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## Bureau of Indian Affairs and State Education Agencies: Roles and Responsibilities in Implementing IDEA

by Eve Müller

### Introduction

Over the past few years, several state directors of special education have expressed concern about the lack of clarity regarding the respective roles and responsibilities of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and state education agencies (SEAs) in terms of implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In response to this, the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRC) helped organize and facilitate a meeting in May of 2006 between representatives of the BIA and the state directors of special education and their staff from four states with significant numbers of American Indian students: Arizona, New Mexico, North Dakota and South Dakota.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this document is to identify the major issues related to BIA and SEA general supervision roles and responsibilities in implementing IDEA by building on the work of the MPRRC through an analysis of information obtained from interviewing representatives of both the BIA and five SEAs. Interviewees were asked to describe challenges and generate recommendations for improved communication and coordination between the BIA and SEAs. Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) completed this document as part of its cooperative agreement with the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

### Background

The BIA's responsibility is the administration and management of 55.7 million acres of land held in trust by the United States for American Indians, Indian tribes and Alaska Natives. There are 561 federally recognized tribal governments in the United States. The BIA has responsibility for

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<sup>1</sup> To request a copy of the proceedings for this meeting, titled *BIA and State Educational Agencies Special Education General Supervision Summit: Proceedings and Next Steps*, contact the MPRRC at <http://www.rrfnetwork.org/mprrc>.

developing forestlands, leasing assets on these lands, directing agricultural programs, protecting water and land rights, developing and maintaining infrastructure and economic development. In addition, the Bureau of Indian Affairs provides education services to approximately 48,000 Indian students.<sup>2</sup> The BIA is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior.

The Office of Indian Education Programs (OIEP)—recently renamed the Bureau of Indian Education as part of the restructuring taking place at the BIA—oversees a total of 184 elementary and secondary schools either operated by the BIA or funded by the BIA and tribally operated under contracts or grants. These schools are located on 63 reservations in 23 states. According to 2004 Child Count data, these schools serve a total of 8,051 AI/AN students with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> The Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP) provides base funding that is comparable to that received by public schools for both BIA-operated and BIA-funded schools. Eligible AI/AN students include children ages 5-21 who are members of or at least a one-fourth degree Indian blood descendent or a member of an Indian tribe that is eligible for special programs and services provided through the BIA.<sup>4</sup> (The BIA is not required by law to serve children under the age of five.)

For more information on AI/AN students with disabilities, as well as state infrastructures for serving this population, readers should refer to Project Forum's 2004 document titled, *American Indian and Alaska Native Students with Disabilities* (Müller & Markowitz, 2004).<sup>5</sup>

### **Methodology**

In February and March of 2006, Project Forum staff—in collaboration with the MPRRC—conducted two focus groups: one with state education agency staff and one with BIA staff. Information gleaned from these focus groups was then used to develop an interview protocol. Based on recommendations from the MPRRC, Project Forum interviewed state directors of special education and/or members of their staff from *Arizona, Maine, New Mexico, North Dakota* and *South Dakota*. Interviews were also conducted with the BIA's interim director of special education, as well as a regional BIA staff member based in the state of *South Dakota*. Interviews were conducted during the months of April, May and June of 2006; and analyzed using ATLAS.ti (a computer program designed to aid in the analysis of qualitative data). Findings are presented in the following section of this document.

### **Findings**

#### **BIA Structure and Anticipated Changes**

The BIA is currently in the process of restructuring its education department and a number of the changes will have significant impact on the infrastructure serving students with disabilities. The

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<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the BIA website at <http://www.doi.gov/bureau-indian-affairs.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Child Count figures for the BIA and other state education agencies can be found at [www.ideadata.org](http://www.ideadata.org).

<sup>4</sup> This information was retrieved June 28, 2006 from Federal Grants Wire at [www.federalgrantswire.com/indian\\_school\\_equalization\\_program.html](http://www.federalgrantswire.com/indian_school_equalization_program.html).

<sup>5</sup> This and other Project Forum documents can be downloaded at [www.projectforum.org](http://www.projectforum.org) or at [www.nasdse.org](http://www.nasdse.org).

department of special education, now known as the Division of Compliance, Monitoring and Accountability (DCMA), is located under the newly named Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). The DCMA has four subdivisions: Supplemental Education, Accountability, Special Education, and Monitoring and Compliance. Three area special education offices oversee 18 regional special education agencies, each with an Education Line Officer. Although the Education Line Officers used to oversee agency special education coordinators (comparable to local education agency [LEA]-level special education directors within the public school system), these positions are currently in the process of being eliminated, along with the offices in which they reside. According to BIA interviewees, the 184 BIA-operated and/or BIA-funded schools will now have to hire special education consultants either individually or cooperatively.

