



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Bureau of Indian Education
1849 C Street NW, MIB-3610
Washington, DC 20240

BIE Advisory Board for Exceptional Children

Board Minutes - Day 1
Wednesday, August 12, 2026
8:00 AM - 4:00 PM (MDT)

Name of Committee: Bureau of Indian Education Advisory Board for Exceptional Children

Meeting Location: Online using the Zoom.gov platform.

FACA Regulations: As an Advisory Board to a federal agency, the Board falls under the requirements of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA; 5 U.S.C., Appendix 2). FACA aims to ensure the advice of federal advisory committees is objective and available to the public, and that the committee complies with cost control and recordkeeping requirements. The BIE Advisory Board ensures all their Board meetings are open to the public, all meeting notices are published in advance, and all Board meetings are advertised using the Federal Register and posted on the BIE website at www.bie.edu. The BIE has provided a Designated Federal Officer (DFO) assigned to support the Advisory Board, and the BIE ensures each Board member avoids conflicts of interest and limits their membership terms.

ADVISORY BOARD ROSTER

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1. Present | Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson |
| 2. Present | Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson, Ed.D. |
| 3. Present | Leon Reval, Secretary |
| 4. Present | Dr. Janet Slowman, Board Member, Ed.D. |
| 5. Present | Melanie Star, Board Member |
| 6. Excused | Heather Church, Board Member |
| 7. Excused | Season Goodpasture, Board Member |
| 8. Present | Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member, Ph.D. |
| 9. Excused | Joshua Shumak, Board Member |
| 10. Present | Amber "Jade" Tyner, Board Member |
| 11. Present | Katinee Shawanokasic-Chavez, Board Member |
| 12. Present | Mariah Crow, Board Member |



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13. Present Taryn Jim, Board Member

BIE Staff Members: Tony Dearman, Director of the Bureau of Indian Education
Margo DeLaune, Associate Deputy Director
Dr. Eugene Thompson, Supervisory Education Specialist
Jennifer Davis, Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
Ronald J. Worst, Education Specialist
Arlene Davis, Education Program Specialist BIE/DPA/IDEA

TAESE Contractors: Kristen Perez-Rickels, Laura Lema, and Lindsey Brogdon

Presenters/Speakers: Dr. Eugene Thompson, Ronald Worst, Todd Lertjuntharangool, Jennifer May, Gloria Yepa, Teresa Ramone-Wilson, Katharine Ford, and Erin Trottier

Others in Attendance

Chinook Miller	LeClair Yazzie
Deanna Lubarsky	Loretta Hobbs
Delphina Dayish	Marcy Starr
Detroit James	Margo DeLaune
Dr. Tammy Tom	Marlencia Chee
Eleanor Francis-Jones	Mary Junne Largo
Ereca Camero	Patty Diehlmann
Eric Cultum	Rena Tuni
Feather Holt	Robert McDonald
Jackie Chischillie	Roberta Clarke
Janalee Vander Hoven	Rosetta LaClair
Joann Fields	Scott Norton
JoDee Holmes	Sherylene Sells
John Begay	Tammy Tom
John McIntosh	Vanessa Cooper
Kathleen Sando	Vida Benally

8:00 AM – 8:30 AM Roll call, New Business, Old Business

Jennifer Davis, DFO, provided an overview of the meeting's purpose, objectives, Board authorizations, public commenting sessions, and meeting reminders. Questions regarding the



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purpose of the Board can be directed to [Jennifer Davis](#). The meeting agenda was reviewed for the two-day meeting. Contact information was shared for the DPA Special Education team.

Roll Call – Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic completed roll call. The following were present constituting a BIE quorum:

- Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson
- Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson
- Leon Reval, Secretary
- Melanie Star
- Dr. Paula Seanez
- Amber Tyner
- Katinee Shawanokasic-Chavez
- Mariah Crow

Excused: Heather Church, Season Goodpasture, and Joshua Shumak

Chairperson Shawanokasic welcomed the Board and expressed appreciation for the Board members and their efforts supporting students with disabilities and tribal communities. He thanked the Board members who were attending their last meeting.

Jennifer Davis, DFO, and Chairperson Shawanokasic both encourage regular attendance for Board members for each meeting to constitute a quorum.

New Business – Jennifer Davis, DFO, shared new business items:

- Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic’s term was renewed for another three years as the BIE Special Education Advisory Board chairperson.
- Board member Jeron Velasco submitted his resignation as a Board Member, resulting in another vacancy.
- A call for nominations and applications for two vacant Board positions will go out.
- When the Notice was published in the Federal Register, the September meeting was also approved. The meeting will be on September 10th and 11th in Albuquerque and will be available online. The September notice and agenda are on the [BIE website](#). Jennifer Davis requested Board members provide verbal commitment for their attendance in September to ensure a quorum.

Old Business – Jennifer Davis, DFO, shared old business items:

- The April 30-May 1 minutes are posted on the [BIE website](#) along with the other fiscal year 2026 documents.



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an update on the Annual report progress was provided.

TAESE staff introduced themselves:

- Kristen Perez-Rickels, Technical Assistance Specialist
- Laura Lema, Technical Assistance Specialist
- Lindsey Brogdon, Support Specialist
- John Copenhaver, Project Director

Kristen Perez-Rickels explained the purpose and role of TAESE in supporting the Board as providing logistical support such as Zoom hosting, live meeting support, taking minutes, and facilitating discussion around priorities, developing the annual report, and assisting the Board with building the agendas for future meetings including presenter questions. John Copenhaver provides orientation for new Board members.

Dr. Eugene Thompson introduced himself and shared his role as the Supervisory Education Program Specialist. His office is based out of Albuquerque, New Mexico and his efforts are to support the Board. He expressed appreciation for their efforts.

8:30 AM – 9:30 AM BIE Central Office Updates

Presenter: Tony Dearman, Director of the BIE

Chairperson Shawanokasic welcomed the presenter to the Board meeting.

The presenter was asked to respond to the following items for this report and discussion.

General Updates and Planning

1. What is the current status of the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and are there any significant updates, developments, or ongoing initiatives to report?
2. Are there any current or pending changes in education or within the Department of the Interior that may have an impact on BIE operations or policies.
3. There is interest in whether strategic planning is occurring with state offices to help address federal funding gaps, including collaborative approaches or shared initiatives.

Impact of Increased Costs on Students and Families

1. How is the current increased costs, particularly rising living costs, affecting children with disabilities and their families within the school system, especially in terms of their ability to attend Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings, participate in related service therapy sessions, and engage in other essential educational activities?



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2. Clarify how Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is being ensured for families facing high costs, and how their right to meaningful participation is being upheld under these circumstances?
3. Clarification is sought on whether current funding includes allowances that could help alleviate the challenges families are facing due to increased costs.
4. What efforts are being made to ensure access for rural communities and unaccompanied homeless youth, particularly in supporting these vulnerable populations?

Anticipated Changes and Budget Considerations

1. From a practical standpoint, what positive changes, improvements, or new initiatives can parents expect to see in the upcoming year?
2. Is there a proposal to decrease the FACE (Family and Child Education) program budget, and if so, what implications might this have?

Program Planning and Student Support

1. Information is requested on plans for summer programming, including activities, support, and resources available to students and families during the summer months.
2. What efforts are being made to improve secondary transition planning and to better support students pursuing higher education, with the goal of enhancing their outcomes and opportunities?

Following are the responses given by the presenter to the requested items above.

Director Dearman provided an update of the status of budget—the President’s proposed 2027 budget does include several reductions for the BIE. However, Congress has the final say. The budget has been marked back up by the house and will move to the Senate now, where it may be reduced again before approval. Director Dearman will continue to update the Board on the budget as the process of approval moves forward. Director Dearman noted that history shows the BIE is typically flat funded. The team anticipates the budget will not be approved in time so the BIE will likely continue operations under a continuing resolution. Schools are forward funded so any continuing resolutions or government shutdowns will not impact school operations. Director Dearman shared the BIE is the lowest funded state education system.

Moving forward the BIE team is focusing on nine areas with outside consultations, including:

- The BIE agency plan, team conducting analysis on state assessments
- Developing AI policy



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- Reviewing and updating the student personal device and digital wellness policy, with a focus on how to limit the use of cell phones in school
- Examining the interest in realigning schools based on location vs. function
- Postsecondary funding methodology
- Student growth framework and portrait of BIE learner

Director Dearman provided updates on the transition of U.S. Department of Education programs and the impact on the BIE. There will be 15 new employees coming to the main interior office, 10 will be in office, five are remote. The statutory authority stays with the Department of Education, which will continue to maintain control over employees, hiring, and budget. There have been two legislative bills introduced that are related to this transition, one with the purpose of stopping it and one to support the transition. Other branches are involved in this process, and Director Dearman will provide updates as things progress.

Director Dearman shared ongoing initiatives to:

- Keep moving forward with the strategic direction
- Support efforts with outside consultation, utilizing stakeholders, and leaders
- Improve key performance indicators –
 - chronic absenteeism
 - strengthening college career readiness
 - expanding access to native language and culture and instruction
- Continue making data driven decisions with schools' data and input. Compared with other school systems, the BIE has very few employees. Director Dearman expressed appreciation for their work keeping up with all mandates, collecting and submitting data, and supporting schools.
- Prioritize facility repair and maintenance

Question: Chairperson Shawanokasic, Chairperson – Asked about the intent of the training on chronic absenteeism.

Response: Director Dearman – Explained the training will address how to identify chronic absenteeism.

