

Statement of
Jacquelyn Power
Superintendent of Blackwater Community School
On behalf of the
Family and Child Education Program

Before the
Committee of Indian Affairs
United States Senate

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Chairman Tester, Vice Chairman Barrasso and members of the committee my name is Jacquelyn Power and I have been the Superintendent/Principal at the Blackwater Community School for the past twenty years. Blackwater Community School is an early childhood through grade two Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) grant school. Thank you for inviting us to participate in this important hearing on early childhood education and to comment specifically on the impacts of the FACE program.

Our school has participated in the Family and Child Education program for the past twenty-one years. We have been recognized twice by the BIE for quality implementation of this program and our pre-school teacher, Ms. Gwendolyn Paul, has been recognized by the National Center for Families Learning as the Toyota Teacher of the Year.

The FACE program in my opinion is the most significant education initiative in the Bureau of Indian Education's (BIE) history. In the Bureau of Indian Education too often programs come and go, many without positive results. However FACE has continued because it is based on the latest research and best practices and has long term data to demonstrate its success. FACE has directly impacted the quality of our school with the result that our school has made AYP since the beginning of the No Child Left Behind legislation.

The FACE program was implemented to address the need to prepare children for school as the majority of children enrolling in BIE schools were not prepared for kindergarten. It was also started due to the lack of resources, financial and facilities, to expand the Head Start Program. This situation still exists in many locations throughout Indian country. As an example, in our school's attendance area we do not have one Head Start Program. If it were not for FACE, children would not have access to a quality pre-natal through early childhood program prior to entering kindergarten at Blackwater Community School.

FACE is the only evidence-based program in the BIE, having been evaluated for the past twenty-three years by an outside evaluator.

Beginning in 1990, based on an extensive tribal consultation process, FACE was implemented at six sites, serving almost 500 participants. The FACE program primarily serves families with children prenatal to 5 years of age by providing parenting education services, adult education or early childhood services. The goals of the FACE program are to:

Support parents/primary caregivers in their role as their child's first and most influential teacher.

Strengthen family-school-community connections.

Increase parent participation in their child's learning and expectations for academic achievement.

Support and celebrate the unique cultural and linguistic diversity of each American Indian community served by the program.

Promote lifelong learning.

During the 23-year history of FACE, the program has gradually increased to 43 sites and has served approximately 41,000 adults and children. The design of the program since has been to support children and their families from birth through age four. It is a comprehensive program consisting of home visiting, parent education to increase parents' formal education levels to prepare them for employment, pre-school for three and four year old children, and parent and child time, when parents and children interact in a structured learning environment. It is important to note that this comprehensive approach is critical as each component by itself is not sufficient to improve school readiness on its own.

Two home visiting parent educators are usually employed at each site and are required to serve 12 families weekly or 24 families bi-weekly, reaching a maximum of 48 families served at a site at any point in time. These trained parent educators work with families in their own homes, to help parents make age and developmentally appropriate choices regarding the early literacy activities, healthcare, and development of their children. FACE preschools can serve a maximum of 20 children and 15 parents in the adult education component.

When FACE started, two national models were selected for implementation. The Parents as Teachers Home Visiting Model was selected based on their curriculum's focus on increasing parent involvement in their child's development and learning; early detection of developmental delays; and helping support parents prepare their child for school. The National Center for Families Learning was selected as the center based model that contained both a pre-school and adult education component that continued the role of parents as integral to the success of their child in school. Both of these models focused on parent engagement that research show is critical to a child's success in school. Since FACE started each site has received continued technical assistance and professional development from these two nationally recognized organizations. Their commitment to quality training and support make it possible for FACE to produce positive outcomes year after year.

Some of the outcomes for the Home Based program show:

- Almost 100% of children from tribal families receiving home based parent education services go on to attend preschool, and they attend for a longer period.
- 81% of parents report reading to their children almost daily.

- Participating families had more than 50 books on average in their homes compared to the majority of Native American homes with less than ten books that are developmentally appropriate.
- 87% of FACE children in the PAT home based component received a screening (developmental, hearing, vision, dental or health), which is more than double the percentage of children screened when the data was first reported in 1997.
- 83% of 19-35 month old children in the FACE program were current with their immunizations (compared to the 76% national average.)