The BIA indicated that one of the main reasons for changes to the special education infrastructure has to do with a new requirement in IDEA 2004 that states that no more than 5% of IDEA funds may be spent on administrative costs:

*(a) The Secretary of the Interior may reserve five percent of its payment under Sec. 300.707(a) in any fiscal year, or \$500,000, whichever is greater, for administrative costs in carrying out the provisions of Sec 300.707 through 300.709, 300.711, and 300.713 through 300.716 [20 U.S.C. 1411(h)(1)(A)].*

Furthermore, in response to a directive from OSEP stipulating that money flow directly to schools, DCMA will no longer be providing technical assistance to schools. This means that schools themselves will now be responsible for hiring consultants to provide technical assistance and professional development.

Significantly, the BIA recommends that BIA-operated school systems align themselves with the special education rules and regulations of the states in which they are located—for example, ensuring that teachers meet the highly qualified requirements determined by the state, take state assessments, adhere to state accountability workbooks and follow state accreditation guidelines.

Of the five SEAs interviewed, four reported that state-level staff for the most part lacked a working understanding of BIA infrastructure. Furthermore, most SEA interviewees were unclear about the planned changes to the BIA infrastructure and how these changes would impact AI/AN students with disabilities. In the words of one state director of special education, it is “just shocking that there is this marginal level of understanding” on the part of everyone involved.

## **Communication Between the BIA and SEAs**

### *Issues*

Five of the seven interviewees agreed that communication between the SEA and the BIA was rare. In the words of one interviewee, “Usually we don’t have communication.” Furthermore, when communication does take place, it takes place on an ad hoc basis as there are no systems in place to ensure regular contact. The interviewee from *South Dakota* reported, however, that

although the structure was no longer in place, the state *used* to have a system that ensured regular contact between the BIA, SEA and LEAs. She expressed a desire to reinstate such a system.

When asked about the points of contact for the BIA and SEA, interviewee responses varied. Interviewees from *Arizona* and *South Dakota*, for example, were more likely to approach national-level BIA staff, whereas those from *Maine*, *New Mexico* and *North Dakota* were more likely to approach regional-level BIA staff (or in *Maine's* case Maine Indian Education<sup>6</sup> staff). Several interviewees said that they were not sure who the formal points of contact were for the BIA and noted that high levels of staff turnover at the BIA often made it difficult to maintain and/or develop relationships over time.

Several interviewees also expressed confusion as to which administrative level of the BIA was equivalent to the SEA and which to the LEA, noting that this lack of clarity makes it difficult for states to know whom to approach when addressing specific SEA- and/or LEA-level issues relating to the implementation of IDEA. For instance, interviewees were unsure as to whether the DCMA is responsible for handling all SEA-level responsibilities articulated in IDEA, and several expressed doubts as to whether BIA regional offices or BIA schools handled responsibilities typically associated with LEAs.

Three SEA interviewees agreed that contact was more likely to be initiated by the SEA as opposed to the BIA, and in the words of one SEA interviewee, “We tend to be more aggressive.” BIA representatives concurred with this appraisal, although interviewees from the two remaining SEAs felt that both sides were equally likely to initiate contact. The regional BIA interviewee described a “very strong working relationship” with the SEA office and the state director of special education in *South Dakota*. She agreed, however, that most of her counterparts in other regions of the state rarely, if ever, made contact with the SEA. In her words, most state-level BIA staff “don’t really see the need for us to be involved with the state” and SEA staff, on the other hand, sometimes treat the BIA as a sort of “stepchild”—attitudes which result in limited contact between the BIA and SEA.

*South Dakota* is unique among SEAs interviewed in that it has an Indian Education Coordinator (though not specific to special education) who serves as a point of contact between the SEA and BIA. Also, in *North Dakota* a BIA-employed administrator serves on the state advisory panel for special education. According to interviewees, both of these positions serve to nurture healthy communication between the BIA and SEA.