Response: Margo DeLaune, Associate Deputy Director – Stated training has focused on accurately entering the information in the BIE's longitudinal data within the Native American Student Information System (NASIS). Under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA) grants, comprehensive improvement schools are partnered with to provide interventions to support



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chronic absenteeism rates. One of the indicators from tribal consultation is the adjusted wording of chronic absenteeism to a more positive language. Rather than looking at chronic absenteeism, they would look at schools with high attendance.

Question: Chairperson Shawanokasic, Chairperson – Asked for clarification on the processes and what the team would do to address expanding access to language and culture, in addition to working with the tribes.

Response: Director Dearman – Shared they are evaluating flexibility to increase pay while staying within the office of personnel management policies for language and culture teachers who are not certified teachers. They have worked to increase pay for the education technical level to be comparable with certified teachers. When working with tribes, it is important to note that tribal elections will change support. There are different levels of support from tribes for this effort, some believe that language and culture should be taught at home. We are working to individualize support for each tribe.

Comment: Chairperson Shawanokasic, Chairperson – Commented that HR 96.04- Less Bureaucracy Better Tribal Education Act is designed to help support these efforts.

Response: Director Dearman – Shared there are 230 federally recognized tribes.

Question: Paula Seanez, Board Member – Asked about the 15 Department of Education employees and which programs will be transitioned.

Response: Director Dearman – Answered he will provide a list of programs that are transitioning and who will be the contacts. These will all be posted on their website.

Question: Leon Reval, Secretary – Asked how increased funding will translate into special education resources at the school level and ensuring resources reach students with disabilities.

Response: Director Dearman – Shared schools are required to spend 15% ISP funds on transportation. Weighted student units (WSU) increase along with percentages that are required to be spent. Increase in appropriations will lead to increased funds.

Response: Dr. Eugene Thompson, Supervisory Education Specialist – Explained on July 1 the BIE did receive the Part B grant, same as last year and an additional \$700,000 as supplemental funds. This money can be sent to schools or used to develop initiatives. All schools are required to set aside 15% of their allocation of the Part B grant. They are working on allocating all Part B funds. Currently they have made three allocations and 112 are pending. They are reviewing applications and hope to allocate all funds by the end of the month.

Response: Director Dearman – Added that there are two pots of funds ISEP- 15%, and a large portion from the Department of Education.



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Comment: Leon Reval, Secretary – Stated appreciation for the efforts and the presenter’s willingness to answer questions. He shared his perspective as a parent his hope for efforts to increase parent understanding, voices, and lobbying efforts. He suggested drafting a collaborative letter to those representing them in government. He stated training is important and highlighted that lower-tier school professionals are the ones most in need of training and to increase retention. Training for chronic absenteeism should include all team members, including parents, students, and superintendents.

Response: Director Dearman – Explained federal employees are not allowed to lobby directly, but can share information that school boards, tribes, etc. can use in lobbying efforts. His office is willing to take the heat to make improvements for the kids. He asked the Board if there was any information they would like.

Question: Paula Seanez, Board Member – Asked about the shortfall and if the data for student counts fluctuate.

Response: Director Dearman – Explained if WSUs increase, it may reflect decreased enrollment. One reason for the decrease may be poor facilities. The length of time to build schools is delayed and currently over 80 schools are in poor condition. With funding they can repair/build 1-2 schools per year. He expressed these questions are the dialogue that is needed to address issues around the disparity of new schools being built by other programs (public and/or private schools) and the deteriorating infrastructure of BIE schools. He recommended Doug Ward or someone from school operations present to the Board on this issue.

Public Comment (chat): John McIntosh, Education Program Administrator, Navajo – I would like to express my appreciation to Director Dearman for his leadership in guiding and supporting the DPA staff. Additionally, I extend my sincere thanks to the DPA staff for their professionalism, expertise, and assistance on Special Education matters, including IEPs, budgeting, and legal considerations. This support has a direct effect on the grassroots operations of BIE schools.

Director Dearman explained they are working with administration anytime they have a transition.

Director Dearman shared initiatives designed to increase parental involvement. Typically, there are struggles with collecting input via surveys and questionnaires. There have been shifts from holding parent teacher meetings to meetings with dorms. The office is tracking family access to



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school websites for community dissemination metrics. Many schools are working with them to update school websites and express desire to increase parent involvement.

Director Dearman explained the graduation rate for the previous school year was 79%, which is the highest rate in the history of the BIE. Schools need to increase efforts to contact students on the dropout list to determine if they are continuing education elsewhere to assist with accurate data collection. They have seen increases in assessments in math and Language arts. The office is working to support school data and interventions.

Director Dearman noted they are starting partnerships with agencies and businesses to ensure students can leave the school system and have meaningful employment. Students are eligible to do dual enrollment and are certified to be able to work after graduation and continue to serve communities in valuable employment.

Comment: Chairperson Shawanokasic, Chairperson – Thanked Director Dearman for his information and efforts.

Comment: Jennifer Davis, DFO – Announced school operations will be sharing information about the Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP).

Public Comment (chat): John McIntosh, Education Program Administrator, Navajo – By learning about the graduation rate process, we have also enhanced our knowledge and abilities within the NASIS system. This improvement has allowed us to use the system more productively and efficiently.

9:30 AM – 9:40 AM

Board Reflection with Public Comments

Jennifer Davis, DFO, explained the guidelines for the public comment session.

Chairperson Shawanokasic shared appreciation for the information from Director Dearman

Comment: Leon Reval, Secretary – Shared hope the letter and Annual Report receives acknowledgement to show value of the Board’s efforts. He expressed the need for space for constructive conversations, honest sharing, and feedback. He hopes more parents will see the value of the Boards and share their voices. He applauded the higher graduation rate and highlighted the importance of providing opportunities for future students and community members.



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Comment: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Expressed appreciation for the improved graduation rate and efforts to look at the important factor of postsecondary employment.

9:40 AM – 10:00 AM **Break**

10:00 AM – 11:00 AM **Office of Head Start, Administration for Children and Families**

Presenter: Todd Lertjuntharangool

The presenter was asked to respond to the following items for this report and discussion.

- Please provide a general overview of your work, specifically related to American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) programs, including key challenges, notable achievements, and recommendations. We ask that you focus on how your efforts and initiatives align with and support the needs of American Indian students with disabilities.
- 1. How does your program use data to identify, improve and support family and student outcomes?
- 2. Explain Head Start's expectations for how tribal programs should address special education services.
- 3. What early intervention strategies or practices are being utilized, and which has been most effective?

Below are the answers to the board's questions by Todd Lertjuntharangool.

Todd Lertjuntharangool prefaced his presentation with a note that on Friday, August 7, 2026, Notice of Proposed Rule Making was published to the federal register. This will have a 60-day public comment period and if/when enacted and implemented in a final rule would likely have significant impact on many of the requirements discussed in the presentation. The discussion today will focus on current requirements and operations.

Todd Lertjuntharangool shared the history and creation of the Project Head Start program in 1965 as part of America's War on Poverty. Head Start encompasses Early Head Start programs for infants, toddlers, and pregnant women, as well as the three and four year old children programs. Head Start operates in every state, many Tribal nations, and several U.S. territories. The programs promote school readiness of children ages birth to five from low-income families. The programs are operated in centers and schools, as well as licensed childcare centers and family childcare homes. Head Start has an excellent working relationship with Indian Health Service (IHS) and the childcare centers they IHS oversees. The Office of Head Start (OHS)



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administers grant funding and oversight of Head Start grant recipients through regular and ongoing communication and a comprehensive monitoring system. OHS also provides guidance, training, and technical assistance to grant recipients. Funding is direct federal to local, rather than through a block grant design. The American Indian Alaskan Native (AIAN) region (also known as the Tribal region) is served across 27 states and 152 grant recipients with no physical regional office, as it is considered nationally administered. For fiscal year 2026, OHS awarded \$351 million total to AIAN Head Start programs. The grant is a five-year discretionary grant with annual application opportunities.

Todd Lertjuntharangool explained services provided by Head Start programs focus on school readiness with research-based curriculums and a systemic and ongoing approach to monitoring children's progress toward School Readiness Goals developed by programs in coordination with local kindergarten schools. Every Head Start provides services to promote health, behavioral health, and safety for children and families. Head Start programs work with families to ensure children are up to date on their health status, have access to continuous health care, and obtain age-appropriate health screenings. Programs secure ongoing mental health consultation services to support children, families, and staff. Programs must design and implement nutrition services that are culturally and developmentally appropriate and meet the nutritional needs of and accommodate the feeding requirements of each child, including children with special dietary needs and children with disabilities.

Todd Lertjuntharangool noted Head Start program performance standards currently require programs to meet the needs of children with disabilities, including those who may be eligible for services under IDEA. It also requires all children have access to the full range of Head Start activities and services. At least 10% of a program's actual enrollment must be filled by children who are eligible for services under IDEA. He noted Tribal and AIAN Head Start programs are unique in that they no longer have income requirements for program eligibility. Of the 17,771 children served cumulatively during the 2025-2026 program year, 1,300 were diagnosed with a chronic health condition, 2,100 children had IEPs, and over 450 children had Individual Family Service Plans (IFSPs). Of those 2,100 children with IEPs, the most frequent disability category for IDEA service eligibility was speech or language impairment at 916 children.

Todd Lertjuntharangool noted to support the whole child, Head Start programs recognize the role parents play in their child's health and wellness, including the importance of the health and wellness of parents themselves. Head Start programs must implement a family partnership



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process that includes a family partnership agreement and activities to support family well-being. The process must be initiated as early in the program year as possible and continue for as long as the family participates in the program, based on parent interest and need. A program must establish ongoing collaborative relationships and partnerships with community organizations such as establishing joint agreements, procedures, or contracts and arranging for onsite delivery of services as appropriate.

