

## Laguna Head Start named a center of excellence

By Bob Tenequer Beacon Staff Writer | Posted: Tuesday, November 22, 2011 12:00 am

LAGUNA – The Pueblo of Laguna’s Head Start Program has been named a “Center of Excellence in Early Childhood” by the Office of Head Start in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Dr. Anthony Fairbanks, superintendent of the Laguna Department of Education, said, “This award is a true credit to the community of Laguna.”

Jack Ondelacy, president of the LDoE school board stated, “The award is a reflection of the capabilities and collaborative efforts of the staff in improving the whole childhood development program.”

Ruth Kie, executive director for the early childhood program said, “This recent recognition will provide encouragement for all working with Laguna children and families to continue to work hard and continually work toward the next level of best practice.”

The Head Start program is a part of the Pueblo of Laguna Department of Education’s Division of Early Childhood.

The program is among 10 newly-designated centers of excellence and the first American Indian Alaska Native Head Start program to earn this distinction.

“Out of more than 100 gubernatorial nominations, I want to congratulate these 10 additional Centers of Excellence,” said Yvette Sanchez Fuentes, director for the Office of Head Start. “Their innovations and best practices can help inspire and guide other Head Start programs and the early education community at-large as we continue to raise the level of quality for the children and families we serve.”

In receiving the distinguished award, Fairbanks acknowledged the support of the Tribal Council, Pueblo of Laguna governor, Richard Luarkie, community members, parents, students, teachers, administrators, Head Start Policy Council members and the LDOE Board members

George Sheldon, HHS acting assistant secretary for children and families, said “These programs that have shown a proven track record of going above the beyond to make sure our children reach their highest potential.”

The Laguna Head Start early childhood programs are known for excellence in using the Brazelton Touchpoints approach, which is a practical approach for enhancing the competence of parents and

building strong family-child relationships from before birth through the earliest years, laying a foundation for children's health development.

In doing so, the program utilizes parent-staff interaction/reflection approaches; family support and financial literacy services, and enhancing the K'awaika Keres language and culture experiences for children and families.

Sheldon said, "Head Start has strengthened families and communities by helping more than 28 million low-income children and their families prepare for success in school and in life."

The Centers of Excellence represent the Head Start and Early Head Start program that have long standing and consistent records of implementing exemplary services and demonstrating positive outcomes for children and families.

To be designated, these agencies must have active partners with other early care and education providers; collaborate with schools, child care and other community organizations to deliver comprehensive services in their respective communities. Centers for Excellence serve as models to other programs within their states and regions.