### *Recommendations*

Several interviewees recommended that communication should be more systematic. For example, the regional BIA interviewee stressed that BIA employees at the regional level should always be included on the state’s listserv, so that all correspondence being shared with LEA special education directors is shared with BIA special education administrators as well. She also

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<sup>6</sup> The BIA contracts with Maine Indian Education, a non-governmental agency, to manage BIA-operated and/or BIA-funded schools throughout the state.

recommended that having a BIA representative serve on the state's interagency coordinating council as an invited member (as she does in *South Dakota*) could serve to strengthen relationships between the BIA and SEA. An SEA interviewee, on the other hand, recommended that the BIA send copies to state directors of special education of any BIA correspondence pertaining to special education issues within the state.

In order to determine appropriate points of contact with the BIA, several interviewees recommended that OSEP provide explicit guidance as to the "statehood" status of the BIA—thereby helping to clarify whom to approach with SEA- and/or LEA-level queries.

Several interviewees also stressed the importance of the MPRRC in bringing together representatives from the BIA and SEAs in order to facilitate open dialogue. They recommended that the MPRRC and/or NASDSE facilitate a national-level meeting between the BIA and the 23 states that have BIA-operated schools. The BIA interim director of special education recommended that such a meeting include state special education directors and representatives from the BIA's department of special education. She also recommended that this type of meeting take place once or twice per year as it would "go a long way toward improving communication" as well as facilitating the development of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between SEAs and the BIA regarding issues as varied as monitoring, assessment and Child Count.

In terms of improving within-state relationships, several interviewees recommended designating LEA-level contacts for both the BIA and the public school system and conducting annual meetings within each state that bring together both BIA and SEA/LEA representatives. One interviewee suggested that the state's "rolling out of new IDEA regulations" could create an ideal opportunity for revisiting the relationship between the BIA and SEA, as well as clarifying roles and responsibilities.

## **Responsibility for Individual Students**

### *Issues*

As mentioned in the introduction to this document, one of the biggest challenges is sorting out issues of ownership when schools are jointly operated by the BIA and the public school system, or when a BIA-operated school and a charter school (operated by the public school system) are "co-located" (i.e., share a single building).

Interviewees described a range of these types of school configurations and some of the concerns regarding ownership that arise. For example:

- *North Dakota*— There are a number of jointly operated schools throughout the state (e.g., combining a public preschool, BIA-operated elementary school, and public middle and high school). It is not always clear on the part of administrators or parents who is responsible for children as they move through these schools.

- *Arizona* – Charter schools<sup>7</sup> and BIA-operated schools often share a single building. In most cases, the charter schools were created either to generate a funding stream for students not eligible for BIA funding (i.e., students who do not meet the blood quantum requirement necessary to receive ISEP funds and children of non-Native American school staff) or to expand the grade levels of BIA-operated schools to avoid students having to leave home to attend boarding schools. However, because the charter schools are open to *all* AI/AN students in the area, students frequently transfer back and forth between the BIA-operated and charter schools. When a child transfers from the BIA-operated school to the publicly-operated charter school, the child should no longer receive ISEP funds. However, according to Arizona’s state director, “double dipping” occasionally occurs. Furthermore, BIA-operated schools that do not offer a full continuum of special education services have been known to counsel families to enroll their children in the public school instead, after the BIA-operated school has already claimed and received funding for the student—a practice which, according to the state director of special education, has caused “resentment to build up over the years.”

Because communication between the BIA and SEA is not always clear, a number of interviewees expressed concern that students attending jointly operated and/or co-located schools might be claimed by both the BIA and SEA, or not claimed at all.

According to interviewees from the BIA, ownership of students is determined according to ISEP funding (i.e., if a student is eligible for and receiving ISEP funds, he or she is considered a BIA student as opposed to a public school student). Incidentally, the BIA’s interim director of special education noted that BIA schools frequently serve children who are *not* eligible for ISEP funds—for example, students who are not of AI/AN descent—and serve them without receiving *any* funding at all. It is unclear, however, whether these students are formally under the purview of the BIA or the public school system when it comes to IDEA. Significantly, several state directors interviewed as a part of this study were unfamiliar with ISEP, suggesting that there is a need for additional information on the part of SEA staff as to how the BIA determines ownership of students.

Neither *Maine* nor *New Mexico* has jointly operated or co-located schools. *Maine*, however, described a system wherein Maine Indian Education, as an agent of the BIA, operates several K-8 schools throughout the state and then pays tuition for AI/AN students to attend public high schools within their local areas. *New Mexico* described occasional confusion regarding ownership of children residing on the Navajo Reservation, which spans three states.