Todd Lertjuntharangool explained the Head Start monitoring system is designed around the five-year project period. Congress requires OHS to verify compliance of every recipient once every three years at least. Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) system supports program staff in their delivery of quality services to children and families. The current system consists of three levels of TTA: national, regional, and grant recipient. Grant recipients receive at least 50% of all Head Start TTA dollars directly. Grant recipients use these funds in accordance with their training plans to support the needs identified by and specific to their local program.

Todd Lertjuntharangool noted OHS also funds Tribal Colleges and Universities to strengthen the number of qualified early childhood education teachers in AIAN Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Since 2020, more than 620 early childhood education degrees and credentials were earned.

Question: Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson – Asked if the presence of a disability increase funding for the Head Start program.

Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Responded if an IEP is issued then yes, the Local Education Agency (LEA) provides services to the student. Even if a child is identified as having a disability but do not qualify for IDEA services, the Head Start program will still provide some level of individualized services through scaffolding and instruction

Question: Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson – Inquired if any money is focused on training parents.

Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Explained TA funding will go toward funding for teachers and staff, but staff are working with parents and reinforcing parents as the first teacher of their child. They support parents as they transition to engaging with the LEA on receiving school-based IEP services.

Question: Leon Reval, Secretary – Asked if there is a plan to capture the increased graduates as recruits where we need staff and teachers within Head Start?



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Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Explained tribal colleges must have a formal partnership with Head Start programs before receiving grant funding. There should be a pipeline of incoming students interested in working with AIAN programs. Once individuals are supported in getting degrees, eventually they move on to different career aspects of education, which creates a need for a continuous pipeline of staff. It is important for potential staff to have time in classrooms gaining experience working with children.

Question: Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson – Asked if OHS has data or opportunities for tracking how many students take advantage of mental health services.

Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Noted present data does not capture mental health directly. They collect data on students accessing support for chronic health issues.

Comment: Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson – Observed there is a lot of discussion around whether it is a mental health or disability issue.

Question: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Noted the number of children with speech language impairments (SLI) seemed disproportionate. About 80% or more of children on reservations with specific learning disabilities (SLD) also have auditory processing issues, which may be related to SLI. There is interesting research coming out about how native people and children learn, which is less auditorily. Data indicates the way native peoples learn and use language is different than what is expected in schools. She asked how do we address that and educate schools in how to address this?

Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Noted they've nationally seen consistent changes and fluctuations in disability services. Post-pandemic, we saw an influx in SLI needs. We are still waiting for more research and information in Autism. We know language and culture is a top priority for tribal Head Starts.

Comment: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Explained she sees some states looking at Title 3 funding to support language development of tribal students.

Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Asked if there will be forums for tribal communities to speak publicly on proposed changes.

Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Explained August 25 and 26 there will be an annual tribal consultation in Washington, DC where we expect to get a lot of comments. This is the biggest proposal of regulation overhaul in his 17-year career at OHS.

Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Requested the tribal consultation information and asked if there is a need for an agreement between FACE programs and Head Start. There are questions around whose responsibility it is to serve children with disabilities in unorganized territories.



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Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Explained this is a topic for tribes who operate multiple programs. Coordination of programs is not seen often and sometimes there is some competition between programs. Competition does not fill the service gaps at that level, so he sees the benefits of formal partnerships at the tribal level.

Question: Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson – Expressed the SLI concern again and that it may not be disability but culture.

Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Responded that as things progress, they will be factored in more for how evaluations are conducted. There are high rates of needs, but not high rates of providers to meet the needs. We also see that while Head Start staff may make referrals for evaluation, in many cases, that child is so far down the list of the LEA that they never receive an evaluation while at Head Start. 70% receive the evaluation prior to aging out of Head Start services.

Question: Leon Reval, Secretary – Inquired If Todd Lertjuntharangool had an opportunity to add a sentence or two for the Board to add to their Annual Reportletter, what would that be.

Response: Todd Lertjuntharangool – Asked for Secretary Reval's request in writing for an emailed response.

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Panel Discussion: Family and Child Education (FACE) Programs

Presenter: Jennifer May

Vice Chairperson Dr. Younce welcomed the presenter to the Board meeting.

The presenter was asked to respond to the following items for this report and discussion.

1. Provide an overview of your school's FACE early childhood program and its core goals.
2. How does the FACE program specifically support American Indian students with disabilities and their families.
3. What are some key challenges you have encountered in implementing or sustaining the FACE early childhood program?
4. What notable achievements or successes has the FACE program experienced in recent years?
5. How do you measure success within the FACE early childhood program, particularly for students with disabilities?
6. How do you ensure the program remains aligned with the cultural, developmental, and educational needs of American Indian students with disabilities?
7. What strategies or practices have been most effective in improving outcomes for children served through the FACE program?



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8. Are there any recommendations you would make for strengthening early childhood services for American Indian students with disabilities?
9. How do you engage families and communities in shaping and supporting the FACE program?
10. What supports or resources are most needed to continue improving the program's impact?

Below are Jennifer May's responses to the questions.

Jennifer May introduced herself as the Adult Education Coordinator for the American Horse School FACE Program located on the Pine Ridge Reservation in Allen, South Dakota. There current enrollment of K-8 is 230 students. The FACE program has been part of the schools since 2011 and serves approximately 70 families, prenatal to five every year. Their preschool classroom has 15-20 students with two parent educators serving 25 families each in the community.

Jennifer May explained the core goal of FACE is strengthening the connections among children, family, schools, and community. FACE recognizes parents as first and foremost teachers and encourages parents to be active partners in education. FACE offers early childhood programs that focus on supporting the development of whole child to prepare for school. The programs focus on family engagement.

Jennifer May stated all students are evaluated within 45 days, if needed they refer the child to for early intervention follow up. They support parents in letting them know about available resources. They collaborate with special education services to ensure students receive help.

Jennifer May explained their key challenge is maintaining consistent enrollment past winter break. Due to transportation, parents and FACE educators might not be able to get to homes to provide services and parents struggle to transport children to schools. They have utilized Zoom as way to address this, but still see declines in enrollment post winter break.

Jennifer May noted one achievement is that FACE has continued their presence as a bridge between families and American Horse School. They have built partnership with and increased trust from community. They will continue emphasizing parent engagement, incorporating culturally responsive practices, and integrating American Indian languages, traditions, and values within service.



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Jennifer May explained to measure progress FACE focuses on multiple indicators, including following progress on goals, developmental progress, and more.

Jennifer May observed the program is aligned with cultural development and educational needs because all are incorporated into programs and are not separate environments. FACE is working to maintain high expectations and offering accommodations. FACE creates integrated experiences. These efforts are measured by using observation assessments.

Jennifer May explained strategies and practices that have been effective are promoting strong family relationships. FACE has 15 years of recognizing parents as teachers, understanding their activities, and their role in learning. They have family engagement activities scheduled for the 3rd Wednesday of each month beginning in August.

Jennifer May noted the biggest need is currently to increase staffing. Most students are receiving speech services; they support some with other disabilities. More staff will allow more service delivery and more individualization.

Jennifer May reiterated they focus on building relationships. They are constantly checking in and following up. They make efforts to be part of the community and meet them where they are. Teachers and staff are part of the community and participate.

Jennifer May stated supports they need include additional funding. The programs currently run well, but additional professional development with staff buy in is needed. FACE and the BIE do a great job offering professional development.

Comment: Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson – Shared the 94% graduation rate was impressive and asked for data comparing students with disabilities and those without.

Response: Jennifer May – Explained they don't maintain that official data but shared her personal opinion that the strong focus on parent involvement is making that difference.

Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Inquired if FACE has an agreement with Head Start.

Response: Jennifer May – Replied that they don't have an official agreement, but collaborate closely.

Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Inquired what happened to the Baby FACE program?

Response: Jennifer May – Stated she does not know. The current programs are Prenatal to three years of age. Currently parent educators go into homes to work with babies and parents to support developmental milestones. They have added 3-5 preschool and adult education components to the FACE programs.



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Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Asked if FACE is still funded competitively.

Response: Jennifer May – Replied yes, based on data.

Question: Leon Reval, Secretary – Asked what FACE would like the Board to carry forward into their Annual Report.

Response: Jennifer May – Replied they could share the success rate and highlight the program's focus on parent involvement. Parents learn how to play, speak, understand milestones. In addition, they learn how to advocate and speak with school professionals with confidence. This leads to increased collaboration and childhood success.

Question: Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson – Asked how they engage parents.

Response: Jennifer May – They strive to accommodate parent schedules, and hold meetings and training at various times. They offer meals. Everything they do has a focus on the importance of reading and how they can support their children.

Question: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Inquired what the challenges of rural locations are.

Response: Jennifer May – Responded speech pathologists often travels 120 miles to offer services. Parent educators encounter challenges with the distance of driving road conditions, schedules, etc.

Question: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Asked if there is additional funding to support solutions.

Response: Jennifer May – Responded she is not aware of additional funding. FACE has worked with transit folks to decrease challenges and barriers to service delivery.

Question: Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson – Requested Jennifer May to share more about staffing shortages.

Response: Jennifer May – Noted they have a shortage of teachers and paraprofessionals. They have challenges with background checks and the slow hiring processes that are almost a year long. Shortages and delays are currently being filled with parent volunteers.

Comment: Leon Reval, Secretary – Shared the importance of parent engagement. He asked the Board to encourage parents to be involved.

Public Comment (chat): Marcy Starr – That is great but please use "Bring your adult" or something like that. As a foster parent and a mother of children who have two moms, this can also be traumatic to children in care or from "different" families!

Comment: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Shared her perspective that parents are more inclined to participate when curriculum is focused on native culture and traditions, including



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the native perspective. There is a need to create spaces where native stories are heard and build campuses that are reflective of indigenous culture.

