

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Educational Research and Development Centers Program

AGENCY: Department of Education.

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of final priority for FY 1997.

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces a final priority under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program. The Secretary takes this action to support research on early reading. The priority is intended to produce research findings that will effect changes in early reading instruction and related practices.

EFFECTIVE DATE: This priority takes effect on April 25, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Anne P. Sweet, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20208-5573. Telephone: (202) 219-2043. Internet: (anne—sweet@ed.gov). Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Office of Educational Research and Improvement, authorized under Title IX of Public Law 103-227 (20 U.S.C. 6001, *et seq.*), supports educational research and development activities. The National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment and the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education are two of five research institutes that carry out coordinated and comprehensive programs of research, development, evaluation, and dissemination designed to provide research-based leadership for the improvement of education.

As National Institutes, the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment and the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education support a range of research, development, and dissemination activities. They support long-term activities focused on core issues in education carried out by national research and development centers, as well as field-initiated studies carried out by individual investigators. The final priority for research on improving children's early reading is for a research and development center to be supported jointly by the Student Achievement and the Early Childhood Institutes.

The Secretary believes that improving reading achievement in this country and increasing the capacity of the nation's education system to provide all members of society with equal opportunities to attain a high level of literacy depend on knowledge generated by an enduring program of education research and development. Knowledge gained from education research and development can help guide the national investment in education and support local and State reform efforts. Because they carry out sustained, long-term research and development, centers are a primary mechanism for pursuing new knowledge about education. Center awards are made to institutions of higher education, institutions of higher education in consort with public agencies or non-profit organizations, and interstate agencies established by compact that operate subsidiary bodies to conduct postsecondary education research and development.

Prior to this announcement and in conjunction with planning for Educational Research and Development Center competitions in fiscal year 1996, OERI engaged in a series of meetings, regional hearings, and **Federal Register** notices that solicited advice from parents, teachers, administrators, policy-makers, business people, researchers, and others to identify the most needed research and development activities. Following these activities and subsequent research priorities planning meetings in which OERI engaged, the Secretary published a notice of proposed priority in the **Federal Register** on December 13, 1996 (61 FR 65932) for a national educational research and development center that would carry out sustained research and development to address problems and issues related to early reading instruction and related practices. Written public comments were to be submitted to the Secretary by January 27, 1997.

The Secretary has reviewed the written public comments and has modified the proposed priority to include research on: teacher professional development in early reading instruction; the use of technology to make reading instruction more effective; and the development of strategies that foster early reading acquisition. The reasoning for this modification is explained in the Appendix to this notice.

Analysis of Comments and Changes

In response to the Secretary's invitation in the notice of proposed priority, nine parties submitted written comments. An analysis of the comments

and changes in the priority since publication of the notice of proposed priority is published as an appendix to this notice of final priority. Major issues are grouped according to subject. Technical and other minor changes and suggested changes the Secretary is not legally authorized to make under the applicable statutory authority are not addressed.

Absolute Priority: Research to Improve Children's Early Reading

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3) the Secretary will give an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priority. The Secretary intends to fund only one application that meets the priority listed below. Funding this priority will depend on the availability of funds and the quality of applications received. The Secretary intends to support a national research and development center on improving children's early reading. As the topic of study, "early reading" refers not only to those reading and related skills learned in kindergarten and the primary grades, but also to children's earliest experiences, including preschool, that affect their language and vocabulary acquisition. This center must:

(a) Conduct a coherent, sustained program of research and development in early reading, using a well-conceptualized and theoretically sound framework;

(b) Contribute to the development and advancement of theory and practice in early reading;

(c) Conduct scientifically rigorous studies capable of generating findings that contribute substantially to understanding in the field;

(d) Conduct work of sufficient size, scope, and duration to produce definitive guidance for instructional improvement;

(e) Address issues of both equity and excellence in early reading education for all children;

(f) Conduct the following research and development activities—

(1) Research on early reading acquisition and strategies that foster this learning, including strategies to be used by families, child care and preschool personnel, and kindergarten and elementary school teachers;

(2) Multidisciplinary research including, as appropriate, neuroscience, cognitive and developmental psychology, and the relevant social sciences, on the relationships among the development of oral language, reading, and writing fluency for all children, including those who are from linguistically and culturally diverse populations;

(3) Research that applies a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodologies to describe and to assess the efficacy of current practices in early reading instruction and to provide a knowledge base to make early reading instruction more effective, including instruction that involves the use of technology;

(4) Research on theory-based diagnostic and assessment tools for early reading;

(5) Research on social, motivational, and affective factors that play a part in early reading acquisition;

(6) Research on the relationships among early reading, writing, and content knowledge acquisition; and

(7) Research on teacher knowledge and professional development in reading to make teachers and teacher education in reading and literacy more effective; and

(g) Document, report, and disseminate information about its research findings and other accomplishments in ways that will facilitate effective use of that information for teachers and other early childhood professionals, families, and community members, as appropriate.