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<sup>7</sup> Charter schools are semi-independent schools within a state’s public education system that are designed and operated by educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs and others. They are authorized/sponsored by designated local or state entities that are responsible for monitoring their quality and effectiveness. As of 2006, a total of 40 states and the District of Columbia had passed charter school laws allowing this type of school to be part of their system.

### *Recommendations*

Interviewees expressed a need for guidance from OSEP regarding how to handle ownership issues related to jointly operated and/or co-located schools (e.g., determining which entities are responsible for oversight of which classrooms and/or students). Three interviewees suggested that these issues be resolved by having the two parties (i.e., the BIA and SEA) meet together and “hammer it out as best they can,” establishing an MOU or joint agreement. One of these acknowledged that legal review on both sides would probably be necessary. Another suggested that a “state-specific guidance tool” be developed.

### **Child Count**

#### *Issues*

Most interviewees expressed grave concern that students attending jointly operated and/or co-located schools might be counted twice or not at all. Both BIA and SEA interviewees worried that students who are counted twice may in fact also be doubly funded (i.e., receiving funding from both ISEP and the public school system). This problem is particularly acute in schools where students transfer back and forth between the two systems (e.g., between the BIA-operated and charter schools in *Arizona*), a practice which leads to confusion regarding who counts—and pays for—students. The BIA interim director of special education described the situation as “absolutely murky.” In her words, “We have schools that are counting and perhaps receiving funding from both sources [i.e., BIA and the public school system].” She expressed concern that even in states like *New Mexico*, where there are no jointly operated or co-located schools, non-ISEP eligible students who are attending BIA-operated schools do not show up on any count. Interviewees from *Maine* reported that the SEA counts *all* students in the state receiving special education services, including those attending BIA-operated schools. They were unsure whether the BIA conducted a separate count of these same students.

The regional BIA representative from *South Dakota* described the following practice intended to avoid duplicate counts of students: Each year she meets with the two school superintendents and their clerical staff (i.e., from both the BIA and public school components of a jointly operated school) and together they individually count all students enrolled in the school, determining which entity (i.e., BIA or public school) will generate more money by counting that child.

#### *Recommendations*

*South Dakota’s* state director of special education, as well as the regional BIA representative (who also works in South Dakota) recommended that the BIA and SEA work together to conduct a collaborative count—ensuring that each student is counted and that no students are counted more than once. Other interviewees agreed that coordinating Child Count activities was a good idea that would help eliminate errors.

The BIA interim director of special education expressed a desire for written policy guidance from OSEP regarding the handling of Child Count (i.e., a document that would specify which students fall under the purview of the BIA and which under that of the SEA). She also noted that funding should ultimately go to the entity providing services to the student, even if the student is being claimed (for the purposes of Child Count) by someone else. Other state directors agreed and one recommended that such guidance be provided by OSEP—similar to the type of guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education in the area of assessment.

## **Assessment**

### *Issues*

All states interviewed reported that the most effective collaboration between the BIA and SEAs took place in terms of assessment. Most agreed that coordination was stronger in this area because of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requirement that BIA-operated schools accredited by the state use the assessment system of the states in which they are located [P.L. 107-110 §1111(m)]. *Arizona*'s state director, for instance, reported that the state is currently in the process of developing a MOU with the BIA regarding state-wide assessment and *New Mexico* has a MOU in place, but the MOU is currently on hold pending further consultation with tribal governments. Furthermore, *North Dakota*, *Arizona*, *Maine*, *New Mexico* and *South Dakota* state directors reported that their SEAs routinely invite BIA staff to participate in training activities related to the state-wide assessment. One concern was raised by interviewees from *Maine* as to whether the SEA itself was responsible for assessing BIA students (and, if so, whether the state disaggregated scores for these students), or whether the BIA assesses its own students using the state's assessment system.

### *Recommendations*

One state director recommended that SEAs “ensure that all [assessment-related] training is inclusive and all materials are accessible and culturally sensitive.” An interviewee from *Maine* recommended that there be greater clarification regarding BIA and SEA roles regarding state-wide assessment. Other interviewees reiterated that they had no serious concerns regarding the coordination of assessment.

## **Monitoring**

### *Issues*

Monitoring, particularly of jointly operated and/or co-located schools, can also be tricky and is handled differently in different states. For example:

- *South Dakota* –The one jointly operated school is monitored by both the state and the BIA. Because some BIA-operated schools follow state rules and regulations rather than BIA rules and regulations, the regional BIA representative reported that these schools are

frequently cited by the BIA for non-compliance. She stressed, however, that state regulations are the stricter of the two sets of rules.