12:00 PM – 1:30 PM Lunch

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic welcomed the Board back from lunch and conducted roll call. The following Board members were present:

- Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson
- Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson
- Leon Reval, Secretary
- Katinee Shawanokasic-Chavez
- Taryn Jim
- Melanie Star
- Amber Tyner
- Mariah Crow

1:30 PM – 2:30 PM BIE Special Education Updates

Presenter: Dr. Eugene Thompson

The presenter was asked to respond to the following items for this report and discussion.

1. What current trends are being observed in dispute resolution data, and what do they indicate about system performance?
2. What do the most recent State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) indicator data reveal about progress and areas of need?
Can you describe any current collaboration efforts with other state directors and how those partnerships support your work?
What is the current status of the rollout of the special education policy handbook, and what can stakeholders expect moving forward?

Dr. Eugene Thompson shared the BIE's mission and the DPA vision for Special Education Programs. The Special Education Program has established two goals:

1. DPA will ensure that administrators, teachers, service providers, and families have access to evidence-based information and training designed to build capacity to improve educational results and functional outcomes for children with disabilities.
2. DPA will monitor how schools implement OIDEA and provide support to strengthen their ability to improve educational outcomes and results for children with disabilities.

Dr. Thompson explained over the course of School Year 2025-2026, there were no due process hearings, onw mediation that was resolved through a mediated agreement, and 18 written



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state complaints representing six BIE-funded schools. Two complaints are now closed, meaning all corrective actions resulting from the complaint have been completed and verified. Another 15 complaints are currently in corrective action states, meaning the schools are in the process of correcting all findings of noncompliance and are receiving technical assistance from the BIE to complete correction. Finally, there is one complaint with a pending investigation. There is a current trend of multiple complaints by the same complainants. Dr. Thompson noted the dispute resolution team meets weekly to review any new complaints submitted and determine if complaints meet the requirements for an investigation or if more information is needed first.

Dr. Thompson shared the themes present in most complaints. He noted most states have experienced a significant increase in state complaints over the past year. This has been the first year that BIE has experienced an increase in complaints.

Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Asked what issues were addressed within the parent participation complaint.

Response: Marcy Starr, DPA – Noted they were alleging they weren't invited to the IEP meeting or consulted on services such as Extended School Year (ESY).

Comment: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Noted the Board has a lot about the importance of parent participation and it seemed like an issue that can be fixed or accomplished.

Question: Leon Reval, Secretary – Asked if there are other opportunities or materials available to try and alleviate or address those concerns and educate everybody. Also, if there are lessons from dispute resolution being compiled and used to proactively address needs across all schools, rather than waiting for a similar issue to occur at a different school?

Response: Dr. Thompson – Explained they have developed and issued an IEP manual that teachers can use. It has been added to the website with information in recorded videos. They are continuing to provide as much information as they can to our schools to try to update a lot of the processes and procedures.

Question: Leon Reval, Secretary – Inquired with the corrective actions, if reports could be categorized so the Board see what specific free and appropriate public education (FAPE) issues are occurring.

Comment: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Confirmed FAPE complaints were primarily around policies and procedures.

Comment: Marcy Starr, DPA – Noted most FAPE complaints are around not having a qualified teacher or related service provider and providing the compensatory services in a timely manner.



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Comment: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Stated there are rural concerns around these issues.

Question: Amber Tyner, Board Member – Requested clarification around the term state complaint.

Response: Dr. Thompson – Explained state complaints are IDEA complaints that fall within the requirements for BIE investigation.

Comment: Marcy Starr, DPA – Observed most corrective actions are around training for staff. She clarified the formal process of state complaint versus informal complaints lodged at BIE.

Dr. Thompson reported on the most recent State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) indicator data revelations about progress and areas of need.

- 81.94% of students with IEPs graduated
- There was a decrease in the dropout rates of students with disabilities from 26.47% to 15.45%.
- There was a decrease in suspensions of more than 10 days for students with disabilities from 6.33 to 3.95%

Dr. Thompson noted the special education policy handbook is currently available.

Question: Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson – Asked for an example of an innovation.

Response: Dr. Thompson – Explained one example would be for schools to be familiar with their own special education data and how they can collect and unitize NASIS.

Question: Leon Reval, Secretary – Regarding the high turnout of parental input from the survey, he asked how that data is shared with schools.

Response: Dr. Thompson – Explained they receive a lot of recommendations from schools to do parent surveys earlier. They used to start in March but do it in November now. They share public reports and encourage schools to share it with their staff.

Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Inquired what part of Differentiated Monitoring and Supports (DMS) will the Board be involved with.

Response: Dr. Thompson – Explained DMS will cover the SPP/APR, data, fiscal, monitoring, compliance, dispute resolution, professional development, and technical assistance. The Board will probably have some input on the SPP/APR and will be involved in the stakeholder process.

Response: Margo DeLaune, DPA – Added DMS is really meant to help spot early problems and support outcomes for students. It helps target specific areas of issues in IDEA implementation.

2:30 PM – 2:40 PM

Board Reflection with Public Comments



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Public Comments were incorporated during the presentation with Dr. Thompson.

2:40 PM – 3:00 PM

Break

3:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Board Work Time

Jennifer Davis, DFO, let the Board know the September meeting agenda is complete, they can review it and then work on the priorities and the annual report.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic asked to review the September Agenda. The Board reviewed the September agenda and meeting logistics.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic shared a takeaway for the next meeting, encouraging the Board to review past priorities in anticipation of the January 2027 agenda and setting new priorities that are not a repeat of previous years.

Secretary Leon Reval asked if the agenda can include questions regarding dialogue and discussion around the funds that are set aside for special education. Is there a possibility of having special education as its own? Can there be clarification on the breakdown of the 15% of ISEP funds, how much of that is designated for special education?

Jennifer Davis, DFO, stated she will add Secretary Reval's questions to the September agenda.

Secretary Leon Reval requested agenda space where Board members can share honest opinions and issues that are frustrating, with the intention to release frustration and grow solutions.

Jennifer Davis, DFO, shared that the time for that is in the public comments.

Secretary Leon Reval clarified his frustration is around the disparity of funding between systems and the need for space for everyone to share similar frustrations and other issues with opportunities for solutions.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic shared his understanding of the frustration around disparity. He highlighted that BIE and tribal schools compete for funding instead of flow through funding like other states.



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Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic reflected on past Advisory Boards that focused on meetings, priorities, annual reports, etc. They worked hard and never heard anything back – no acknowledgement or appreciation of the Annual Report and the work to develop it.

Chairperson Shawanokasic shared a reminder that they are an advisory Board, and a lot of things need to be filtered and merged. The Board can share their voices and highlight the issues in the letter from professional viewpoint. He recommended the Board include in their charter clarification that the Board assists the Secretary of Interior.

The Board transitioned to working on the Annual Report. They reviewed the priorities they had drafted during their April meeting.

Priority 1 was reviewed and signed off as complete after an edit to change “develop” to “offer”.

The Board discussed Priority 2 justifications and reflected on the morning’s presentations.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic asked for clarification on improving collaboration with outside agencies.

Secretary Leon Reval discussed the meaning of collaboration and opportunities for individualize support for tribes and asked for clarification on community-based resources.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic suggested combining justifications B and C.

Dr. Thompson shared in chat language from their IEP guide that may help the Board with this priority and justifications:

When working with Tribally diverse families, it is important for the IEP team to incorporate cultural responsiveness into the IEP process. For families whose primary language is not English, cultural responsiveness in the IEP process ensures families’ voices are considered and their needs understood so that their child’s education is genuinely customized. Including cultural responsiveness into the IEP process is essential because it builds trust, strengthens partnerships, and ensures that educational decisions reflect the values, experiences, and priorities of the student’s family. For Tribally diverse families and those whose primary language is not English, culturally responsive practices help bridge communication gaps, reduce misunderstandings, and affirm the family’s role as a key decision-maker. When the IEP team honors cultural identity and linguistic diversity, it creates a more inclusive, respectful process.



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The Board decided to continue working on the priorities and justifications during the Board work time on Day 2.

4:00 PM

Recess

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic thanked everyone and recessed the Board until the following morning at 8:00 AM MDT.



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BIE Advisory Board for Exceptional Children

Board Minutes - Day 2
Thursday, August 13, 2026
8:00 AM - 4:00 PM (MDT)

ADVISORY BOARD ROSTER

1. Present Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson
2. Present Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson, Ed.D.
3. Excused Leon Reval, Secretary
4. Excused Dr. Janet Slowman, Board Member, Ed.D.
5. Present Melanie Star, Board Member
6. Excused Heather Church, Board Member
7. Excused Season Goodpasture, Board Member
8. Present Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member, Ph.D.
9. Excused Joshua Shumak, Board Member
10. Excused Amber Tyner, Board Member
11. Present -- Katinee Shawanokasic-Chavez, Board Member
12. Present Mariah Crow, Board Member
13. Present Taryn Jim, Board Member

BIE Staff Members: Dr. Eugene Thompson, Supervisory Educational Specialist
Jennifer Davis, Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
Ronald J. Worst, Educational Specialist
Arlene Davis, DPA

TAESE Contractors: Kristen Perez-Rickels, Laura Lema, and Lindsey Brogdon

Others in Attendance

Bobbie Rosa
Eric Cultum
Frankie Chretien

Kathleen Sando
Lavida B Maestas
LeClair Yazzie



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Lorretta Hobbs
Marcy Starr
Rena Tuni
Roberta Clarke

Sherylene Sells
Tammy Tom
Vida Benally

8:00 AM – 8:30 AM Roll Call, Old Business, and New Business

Welcome and Call to Order – Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson

Jennifer Davis, DFO, provided an overview of the meeting's purpose and objectives, Board authorizations, public commenting sessions, and meeting reminders. Questions on the purpose of the Board can be directed to [Jennifer Davis](#). The meeting agenda was reviewed.

