

Proceeding Submission for Hawaii International Conference on Education

Title: Project EPIC: An Innovative Personnel Preparation Project

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Abstract:

It is a well noted national fact that there is a critical shortage of qualified personnel to serve children with disabilities. Over the past years, school districts have reported a real shortage in both quantity and quality of trained special education teachers. In fact many special education classrooms are taught by teachers on emergency certification. These teachers have minimal if any experiences or training in special education. In addition to this shortage of personnel, a critical need to train professionals who are sensitive to

linguistically and culturally diverse students and their families exists across much of the nation. Project EPIC, which is located in a very culturally and linguistically diverse region of United States, is addressing not only the critical shortage of qualified special education teachers, it is also providing training that focuses on cultural and linguistic diversity in our schools.

Project EPIC serves as a model to others as a project that provides pre-service training to already existing resources in our schools and communities. These resources are the paraprofessionals who have years of experience in special education and understand the demands of a special education teacher. In addition, these paraprofessionals are community members and are invested to remain in the community and work. Through appropriate financial and professional supports, these individuals who have a desire to become certified in special education can be assisted to meet this goal. This project has several innovative and unique features used in its operations. These include the types of field-based training, recruitment, tutoring, and advisement used with each of the participants. Through the efforts of a project like this, individuals are being trained and will acquire the appropriate educational skills needed to teach learners with special needs.