- *Arizona* – The public school system only monitors those components of co-located schools that are relevant to students enrolled in the charter school. The BIA-operated schools are not under the purview of the public school system and are monitored as part of the BIA’s monitoring cycle.
- *Maine* – Although there are no jointly operated or co-located schools in the state, the public school system nonetheless conducts “paper monitoring” of BIA-operated schools (e.g., reviewing of forms, Child Find policies, student records, financial documents, certification and credentialing of teachers). The public school system does not conduct on-site monitoring of these schools, although the BIA does.

SEA interviewees described a number of situations in which monitoring was an issue. In one example, *Arizona’s* state director described the case of a charter school co-located with a BIA-operated school where the BIA found the BIA-operated part of the school *in* compliance, but the SEA found the charter part of the school *out of* compliance (and both parts of the school used the same forms and followed the same procedures). *North Dakota’s* state director reported that parents of children attending jointly operated schools—as well as administrators at those schools—were often unclear about whether to file grievances with the BIA or SEA. Significantly, several state directors were not sure whether and/or how the BIA handled monitoring of BIA-operated schools and/or the BIA components of jointly operated or co-located schools within the state.

Concerns about monitoring were also raised by BIA interviewees. For example, the interim special education director noted that the BIA received 14 procedural safeguard complaints from a BIA-operated school in *North Dakota*. However, when the complaint investigators arrived, they found that five of the students in question were not ISEP-funded. Consequently, it was unclear to the BIA whether they were responsible for handling the complaints, or whether the complaints were the responsibility of the SEA.

Another challenge for the BIA has to do with the monitoring of tribally operated schools. Although the BIA is responsible for monitoring both BIA-operated and tribally operated schools according to IDEA and the NCLB, and taking corrective action when appropriate, the Tribally Controlled Schools Act (TCSA) sets conflicting priorities—i.e., the TCSA preserves tribal autonomy and stipulates that federal money, once distributed to tribally operated schools, belongs completely to these schools and cannot be rescinded. This law makes it virtually impossible for the BIA to exercise directive authority over tribally operated schools.

### *Recommendations*

Two recommendations related to monitoring came up repeatedly. The first was that the BIA and SEA conduct “on-site coordinated monitoring” that would include joint trainings of BIA and

SEA program specialists (i.e., individuals responsible for conducting monitoring of schools) and coordinating of monitoring schedules. The BIA's interim director of special education added that "collaborative work" was particularly important in those states with jointly operated and/or co-located schools. Related to this recommendation, one state director recommended including representatives of the BIA and SEA on one another's monitoring teams. The second recommendation that came up again and again was the alignment of SEA and BIA monitoring systems within each state. One state director cautioned, however, that such an alignment should allow for "adaptations or refinements for culturally specific" concerns.

## **Parent and Family Concerns**

### *Issues*

As mentioned previously, several state directors expressed concern that parents of BIA students are not always aware of where they should go to file formal complaints against BIA schools. Some parents have approached the SEA, mistakenly thinking that the SEA is responsible for due process for *all* schools within the state. According to the BIA's interim director of special education, the BIA is responsible for handling the complaint process for all BIA schools.

Interviewees did mention, however, that the resources available through their states' parent training and information centers (PTICs) are available to all families throughout the state, including families with children enrolled in BIA-operated and BIA-funded schools. The BIA interim director of special education pointed out, however, that most parents of BIA students are not necessarily aware of the resources available through the PTICs and that more effective outreach to families of AI/AN students would be beneficial. The interviewees from *Maine* added that the Maine Parents' Federation and other parent organizations throughout the state made efforts to reach out to Maine Indian Education and share information with families about their rights under IDEA.

### *Recommendations*

Several interviewees stressed the need for policy guidance describing the roles and responsibilities of the BIA and SEA in handling grievances filed by families of students enrolled in BIA schools and/or jointly operated or co-located schools.

## **Child Find and Early Childhood Services**

### *Issues*

Although the BIA is not required by law to serve children under the age of five, the BIA in some states takes responsibility for referring and/or serving this population. For example:

- *New Mexico* – The BIA and LEAs assume responsibility for Child Find activities and the LEAs take responsibility for providing services.