Roll Call – Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic completed roll call. The following were present constituting a quorum

- Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson
- Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson
- Melanie Star
- Dr. Paula Seanez
- Katinee Shawanokasic-Chavez
- Mariah Crow
- Taryn Jim

New Business – Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic asked if any Board members had new business for the Board to review. There was no new business.

Jennifer Davis, DFO, shared that Vice Chairperson Dr. Elizabeth Younce and Secretary Leon Reval terms end in December. Jennifer Davis encouraged the Board to consider those serving in those positions. The Chairperson is appointed by the Secretary of Interior and the Vice Chair and Secretary are voted on via the Board.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic shared his insight and support for the roles of Vice Chairperson and Secretary. He encouraged participants to ask questions. He shared appreciation for the TAES contractors and their technical and logistical support. He reminded the Board of the September in person meeting in Albuquerque.

Dr. Eugene Thompson shared the link to OSEP's annual report to Congress in the chat for all attendees. [Annual Reports to Congress - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)



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8:30 AM – 11:00 AM Associate Deputy Directors (ADD) and Education Resource Centers (ERCs)

- 8:30 – 9:15 AM – Bureau Operated Schools (BOS) | Gloria Yepa, Education Specialist (Special Education)
- 9:15 – 10:00 AM - Navajo Schools (BOS, TCS) | Teresa Ramone-Wilson, Navajo Schools (BOS, TCS)
- 10:00 – 10:15 AM – Break
- 10:15 – 11:00 AM – Tribally Controlled Schools (TCS) | Erom Trottier, TCS SPED Program, Katharine Ford, Education Specialist (Special Education)

The presenters were asked to respond to the following items for this report and discussion.

Family Support and Community Needs

1. How is the organization addressing the needs of parents and caregivers of students with disabilities, particularly during ongoing economic challenges such as rising gas and food costs?
2. From the perspective of parents and guardians, what practical improvements or positive changes can they expect to see for their child with disabilities in the next school year?

Student Services and Accountability

1. What measures are being taken to ensure that students with disabilities are consistently receiving the services and supports they need?
2. What accountability measures or monitoring systems are used to demonstrate that these services are being effectively provided?

Staffing and Instructional Support

1. How are staffing shortages being addressed to ensure that students with disabilities continue to receive appropriate services and support?
2. How are schools and educators providing culturally relevant and responsive instruction for students with exceptional needs?
3. What trauma-informed practices are currently being implemented at the Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels to support students?

Collaboration and Partnerships

1. What agencies or community organizations are you partnering with to support this work?



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2. What do those collaborations look like in practice, and what barriers or challenges have you encountered in working with those agencies?

Advisory Report Contribution

1. Regarding the FFY 2025 Annual Report submitted to the BIE by the BIE Advisory Board for Exceptional Children, how does the report reflect what is currently occurring in your region, and which key findings or issues identified in the report are most relevant to your region?
2. If you could provide one or two key messages to include in the advisory Board annual report, what would you want us to share on your behalf?

8:30 – 9:15 AM – Bureau Operated Schools (BOS)

Presenter: Gloria Yepa, Education Specialist

The following is a summary of the presentation by Gloria Yepa and the answers to the questions listed above.

Gloria Yepa expressed appreciation for the opportunity to present. She explained she utilized assistance to develop the presentation and introduced Hanki Well, the Associate Deputy Director. Gloria Yepa shared there are currently two vacancies and. She introduced herself and described her background experience with special education and BIE.

Gloria Yepa shared the various education resource centers and the numbers of students with disabilities in each school. AERC- Albuquerque Education Resource Center has eight schools with ranges of 53- less than 10 students with disabilities. BERC-Belcourt Education Center has four schools with ranges of 161-59 students with disabilities. PERC- Pheonix Education Center has seven schools with a range of 49-less than ten students with disabilities. PRERC- Pine Ridge Education Resource Center has four schools with ranges from 241-16 students with disabilities. This school data is from the end of the last school year.

Gloria Yepa explained Part B funds have been used to address areas of need, such as weekend food backpack programs. For family engagement they are offering flexible scheduling and locations, providing childcare, and outreach to parents. The goal is to strengthen efforts with community, tribal, and state agencies. They are assisting families by sharing information about resources. They are grateful that staff are part of communities to be aware of needs and resources to share with families.



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Gloria Yepa noted they are going to capitalize on efforts that have been previously successful, such as parent trainings on rights and engagement and monthly meetings with coordinators. They will be focusing on ensuring they are training school staff on parent engagement. Challenges arise with staff shortages and high workloads. Schools have reorganized case management services to ensure effective service delivery and increase student outcomes. They are focusing on relationship building, celebrating cultural norms, avoiding jargon, strength-based dialogue, flexible meetings, and empathetic listening. They will continue treating families as equal partners, and continue to build trust, show genuine care, and encourage children to share. They offer ongoing professional development for staff around inclusive practices and culturally responsive instruction. They will continue to work on removing barriers by filling vacant positions, adding new positions and services, and using contractors as needed.

Gloria Yepa noted all schools in ADD BOS are monitored for ISEP fund use and for implementation by ERC. Schools are notified of visits to review IEPs, etc. Service logs have been revised to address compensatory services and follow up with schools. They are offering training in updated, user-friendly versions. All schools receive information from technical assistance centers, keeping schools aware of national happenings.

Gloria Yepa observed monthly meetings are held with special education coordinators and contacts such as principals to review topics such as fetal fentanyl syndrome, parent engagement, and APR Indicator 8. She stated they look for resources and support schools with corrective actions. School operations conduct quarterly final reviews with schools—looking at the rate of expenditures, Part B funds, contracts and payments, staff vacancies and projections.

Gloria Yepa explained BIE staff work together to fill vacant positions. They use contracts to fill rolls for special education teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, coordinators, and school-based counselors. To address shortages administration ensures provision of services and notifies parents if comp ed services are needed. They are prioritizing special education vacancies over general education. Paraprofessionals are supported to pursue teacher licenses.

Gloria Yepa stated there is a focus on schoolwide collaboration, inclusive practices, and shifting school culture to ensure belonging. They prioritize student belonging, highlighting the belief that students with disabilities are students of the school first. Students with disabilities are



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included in cultural classes, clubs, assemblies, and community events to the greatest extent appropriate with accommodations, modifications, and support. Cultural perspectives have also been incorporated when addressing student needs and interpreting assessment risk data. The native language culture and history education specialist provides guidance to schools to assist with curriculum development and implementation.

Gloria Yepa stated they need to continue developing their multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) frameworks. Implementation varies by school. A few implement trauma informed practices through an MTSS framework. Tier one strategies include school wide positive behavior supports, social emotional learning, etc. Tier 2 interventions provide targeted support such as small group instruction, counseling, mentoring, check-in checkout, and progress monitoring. Schools indicate a need to work on strengthening school programs to better meet the needs of students.

Gloria Yepa explained schools partner with a variety of tribal state and local agencies to provide coordinated support to address students' needs. A lot of time and effort goes into this as they reach out to different agencies such as IHS, tribal council, tribal and state vocational rehabilitation. Gloria Yepa noted they coordinate planning with entities to address student needs. The purpose determines the format of collaboration.

Gloria Yepa shared a quote from a coordinator when asking for input on the question about contributing to the Annual Report.

"The report's emphasis on strengthening collaboration, maintaining IDEA compliance, expanding training opportunities, and improving coordinated services for students with disabilities mirrors the ongoing efforts of schools....The continued collaboration among staff, families, tribal partners, and community agencies remain essential to ensuring students receive high-quality, culturally responsive, and legally compliant special education services while addressing workforce and resource challenges identified in the report."

Gloria Yepa noted recruitment and retention are critical concerns, along with the need for more resources, funding, and coming up with out of the box strategies. Staff shortages in residential programs lead to students not being able to enroll. One factor is the limited staff housing in rural areas. There needs to be additional resources for targeted interventions and support, specifically for students with low incidence disabilities. Sometimes there are challenges to meet the needs of those students. There is a need for increased funding for expanded instructional



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materials, specialized resources and additional intervention opportunities to address student IEP goals.

Gloria Yeppa shared messages for the Board to include in their Annual Report on behalf of the education program administrators that assisted with answering these questions.

- They would like continued investment and support to ensure native students with disabilities have access to specialized instruction, related services, etc.
- Investment in staffing shortages and limited housing availability is needed
- Emphasize BIE schools are positioned to provide culturally responsive education that honors student identities, families, and communities.
- Educators remain committed to advocating for students, strengthening partnerships, and establishing meaningful support to allow native students with disabilities to thrive during their school years and post school endeavors.
- There is not enough professional development. Educators are required to be licensed in the geographical location of their school, meet state licensing requirements, and maintain those certifications. BIE schools are required to also follow the state eligibility criteria, which vary greatly. The BIE must be aware of these differences and provide targeted, individualized support.
- Professional development is needed on research, instructional practices, and national trends.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic thanked Gloria Yepa for her presentation.

9:15 – 10:00 AM - Navajo Schools

Presenter: Teresa Ramone-Wilson

Teresa Ramone-Wilson introduced herself as the Education Program Specialist for Navajo Schools, which covers 64 tribally controlled and bureau operated schools.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson explained they use state and federal resources, parent training and information centers, education resources for parents of indigenous children with special needs, Raising Special Kids, Utah Parent Center, and Parent Center hub to address the needs of parents. The intent is to connect families with outside resources and entities.



