

DR. ALFONSO PEREZ: My name is Dr. Al Perez. I am representing Fiesta Educativa, an organization to help Hispanic parents to understand Public Law 94-142. I would say it is a partnership that combines just about all of the elements in education including psychological services, therapies, teachers, administrators, and so on, having to do with special education and what it takes to help special education to do a better job for the children that they serve.

What makes the partnership work is really a lot of people come very highly dedicated to their professional roles and for the need that they feel within their souls, their hearts for children with disabilities. I am glad that I am a member of the partnership because in doing so I recognize that there are children out there from different cultural backgrounds, different language backgrounds who need special help and I think through IDEA I want to make that a very important area for them to be concerned about because we are a country of great diversity and many cultures and many languages. Not all children learn. Not all children have the same support that every child has in this country so through IDEA I hope to be able to serve those children that are unique, have a unique cultural and language backgrounds. The key outcome that can be attributed to the partnership is the fact that children learn at different levels and depending on what resources are working for them. And I am including the family as a resource. Many children come with a different family resource. Not that the family is not supportive or loving. Not all families have the same ability to help children as other families. You go from the very poorest families to the very richest families. Some of the richest families have psychologists, therapists, neurologists. Everyone helps them work with their kid. Other parents do not even have a doctor to go to so I think this is recognition in this country that must be observed.

The partnership addresses that challenge by a variety of professionals that are represented in the partnership all the way from teachers to psychologists to therapists to medical people. All of the professions that are involved in special education. The gap could be closing with certain families as that family achieve higher socio-economic abilities and some families do. They come here brand new and they get into the America system. They get in to a certain economic level and they start to recognize their ability to help the child more or they become better versed in English, in the culture of America. They begin to recognize what it takes. We are a different planet in this country compared to the rest of the world and people that come from another part of the world to this planet is something that almost has to relearn from scratch.

I am a professional. I had the toughest job in the country being the Director of Special Education in Los Angeles. One of the biggest problems ever. In that job, when the law came into being, I suddenly recognized that there were some people who were very confused by the law and did not really know how to assess the law and the services that the law provided. So they were there. They did not realize they had a treasure of resources to help them with their child with disabilities. So, as a professional, I recognized the need of these unique people that are a part of our educational system. I am going to say something that I say very carefully. In sitting, for instance, in this meeting today everybody is almost white, Anglo Saxon from middle class backgrounds. It is hard for a lot of those people to really conceive what it is to be a parent that does not fit into that socio-economic group and I think the IDEA Partnership has to change in its diversity within the Partnership itself. Socio-economic, cultural, language in every respect. I think the interviews with Sotomayor brought that out very strongly. I think the partnership has been most successful in their really sincere dedication to the role of helping children with disabilities. Although some of it has been lost in the integration process.

Before 94-142, handicapped children were in special schools because regular schools, primarily because regular schools did not have accessibility. They did not have the bathrooms, the ramps, and the liability of having wheelchairs running around in campuses was high. When the law came in, money was provided to make schools accessible. Then children were sent out into regular

campuses. In the process, they lost some of what they had when they were under special education facilities with teachers and administrators, and people who were prepared primarily with special education credentials to help them. There was a mutual understanding that was lost in the campuses of two, three thousand students. When they were in their special schools, they had their student government. They had a prom. They had physical education. They had cheerleaders. They had athletic teams. They had all of the activities that normal kids have in a different way. They got lost in the shuffle of being in the big world.

In a way, we are trying to come back to that. The LA Unified School District uniquely in these economic times, passed a bond issue to help build more schools. Within that bond issue, was \$60 million to develop transition and career centers for special education. So in a way I refer to it as going back to the future. We are thinking back to what we had before and how can we get some of that back. They are trying to develop possibly 5 to 6 centers that will deal primarily with the decision and career development. It seems to me that Joanne or IDEA for that matter, depends on the various divisions or professions that are out there representing their organizations. They are the ones who send the people over. They are the ones who may not be fully representative of what America is all about. America is not the America we knew 50 years ago.

MODERATOR: Exactly.

DR. ALFONSO PEREZ: America is, actually the white, Anglo Saxon, Protestant, middle class person is the minority. Has now become a minority and we are not recognizing that in the organizations that represent IDEA. So she is stuck whatever comes from, I should not use the word stuck but this is what she is from this organization. Fiesta Educativa is unique. It represents a unique part of our population, the Hispanic population. You should recognize diversity as a unique part of American culture and diversity is becoming greater as more of the world comes to us. As we reach out for more of the world, Joanne through her various resources, through her various as we went through the day there are organizations of every alphabetical soup known to the world representing IDEA. It is a sound investment because for instance No Child Left Behind does not recognize that not every child learns the same way. Some children need more money, more resources, and smaller classrooms. Special education recognizes this. The norm for different disabilities is maybe 8 or 10 children to maybe a teacher and an aide whereas the regular education is maybe 25 or 30 students to 1 teacher. So the special education law 94-142 recognized that, and provided extra money to develop and they came up with a plan, the IEP, which is unique in education. Individual Education Plan for every child. If that was applied to every child in the country we would be in a different ball game.

Well, I am a crazy guy. Let me just say this... I am also associated with the United States Academic Decathlon Program which is a competition in ten academic events nationally. I am the original Executive Director for that group so I go from a group that is gifted to a group who is special education. To me, all kids are important and to me it is very rewarding to be on both sides of the educational level. I was just in Memphis for the National Championships and I will be coming back to Minneapolis for the National Championships next year. Four hundred kids compete in academic events. In a sense, to some extent, they are similar to special education. They are unique in their schools. Right now, with the economic backgrounds they are going to be dropping a lot of those programs. They will never drop basketball. They will never drop football. They will never drop tennis but they are likely to drop one of these educationally enrichment programs that are so universal for our kids. Our society's values sometimes are the wrong syllable.