- *Maine* – The state has a Child Development Services (CDS) agency responsible for identifying and serving young AI/AN children throughout the state. However, Maine Indian Education runs at least one preschool program in collaboration with CDS.
- *Arizona* – Referrals of young children living on the reservation are handled by Baby FACES (0-2 years of age) and FACES (3-5 years). These two programs also provide family supports but do not handle evaluation or provision of services.

### *Recommendations*

Several interviewees felt that the BIA ought to be required by law to take responsibility for Child Find and early childhood services for young AI/AN children. In the words of one state director, “To me it is absurd that Congress did not assign responsibility for three- to five-year-olds to the BIA for services,” adding that local services are particularly important for such a vulnerable population and that transporting children two or three hours for services makes no sense.

## **Professional Development**

### *Issues*

All SEA interviewees reported that efforts are made to invite BIA staff to participate in SEA-sponsored professional development activities. For instance, according to several interviewees, BIA representatives are “routinely included” on SEA listservs for local special education administrators. Several interviewees noted, however, that BIA listserv contacts often fail to disseminate information to other BIA staff and/or teachers at BIA schools, resulting in limited participation. Another interviewee noted that the SEA is not always sure who the current regional contact person is for the BIA. According to the BIA interim special education director, professional development for BIA staff and public school staff are “two separate, parallel systems” and participation in one another’s professional development activities is “hit and miss.” No SEA interviewees reported having been invited to BIA-sponsored professional development activities.

### *Recommendations*

Several state directors expressed concern that professional development activities, when not appropriately coordinated between the BIA and SEAs, could result in unnecessary duplication. In the words of one, “There would be no reason for [the BIA] to do a directors’ institute when they could simply send their folks to us.” Most agreed that improved communication was key to ensuring that professional development activities are coordinated and that staff from both the BIA and SEA are informed of the full range of professional development activities available throughout the state. One interviewee suggested that an MOU be created to ensure that invitations from SEA support staff always reach the appropriate BIA contacts. Again, most

interviewees stressed the importance of including BIA staff on the SEA's listserv for professional development activities.

### **Reactions to Anticipated Changes in BIA Infrastructure**

Those interviewees who were aware of anticipated changes to the BIA's special education infrastructures were hopeful that they would improve services to AI/AN students with disabilities, as well as improve BIA/SEA relations. SEA staff who attended the MPRRC meeting in May of 2006 were particularly optimistic, expressing a strong desire to collaborate with the BIA and a willingness to "help with anything we can."

Both state directors and BIA representatives, however, also expressed concerns about anticipated changes. For example, several interviewees expressed concern that the BIA's Division of Compliance, Monitoring and Accountability (DCMA) would no longer be providing technical assistance to schools. In response to this, the BIA's interim director of special education expressed her desire for OSEP to issue guidance and/or a directive stipulating that the BIA does in fact share responsibilities similar to those of an SEA—e.g., providing school-level technical assistance. The regional BIA representative was also very frank in expressing concerns about the proposed changes. In her words, "I think it's bad for kids and bad for schools." She noted in particular that, with the elimination of agency special education coordinators (comparable to LEA-level special education directors) an important source of special education expertise might be lost.

Several interviewees recommended one or more strategies for smoothing the transition process. For example, one interviewee mentioned that in 1995 the BIA convened its own special education advisory panel, comparable to that found in all other states. He noted, however, that the panel was quickly disbanded and suggested that such a panel might be useful in future for addressing cross-state issues regarding the implementation of IDEA. One interviewee recommended that the BIA sponsor a professional development activity to educate SEAs about the changes to BIA infrastructure (e.g., distributing copies of the BIA's new organizational chart, providing contact information that is tied to particular offices as opposed to particular individuals, etc.). Most interviewees reiterated the need for regularly scheduled contact between regional BIA staff and SEA/LEA staff and the importance of meetings (such as the one sponsored by the MPRRC) in creating opportunities for free and open dialogue.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Project Forum and the various interviewees who contributed to this document sincerely hope that the many recommendations contained within it will serve as a starting point for improved dialogue between the BIA and the 23 SEAs in which BIA schools are located. The MPRRC meeting, which took place during the same timeframe as the writing of this document, illustrates the commitment that the various stakeholders have to improving communication and collaboration between the BIA and SEAs. Most mentioned the importance of keeping the lines of communication open and several suggested that the MPRRC and/or NASDSE play a role in

bringing stakeholders together to identify steps to reach this goal. For example, the MPRRC and NASDSE have recently begun to identify ways to involve the other 18 states with BIA schools in ongoing discussions.

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