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Teresa Ramone-Wilson noted they are tightening support for school to family communication, tracking the results through the annual parent survey, and aiming for the BIE target rate of 94% completed surveys.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson noted they are identifying needs and gaps, expanding on some of the celebration items to continue, and identifying some schools that could provide support to others as a mentor. To ensure students are consistently receiving services, they are engaging in ongoing record reviews. They are working to ensure there is alignment in instruction in terms of the least restrictive environment and what accountability exists in supporting the viable curriculum they have implemented. They are tracking compliance through reviews of internal systems in which they have identified schools. New to this year, they are going to be approaching these in a tiered fashion.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson reported they will be making more data-driven decision-making processes in qualifying students for extended school year. With NASIS, they are going to have module links that are linked directly to the IEP system. She gave many examples on ways they will link modules and information to tighten up the alignment of the IEP to the instruction of students.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson outlined accountability measures they are utilizing to demonstrate services are provided effectively. She noted they are using NASIS data to dive deeper into various reports.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson noted staffing shortages are being addressed. They are looking at formal details and special assignments from sister schools. They are using NASIS monitoring to address uniformity and continuity of services.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson explained some schools are being proactive and taking advantage of the Title VI through the Office of Indian Education Grant to target key indicators. Activities are being written to attain funds for student engagement and community involvement. Schools are writing community programs to train their families through inclusive practices rather than segregating.



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Teresa Ramone-Wilson explained they are looking at collaboration in the areas of staffing instructional support, in terms of well-being. They are using a new memorandum of agreement (MOA) with IHS.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson noted challenges are around the fact that they are in year one of vie with the MOA with IHS. Staffing is dependent on the types of services. Outside of the MOA is patient rehabilitation services for secondary transition IEPs. The majority of high schools use local resources for rehabilitation services.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson recommended the Board focus on staffing shortages, specifically for certified special education teachers, related service providers, and transition certified teachers. She mentioned housing availability as one factor that affects these shortages. Another factor is public sector schools have financial leeway and leverage over BIE schools and offer better benefits as a recruitment incentive.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson noted challenges around related services and ensuring those are sustained and high quality.

Teresa Ramone-Wilson stated a key message she would like to share is the training opportunities supported by the BIE for families of students with disabilities around the collaborative efforts to review special education laws or notice of procedural safeguards to know what the rights are.

Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Asked about MOAs with tribal vocational rehabilitation and the processes for the schools to invite vocational rehabilitation.

Response: Teresa Ramone-Wilson – They don't have a MOA or MOU with tribal vocational rehabilitation. As part of secondary transition file reviews, they look for an invitation, evidence of communication, the list of contacts, and the commentary where it states that assistance will not be addressed until student is in 12th grade.

Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Asked Indicators 13 and 14 are tracked.

Response: Teresa Ramone-Wilson – Noted for indicators 13 and 14, they use the plan for learning platform. Education specialists have access to review outcomes of secondary transition reviews.

Dr. Thompson shared the [NTACT:C Indicator 13 Checklist: Form A](#) in chat.



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Question: Dr. Paula Seanez, Board Member – Inquired if there is special attention for transitioning youth from high school that are off Navajo Nations. Sometimes we see a gap in students accessing vocational rehabilitation, especially if they are from a residential school and are from a different community.

Response: Teresa Ramone-Wilson – Explained for all the high schools, there are identified transition teachers to help support that need for transition services. They are assigned to one of the lead special education teachers or the coordinator at the site.

10:00 – 10:15 AM – Break

10:15 – 11:00 AM – Tribally Controlled Schools (TCS)

Presenters: Erin Trottier and Katharine Ford

Katherine Ford introduced herself as the Supervisory Education Specialist. Erin Trottier introduced herself as the Minneapolis Region Education Specialist.

Katharine Ford explained there are 183 BIE schools across the nation, 55 BOS and 128 TCS. Four of the seven education program specialist positions are filled across the ADS. The BIE supports opportunities for more than 400,000 American Indian and Alaska Native students across the US. 7,800 students are identified as having a qualifying disability under IDEA in TCS.

Katharine Ford explained they completed 100% of ISEP annual review monitoring. They developed standard operating procedures from a restructured previous version. They did research and developed a crosswalk that talks about the minimum regulatory requirements for IDEA and minimum requirements for 25 CFR. The intention is to not overburden schools and to ensure monitoring and review cycles have purpose to push school improvement. Katharine Ford shared examples of the pages and changes They are checking for enrollment verification, disability and placement codes inside of NASIS, eligibility, and summary reports.

Katharine Ford noted another achievement was building a tiered data management system, which allows the team to be data driven to establish measurable outcomes and goals. They took all different data reports and pooled them together to identify tiered risk categories for schools. This is a four-pronged approach, looking at the SPP/APR indicators collected by DPA, missed services and service tracking, and the LSTP determinations and ISEP findings. These prongs come together to give scores for each school. Each one is tallied for all 94 schools.



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Combining these for average scores shows how many schools need tiered support. This will be used to determine how to deploy resources at the ADD level.

Erin Trottier shared the challenges. The TCS special education department covers Minneapolis and Albuquerque regions. Challenges include interconnectedness and staff shortages. Shortages are greater for specialized positions, such as speech and language, OT, PT, etc. Many rural and remote schools have limited applicant pools and limited housing. Schools rely on contracting providers; however, this is expensive. Contractors cannot provide the same consistency and connection. Another challenge is paraprofessional capacity. It is important to retain paraprofessionals, offering them training, growing your own opportunities and helping them support the special education teachers. Erin Trottier noted vacancies do not remove school's responsibility to implement student's IEPs.

Erin Trottier stated another challenge is the over-referral to special education within the BIE. Some schools have MTSS and/or Response to Intervention (RTI) programs that are either inconsistent or nonexistent.

Erin Trottier explained the next challenge, related to staffing, is service delivery. Schools may have appropriate IEPs, but are services aren't occurring. Vacancies lead to scheduling conflicts, staff absences, and lack of substitute coverage. TCS does not have a specific service log or a tracking tool. Every school is different, which is why additional support is needed around how missed services are addressed. They are working to build a process schools can adopt and to streamline the review process of MTSS and service logs.

Erin Trottier stated the last challenge on the TCS division level is that it is not a traditional school district where every school operates under one centralized system. There are a large number of TCS across a very broad geographic area. These schools vary in size, staffing, resources, infrastructure, local capacity, housing, etc. We need to find realistic solutions for all schools and because what is relevant for one is not relevant for another.

Erin Trottier noted they have limited staff capacity to conduct record reviews. Any work that should be done in the BIE should have a result and be meaningful and this is one of the reasons they are building measurable goals for the division.



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Erin Trottier explained recommendations for practical actions schools can take for staffing include contracted consultants who can help ensure IEPs remain current appropriately utilizing virtual services, making sure we have people on the ground for in-person services, and creating partnerships with local clinics and IHS facilities. The next recommendation is to increase title programs. We need a stronger service delivery monitoring system. Schools should know when services are missing and they should have a process to respond quickly.

Erin Trottier stated recommendations for the actual division include moving forward proactively to create consistent technical assistance models rather than responding, developing an annual training calendar on the trends data and monitoring, and developing a consistent onboarding process for new special education teachers. The turnover is very high in TCS for special education and a lot of times these teachers do not understand the intricacies of the BIE.

Erin Trottier reported they are going to set up regular office hours for questions and concerns, which will help eliminate a lot of emails and improve communication. They will continue developing practical ready to use resources such as training around RTI and MTSS referrals. g.

Katharine Ford shared how they are addressing the needs of parents and caregivers of students with disabilities particularly during ongoing economic challenges. These economic challenges create barriers for families in rural and remote areas. Schools have options for reducing those barriers. IDEA Part B funds may be used for allowable parent participation expenses, including transportation. Some schools are doing this to provide families with flexible ways to participate.

Katharine Ford noted they are strengthening proactive communication. In a lot of onsite visits, one of the biggest parent concerns was communication. They are working to make sure families feel connected to their child's program throughout the entire year not just during the IEP meeting.

Katharine Ford explained practical improvements and positive changes parents and guardians can expect to see over the next school year the systems have been developed at the division level. One of the changes is greater service accountability through missed services monitoring and looking beyond whether an IEP is in place and asking has the student received those services. Most state complaints involved missed services, not being notified when their student missed those services, or providing compensatory time. With the improved review and



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monitoring system, identification of the specific areas where schools need support will be prioritized.

Katharine Ford observed they are using their four-prong monitoring approach to examine the ISEP review data, the 100% annual review data, and examining which schools have policies and tracking missed services. They will review the SPP/APR indicator data and LSTP determinations to determine where schools are performing. The ISEP review is looking at the enrollment and the current IEP for evaluation and eligibility data that's not lapsed and then making sure all schools have qualified staff. This review is for 100% of all students with disability files across TCS. Each school will get a report card on how they're performing with regards to ISEP certification. It is a requirement for all BIE schools to have guidance or a policy on missed services. Katharine Ford shared examples of the service log. The new log is designed to be easier for at school level and more effective on the review level. This is being implemented across the Bureau with about 25 to 30% adoption rate in the first year.

Erin Trottier shared a data dashboard they developed that combines the information to determine the schools that need the most support and classifying them into 3 tiers. This is done by examining the indicators related to special education from the APR report and collecting relevant data. The total score assists with determining which schools are a priority and high risk and critical.

Erin Trottier shared they are focusing on how schools are performing at the program level so they can provide assistance in specific areas. They will be creating a cycle where a third of schools will have a more comprehensive review.

