Acadia school program called exemplary

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Two projects conducted by the Acadia Parish School Board during the 1996-97 school year have been recognized by the State of Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education as being exemplary.

In a letter to Dr. Marietta W. James, BESE Executive Director Weegie Peabody explained 15 program evaluators visited 260 projects and recognized 18 as outstanding models. "Your system's Early Childhood/Preschool/Parent Education Program has been so chosen," said Peabody in her letter to Dr. James.

The Acadia Parish School Board had applied for the Early Childhood Block Grant which was funded through the state 8 (g) program at a cost of 850,555. The Early Childhood Preschool Parent Education Program was the title selected for this project.

According to Program Administrator Yvonne Mills, the Early Childhood Preschool Parent Education Program provided services to families of disadvantaged four year old children in three public schools, Central Rayne Kindergarten, Crowley Kindergarten and Church Point Elementary, and two Head Start Centers. She said the focus of this program was to improve parenting skills through personalized home visits, group meetings, monthly newsletters and use of a resource center. Parents increased their knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices and improved parenting skills which had a direct influence on the development of their preschool children.

Mills said this project served 143 children and their parents. The three parent educators, Victoria Citizen, Margorie Dubose and Linda Stewart, made 1,092 home visits and conducted 12 group meetings for the parents.

According to Mills, the parent centers were set up in the school to provide parents with information, resources and a well equipped play room to bring young siblings weekly. Mills said as a result of this intensive program of parent education, 90 percent of the children whose parents participated in the program showed gains on the Battelle Screening Instrument and the Creative Curriculum Checklist. According to Mills, the data from the home visits and parent questionnaires showed 100 percent of parents gained skills and confidence in parenting. A nearby university also used one of the parent centers as an observation site for training.

The other project recognized was the Early Childhood Model Program. The Acadia Parish School Board had applied for the student enhancement block grant which was funded through the state 8 (g) program at a cost of 922,353.

According to Mills, this project funded a developmentally appropriate pre-kindergarten class for 20 at-risk students at Lota Elementary School. One student was physically disabled and was qualified for special services.

She said the purpose of this project was to help students gain skills needed for success in kindergarten and to involve parents in the education of their children.

Mills said this included a balance of activities which focused on the children learning through play and through hands-on involvement with materials in learning centers. She also said language development was fostered through peer and adult interaction. The outcome of the program was growth in socio-emotional, cognitive and physical skills needed for success in kindergarten said Mills.

The program impact was that 90 percent of the children increased in socio-emotional, cognitive and physical skills. All 20 students showed gains on the pre/posttest on the Battelle Developmental Inventory. Mills said the average gains in chronological grade placement were 24 months.

According to her report, Mills said the parent involvement was high with 100 percent attendance at the parent orientation and the parent conference day. She also said the Lota Elementary School classroom teacher, Cheryl Frey Turner, was a dedicated professional who shared her expertise at the Annual