The results of the Center Based program, the pre-school and adult education components, have consistently shown:

- Children who attend FACE preschool enter below the national percentile rank, but leave on a level playing field with children nationally.
- Due to early intervention, FACE children are half as likely to need special education services at kindergarten entry.
- After one year of FACE preschool, children with special needs score near the national average, lowering the need for costly, long-term special education.
- Indian children leave BIE FACE with significant and meaningful gains in expressive language development.
- When children attend FACE regularly they exceed the national average in English language development and vocabulary.
- That FACE preschool supports school readiness with increased parent involvement, more literacy materials at home, and more reading aloud.
- Throughout the history of FACE, approximately 5,250 adults gained employment during their FACE participation.
- Most parents indicated that FACE helped them a lot in increasing the amount of time they spend with their child (85%), in becoming more involved in their child's education (82%), in increasing their understanding of child development (81%), in becoming a better parent (80%), in encouraging their child's interest in reading (76%), and in increasing their ability to speak up for their child (73%).

Like these national results, in my 20 years at the school I have seen first hand the impact of this program in our community and in our families. Blackwater's FACE program serves an average of 95 adult and children per year in the home based and center based programs. This calculates to 1995 participants in the 21 years of operation at the school.

Since 1993, 65 adults completed their GED diploma, 77 adults have been inducted

into the National Adult Education Honor Society, 15 adults received college scholarships, and one parent now sits on the school board. In fact, a typical class is composed of parents who dropped out of high school and others who enroll in college classes for the first time. Even more important is the parents' commitment to reconnecting to education for themselves and their child in the FACE program.

To put a face to this data is critical to this discussion on Early Childhood Education. One student that I have known since she was in elementary school stands out in so many ways. She had a learning disability in elementary school. However, as she entered a feeder school she became discouraged and felt isolated and disconnected to school. In spite of her parents best efforts she dropped out of high school. It wasn't long after that this student became a teenage mother. Over the next few years, she became a mother of five children with little hope for a future. For her, the only ray of hope was the FACE program. She spent four long years of hard work preparing for the GED and in December 2013 she passed. On so many occasions we would talk about her future and what she hoped to accomplish. So many times she expressed her interest in working with special needs children because of her personal life and challenges. Today, this student is working at Blackwater as a classroom aide to a special needs child. Without FACE, her dreams would have never been realized and her future and that of her children would be compromised.

Historically, the majority of parents who enroll in FACE with their children are mothers; however, over the years I have seen more fathers attend school with their children. One father that stands out entered FACE without a high school diploma and was a father of five children. In fact, both he and his wife shared the duty to attend the FACE program with one of their children over the years. Both of them completed their GEDs. His wife is in college and working for Gila River. The father, not only completed his GED, but also received the prestigious Friedlander Award in adult education for his accomplishments in FACE. Besides working to complete his GED, he started his own business as a DJ, which is highly successful. He also works full time for Blackwater Community School in food service and facilities. All of their children have thrived in school and their futures will be secured because of the commitment their parents made to FACE.

The Home based program is equally successful and its focus on early screening for disabilities is a hallmark of this component. As a result of these early interventions, I have seen a reduction in referrals to special education. In fact, the school's average special education population has dropped from a high of over 20% to an average of 10%.

Equally important is the success the FACE children demonstrate when they enter kindergarten. These children are prepared to learn and demonstrate consistent proficiency in reading and math. Since the beginning of NCLB the school has always made AYP. Moreover, in 2013 Blackwater was awarded a B letter grade by the Arizona Department of Education for its performance on the Stanford 10 test.

Finally, the FACE program supports the preservation of Native languages. For Gila River this is critical because the O'Odham language is almost extinct. Within FACE, the parents and preschool children are using the computer to develop O'Odham/English web-based books that are then added to the school library and taken home to practice the language. Both the parents and children are learning their Native language at school as well as their culture. This is critical to the survival of the rich legacy of this tribe and the FACE program provides the foundation for this effort. The commitment to the preservation of the language continues in the K-2 program as well.

In closing I wish to again emphasize the need to continue FACE as the four-component model as it was originally designed to include the provision of technical assistance from the two nationally recognized models. Families need and require a comprehensive literacy program that recognizes education begins at birth, as parents are their first and most important teachers. It is a proven model based on twenty-three years of data. I am providing for the record the Executive Summary from Program Year 2012 for your information as well as some preliminary Program Year 2013 data that will be released in the near future that shows current outcomes similar to those in the previous year. We thank Congress for its continued support of this program that is so important to successful education achievement of Indian children and urge Congress to expand this model to all BIE schools.

I very much appreciate this opportunity to speak on behalf of this program and to have the opportunity to speak with you today. I would be happy to address your questions.