Katharine Ford observed the BIE has program specialists who cover culture and language. The goal is to connect specialists with special educators to share resources. They will offer training around different indigenous instructional supports. Teachers can take some tenants and embed them into their everyday practice to help uphold culture and language in the classroom. Those tenants are comprised of elements and considerations that provide encouragement, inspiration, and support in the creation of learning environments. This resource was developed across the 23 sovereign pueblos tribes and nations in New Mexico, but they can apply across different schools as well.



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Katharine Ford noted there are barriers and challenges around de-escalation and their crisis prevention intervention initiative. They are partnering with ADD safety specialists, residential life specialists, special education specialists, and behavioral health specialists. These groups are developing a crisis intervention initiative. Currently they have a contract to have 30 different trainers across the BIE in crisis prevention intervention. This will provide de-escalation training to all teachers and staff in the BIE schools. Through this interagency workgroup they will develop behavioral support policies and guidance to help support students with behaviors and de-escalation in crisis prevention.

Katharine Ford stated the other collaboration area where there is a challenge is the over identification of special education students. They have an interagency partnership with the DPA and title programs and brought together specialists from all different regions with the goal to have an MTSS framework established to implement in the upcoming year across all schools.

Katharine Ford stated the team recommends the Board share the measurable data system that they created.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic thanked the presenters and opened the floor for comments and questions, including public comments.

11:00 AM – 11:15 AM

Board Reflection with Public Comments

Jennifer Davis, DFO, explained the guidelines for the public comment session.

Question: Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson – Asked if the new service log and dashboard will roll out to everyone.

Response: Erin Trottier – Responded the service log has already been rolled out to all TCS and BOS. The Navajo schools should have access to it as well. The challenge is getting the TCS to use it. They have autonomy not too.

Response: Katharine Ford – Elaborated that they will offer trainings to all schools. They have found that the in-person meetings are the best time to get school teams on board with the service log. They hope schools are going to see the logic and take on the service log.

Comment: Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice Chairperson – Shared her school is a TCS and they have had this conversation about service logs and created another one that is not as extensive. It indicates when they've missed a service and when they've made up the service. She noted the addition to workloads caused by the service logs.



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Response: Katharine Ford – Responded that when she joined the Bureau in 2021 the idea of service logs for all special education services was a surprise and it took a couple years to figure out why we were doing it and why this was being requested and it all came down to Government Accountability Office report released in 2020 that addressed a concern around special education services across the Bureau and whether or not they were being implemented. The service log has been developed to better meet the recommendations of that report.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic thanked the presenters and the Board adjourned for lunch.

11:15 PM – 1:30 PM Lunch

1:30 PM – 4:00 PM Board Work Time

Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson welcomed the Board back from lunch and took attendance to ensure a quorum. The following board members were in attendance, constituting a quorum:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| • Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson | • Mariah Crow |
| • Dr. Elizabeth Younce, Vice
Chairperson | • Taryn Jim |
| • Leon Reval, Secretary | • Melanie Star |
| | • Katinee Shawanokasic-Chavez |

Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson, reviewed the objectives for the Board work for the afternoon.

- Review and discuss next meeting logistics and approve the September agenda
- Identify and prioritize annual report deliverables and timelines.
- Review action items, responsibilities, and next steps

The priorities from the previous year were reviewed and it was clarified the Board was working on the sub priorities with justifications being worked on during the September meeting. Dr.

Secretary Leon Reval asked if there is a possibility of adding space for additional explanations on the purpose of the priorities and sub priorities to enhance the products of the Board's work. Also, if it is possible to encourage feedback on the report and letter after submission. Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic shared his insight and hope for feedback on the report and letter. He clarified the Board makes recommendations based on meetings. Priorities and justification should be suggestions and recommendations.



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The Board discussed various verbiage related to the sub priorities and considered drafts provided by Secretary Leon Reval.

Secretary Lean Reval commented in chat – When working with families from diverse Tribal communities, meaningful participation in the IEP process may look different from one community to another. Tribal languages, cultural practices, available resources, family preferences, and community approaches are not uniform. The goal should therefore be to ensure that families can understand, participate in, and meaningfully contribute to decisions about their child, while allowing schools and Tribal communities flexibility in determining how that is best accomplished.”

2:55 PM – 3:10 PM Break

Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson, welcomed the Board back from break and encouraged them to move forward.

The Board to reflected on and finalized Priority 2: Language and culture should be central to the development of IEPs and curriculum to increase cultural identity, student success, and wellness.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic asked for clarification on the intent of Priority 3.

The Board reviewed past meeting minutes regarding the intent of Priority 3.

Secretary Leon Reval commented in chat – My last thoughts will be parted because of allowed word maximization. I may be looking at this too simply, so I ask this from my understanding of our advisory role. I think it is important that our report acknowledge the work BIE is already doing, the strategies already in place, and the people throughout the system working every day for students with disabilities. I do not want our recommendations to suggest that work is not happening. What I am trying to better understand is what happens when all of that work is happening and the same problems still reach this Board. If we continue hearing about special education staff shortages, for example, could we go one step further than identifying the shortage? What is causing it? Is it recruitment, retention, housing, compensation, credentialing, location, workload, funding, or something else? What has the school already tried? What is BIE already doing? Where does the problem get stuck? And if the answer is beyond the authority or resources of the school or BIE, who can help? To me, that may be where our advisory role becomes particularly useful to the Secretary. The same questions could apply to services,



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funding, family participation, communication, or other recurring concerns. What is already being done? What is working? What is not reaching the stakeholder? What remains unresolved? And is the remaining barrier something BIE can address, or something BIE itself needs help from the Department to address? I also wonder if each major recommendation could have something tangible to follow. Perhaps a response identifying what is already being done, what assistance is available, what remains unresolved, and where additional authority, resources, or coordination may be needed. Then the next Board has something to follow rather than starting the same conversation over again. And while we absolutely should acknowledge the work already being done, I do not think that acknowledgment should unintentionally let the system off the hook when schools, staff, students, and families are still encountering the same barriers. Schools and families should not have to become experts in federal bureaucracy to figure out who has the authority to address a problem everyone already knows exists. Maybe our report can help make that connection clearer. Not by prescribing one solution for every school or Tribal community, and not by telling BIE how to do its job, but by helping the Secretary see where needs on the ground are being addressed, where they are not, where BIE may need additional help, and who has the ability to provide that help. If I understand our role correctly, that seems to me to be the value of an advisory report. We help carry the issue far enough up the system that something useful can come back down to the students, families, teachers, staff, and schools we are here to serve.

The Board continued revising Priority 3 and the justification statement. Whole child partnerships for the success and readiness of our children.

4:00 PM

Adjourn

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Vice Chairperson Dr. Elizabeth Younce made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mariah Crow Board Member seconded the motion.

All Board members voted in favor of adjourning the meeting.

Chairperson Norman Shawanokasic commented in chat – I wish success, safety and good health to all the Board members as well as the staff and participants that are here on this Zoom meeting. I usually say safe travels to everyone to get back home however, we are pretty much in our homeland areas. I'm excited about Albuquerque in a few weeks. It will be great to see everyone in person. You guys all do a wonderful job and continue to advocate and support the special education field in terms of education, family, and communities.



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Minutes were chair certified for accuracy on September 4, 2026.



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Following the completion of the meeting, Secretary Leon Reval submitted the following written edits to the BIE Advisory Board Letter and Priorities and asked they be included with the meeting minutes.

BIE Advisory Board Draft Letter and Priorities 2026

PROPOSED CONSOLIDATED REDLINE FOR BOARD CONSIDERATION

Black text reflects the working draft. Red text reflects proposed consolidated language or considerations. Red strikethrough reflects proposed replacement.

~~September 25, 2025~~ September __, 2026

IN REPLY REFER TO:

Secretary Doug Burgum
Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Burgum:

In alignment with BIE's Strategic Direction, the Advisory Board has identified three priorities intended to support a student-centered system, remove barriers to learning and services, and strengthen the connection between what students, families, schools, Tribal communities, and BIE experience and what the Department may be in a position to address.

~~This letter will outline~~ This letter outlines the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Advisory Board for Exceptional Children concerns and recommendations as required by 34 CFR § 300.714 regarding the provision of special education and related services to students within BIE funded schools. ~~Outlined in this report are our current priorities and related recommendations for 2025.~~ Outlined in this report are the Board's current priorities and related recommendations for 2026. The Board welcomes the opportunity to meet and discuss with you to address these priorities.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has determined that the BIE “needs intervention” to be compliant with regulations for implementing the requirements of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Board has collaborated with stakeholders to include representatives of Tribally Controlled schools, Navajo region schools, Bureau Operated Schools, Early childhood and secondary transition providers, BIE behavioral health and wellness program providers, providers for students who are blind and visually impaired, the Division of Performance and Accountability



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(DPA) and the BIE central office, BIE Staff and comments from the public to develop our recommendations for the ~~2025~~2026 Annual Report.

The Board recognizes the value of BIE's existing strategies, technical assistance, data collection, and the work of those carrying them out. Those efforts provide a foundation for the recommendations below. Where a concern continues despite those efforts, the Board can help ask the next question: what does the available information tell us, what does the issue look like in practice, what has already been tried, what remains unresolved, who has authority to act, and what assistance or workable approach may help move the issue forward?

The Board is advisory, so it does not need to prescribe every answer. Its recommendations can give the Secretary enough substance to understand the problem, what has already been tried, where it remains stuck, who has authority to act, and what might actually help move it. This allows information and stakeholder input to become a basis for discussion and recommendation rather than an end in themselves.

The Advisory Board acknowledges the honor and responsibility of our respective roles and takes seriously the opportunity to advocate for students with disabilities. These priorities fulfill the role of the advisory board and cultivate a lasting impact on tribal children's education, well-being, and cultural preservation for generations to come.

Please inform the Designated Federal Officer, Jennifer Davis (Jennifer.davis@bie.edu) on behalf of the Advisory Board, if specific content in this letter needs further clarification. ~~The Board also welcomes information on what has changed in response to recurring recommendations, what remains unresolved, and where additional Department assistance may be appropriate.~~

Maec-waewaenen (Thank you),

Norman Shawanokasic, Chairperson
Elizabeth S. Younce, Ed.D., Vice-Chairperson
Leon K. Reval, Secretary
Janet Slowman, Ed.D., Board Member
Monica Cleveland, Board Member
Rachel Harrison, Board Member
Wendy Kroupa, Board Member
Melanie C. Star, Board Member
Brian Wagner, Board Member

BIE Advisory Board Draft Priorities 2026

~~*Add transition and accountability throughout~~ Proposed approach throughout: use available information to identify the issue, hear how it is experienced in practice,



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understand what has already been attempted, consider workable examples where useful, and identify where responsibility and authority rest so the recommendation has a realistic place to go.

I. Ensure whole child supports that remove barriers to learning, equitable access, and success for students with disabilities, including twice-exceptional students.

Justification:

The Board recognizes ongoing BIE and school efforts to support the whole child. This priority can build on those efforts by identifying where barriers continue in practice and whether the remaining issue can reasonably be addressed by the school, by BIE, through an existing partnership, or requires assistance beyond either.

Specifically, the Board recommends:

- Support sustainable mental health services that are accessible in practice. Where access remains limited, identify the practical barrier, such as staffing, distance, provider availability, funding, family navigation, or another factor, and consider what existing school, Tribal, community, telehealth, or outside partnerships may provide a workable path without assuming the same model will fit every community.
- When special education staffing or related-service shortages continue, identify what the school has already attempted and what is actually preventing a position or service from being filled. BIE can then consider where it can help schools navigate or streamline lawful requirements, such as credentialing, background checks, alternative recruitment, shared specialists, or other approaches already working in BIE, Tribal, state, or comparable federal programs. Where the barrier is outside the school's authority, the recommendation should identify where additional BIE or Department assistance may be needed.
- Use rural-access and service data for a defined purpose. Identify what question the information is intended to answer, what it shows about the barrier, and what decision or response it can reasonably inform. Where the same information continues to show the same gap, consider what has already been learned and acted upon before making additional data collection the next step.
- Where another BIE school, Tribal program, state program, or comparable federal education system has addressed a similar barrier successfully, consider the approach as a point of comparison. For example, the Board could ask how other systems address hard-to-fill positions, specialized services, rural access, or per-student supports, why those approaches work, what resources or authority make



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them possible, and whether any part could reasonably inform BIE options. The purpose is comparison and problem solving, not assuming the systems are equivalent.

- Keep accountability connected to authority. A school can be accountable for what it can reasonably control. Where a barrier results from federal requirements, limited authority, unavailable providers, infrastructure, or another systemic constraint, identify that distinction so a system-level problem does not simply become another corrective requirement for the school.

II. Language and culture should be central to the development of IEPs and curriculum to increase cultural identity, student success, and wellness.

Justification:

Intent is to address student language needs and services within the IEP, as well as parent's meaningful participation in IEP development and cultural differences.

When working with families from diverse Tribal communities, meaningful participation in the IEP process may look different from one community to another. Tribal languages, cultural practices, available resources, family preferences, and community approaches are not uniform. The goal should therefore be to ensure that families can understand, participate in, and meaningfully contribute to decisions about their child, while allowing schools and Tribal communities flexibility in determining how that is best accomplished.

Specifically, the Board recommends:

- Preserve every required IEP element and protection while allowing schools practical ways to help families understand and use the information. This could include a plain-language explanation, organized summary, visual aid, translated information, or another supplemental approach appropriate to the family and community. The required IEP remains intact. The additional approach helps meaningful participation occur without requiring schools to create an entirely separate compliance process.
- Use existing IEP meetings, family contacts, and school communication whenever possible to understand whether families can meaningfully participate, rather than automatically creating another reporting requirement for already limited school and BIE staff. A signature or attendance count can show that a step occurred. Where feasible, existing interactions can also help show whether the family understood the services, decisions, and next steps.
- When data is used to describe student participation, access, or outcomes, consider who is included within the aggregate result and who may be hidden by it. An overall improvement for students does not necessarily show whether students who



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are nonverbal, nonspeaking, use alternative communication, or require intensive supports experienced the same benefit. Existing information should be examined, where feasible, in ways that help those students remain visible without turning them into another reporting burden or simply another number.

- When a school has a lawful and appropriate approach that is improving family understanding or producing a positive student outcome, consider why it is working before treating the difference itself as a concern. BIE can help clarify the boundaries, preserve required protections, and determine whether the approach can continue or inform practice elsewhere without assuming one presentation or process works for every family or community.
- Where language, communication, cultural, or service gaps remain, identify the practical resource already available to the family or school and what is still missing. Possible options may include Tribal language resources, interpreters, communication specialists, assistive communication, community partners, or outside expertise. The recommendation can then identify whether the gap requires coordination, technical assistance, resources, or authority rather than simply stating that greater participation is needed.

III. Whole child partnerships for the success and readiness of our children.

Justification:

~~Define “whole child” — supporting students academic, social, emotional, physical, cultural growth as they become members of their community~~ For purposes of this priority, “whole child” means supporting a student's academic, social, emotional, physical, and cultural growth while recognizing that the resources, partnerships, leadership structures, and workable approaches available to schools and Tribal communities will differ.

~~what is already being done, what assistance is available, what remains unresolved, and where additional authority, resources, or coordination may be needed.~~ The Board can consider what is already being done, what assistance is available, what stakeholders experience in practice, what remains unresolved, and where additional authority, resources, flexibility, leadership attention, or coordination may be needed.

Specifically, the Board recommends:

- When recurring issues warrant deeper understanding, use already approved in-person Board meetings, when practical, for short issue-focused panels or discussions. Depending on the issue, participants could include teachers, service providers, administrators, superintendents, school board members, parents or



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caregivers, BIE personnel, Tribal representatives, or others directly involved. Including different levels of responsibility can help the Board understand whether a barrier is occurring in implementation, leadership, policy, resources, or communication, and where a workable response may actually begin.

- Address accessibility and transportation as practical access issues, particularly in rural communities, without assuming that the answer is simply additional funding or another school requirement. Where transportation is preventing a student from receiving a service, consider safe options already available or legally workable, such as coordinated routes, contracted transportation, mileage reimbursement, shared services, Tribal or community partnerships, mobile services, tele-services when appropriate, or bringing the service closer to the student. The useful question is which option fits the local circumstances, what prevents its use, and who can help remove that barrier.
- For mental and physical health supports, identify what schools are already providing and where the actual break in access occurs. Examples may include unavailable local providers, referral delays, distance, scheduling, family navigation, consent, or coordination across systems. Where another program has solved a similar access problem through school-based services, telehealth, visiting providers, shared specialists, or community partnerships, consider why that model works and whether it offers a realistic option for the school or community involved.
- Consider leadership as part of the whole-child environment. Strong programs can be affected by unclear direction, turnover, inconsistent implementation, or decisions made above the classroom level. When appropriate, hearing from school leadership, superintendents, school boards, frontline staff, and families together can help distinguish whether a recurring problem is a resource issue, a policy issue, an implementation issue, or a leadership issue before a recommendation is made.
- Use successful examples to give recommendations a starting point. When a BIE school, Tribal program, FACE program, state program, or other federal system demonstrates an approach relevant to a recurring concern, identify what the program did, why it appears to work, what resources or authority support it, and what would need to be different for another community. This gives the Board and Secretary something concrete to consider while preserving local choice and avoiding a one-size approach.
- Use the Annual Report as a bridge in both directions. Information from students, families, schools, Tribal communities, and BIE should reach the Secretary with enough clarity to show what is working, where an issue remains stuck, what has already been attempted, and where help may be needed. Information returning to



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the Board should likewise help show what changed, what did not, and why, so the next Annual Report can build on what actually occurred rather than simply restating the concern.

Proposed Cross-Cutting Consideration

Creating an opportunity to receive information is important. Creating an opportunity to use that information is the larger objective. Data can tell us something. Stakeholders can tell us what it looks like in practice. Different experiences can test an assumption. Existing solutions can provide comparison. Responsibility and authority can show who is able to act. The Board can then make a recommendation with a clearer place to go.

This approach does not diminish BIE's strategies or require every issue to generate another study, report, meeting, or task for schools. In some cases, the most useful step may be to use information already available, hear directly from the people involved during an existing meeting, examine a workable example, clarify who has authority, and carry the unresolved portion to the level that can address it.

The time, energy, hope, and trust invested by students, families, educators, school leaders, Tribal communities, BIE, and this Board also deserve consideration. Those voices and experiences are ultimately what we carry forward to the Secretary. Using them meaningfully can help keep that bridge strong, particularly when the future of our schools and the students they serve may be uncertain.

Ultimately, the measure cannot simply be whether data was collected, a presentation was received, a process was followed, or another recommendation was made. The Board's advisory role has greater value when that information helps show what can reasonably happen next and whether any of it made a difference for the student.

Prepared as an individual Board member's proposed consolidated working draft for discussion and consideration. Examples are offered to provide a foundation for discussion and comparison, not as findings that every school, Tribe, or federal system is directly equivalent. This is not presented as an approved position of the Advisory Board.