Post-Award Requirements

The Secretary established the following post-award requirements consistent with the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994. A grantee receiving a center award must:

(a) Provide OERI with information about center projects and products and other appropriate research information so that OERI can monitor center progress and maintain its inventory of funded research projects. This information must be provided through media that include an electronic network;

(b) Conduct and evaluate research projects in conformity with the highest professional standards of research practice;

(c) Reserve five percent of each budget period's funds to support activities that fall within the center's priority area, are designed and mutually agreed to by the center and OERI, and enhance OERI's ability to carry out its mission. Those activities may include developing research agendas, conducting research projects collaborating with other federally-supported entities, and engaging in research agenda setting and dissemination activities; and

(d) At the end of the award period, synthesize the findings and advances in knowledge that resulted from the Center's program of work and describe the potential impact on the

improvement of American education, including any observable impact to date.

Note: This notice of final priority does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under this competition is published elsewhere in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (84.305R) Educational Research and Development Centers Program)

Program Authority: P.L. 103-227, Title IX (20 U.S.C. 6031).

Dated: March 20, 1997.

Marshall Smith,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement.

Appendix: Analysis of Comments and Changes

Absolute Priority

Summarized below are comments that referred specifically to the Absolute Priority.

Comments Related to Teacher Professional Development

Comments: Six commenters advocated that knowledge about the learning and development of teachers be integrated into the designated scope of this center. One commenter noted that we possess little information on what knowledge teachers need to teach reading effectively. A different commenter took the position that efforts to improve student learning without corresponding efforts to improve teacher education are handicapped from the start. The same commenter urged OERI to move forward with the plans for an early reading center and observed that such a center has a valuable role to play in our nation's future, given President Clinton's initiatives in programs like "America Reads."

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that teacher professional development in reading is a critical issue. The Secretary also agrees that the work of an early reading center will be important to the President's "America Reads Challenge," and expects that an early reading center will produce results that will be useful to those engaged in this initiative.

Changes: The Secretary has revised the priority and has added paragraph (f)(7) to the early reading priority. The priority now includes a focus on teachers' knowledge and professional development in reading to make teachers and teacher education in reading and literacy more effective.

Comments Related to Technology

Comments: Four commenters argued for the inclusion of technology into the scope of this center. One commenter noted that technology that can support

literacy development and instruction and technology that can be used as a dissemination tool should be studied. A second commenter stated that we need to study not only principles that underlie learning in interaction with computer programs, but also how computers change the fabric of the classroom.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the study of technology in literacy development and its use as a dissemination tool are important. Technology as a dissemination tool is already included under paragraph (g) of the priority.

Changes: The Secretary has revised the priority, under paragraph (f)(3), to include research on the use of technology to make early reading instruction more effective.

Comments Related to Classroom Practices and Instructional Strategies

Comments: Two commenters asserted that research on classroom practices and instructional strategies should be included in the scope of work of this center. One commenter observed that classroom practices and instructional strategies are the most critical aspect of school literacy.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that classroom practices and instructional strategies are crucial aspects of early reading acquisition and believes that classroom practices are already included under paragraphs (f)(2) through (6) in the priority.

Changes: The Secretary has modified the priority under paragraph (f)(1) to include research on strategies that foster early reading acquisition, which would include research on instructional strategies.

Comments Related to Connection of School, Family, and Community to Support Reading Acquisition

Comments: Two commenters recommended that the connection of school, family, and community to support reading acquisition be included. One commenter noted that a convergence of research suggests that our future success in teaching young children lies in developing strong continuous connections between schools, families, and communities and that these partnerships are crucial to what children learn and how they come to see the eventual place of reading in their lives.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that home-school-community connections are pivotal ones in children's education and believes that they are included for study under paragraphs (f)(2), (5), and (6) of the priority.

Changes: None.

Comments Related to the Role of Word Recognition Instruction in Early Reading Programs

Comments: One commenter argued that the role of word recognition instruction in early reading programs should be included. This commenter felt that this issue is schools' largest area of concern, noting that there is very little solid research documenting how to structure a quality school reading program that contains quality literature and instruction in word recognition, including phonics.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the role of word recognition instruction in early reading programs is important and believes that it is included under paragraphs (f)(2) and (3) of the priority.

Changes: None.

Comments Related to Programs for Struggling Readers

Comments: One commenter advocated the inclusion of programs for struggling readers. This commenter argued that most pull-out programs have not been effective in bridging the gap in achievement, hence programs that might work better need to be studied, along with methods of organizing classrooms to accommodate diversity.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that programs for struggling readers (e.g., Reading Recovery, among others) require study and believes that they are included under multiple paragraphs in the priority "most specifically (f)(2), where the social sciences will bear on organizing for instruction, and (f)(3).

Changes: None.

Comments Related to Challenges Facing High-Poverty, Low-Achieving Schools

Comments: One commenter, citing preliminary evidence, which suggests that reading instruction has a larger effect on low-achieving populations in high poverty schools than it does on other students, recommends that research on low-achieving, high-poverty students be included in addition to research on bilingualism and multiculturalism.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the challenges facing high-poverty, low-achieving schools are important and believes that they are included under multiple paragraphs in the priority "most particularly (f)(2-3) and (5-6).

Changes: None.

Comments Related to Second Language Learners

Comments: One commenter recommended that the topic of second language learners be included. This

commenter pointed out that improving early reading in California necessitates the inclusion of the Second Language Learner's primary language, given the state's demographic landscape.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the topic of second language learners is important and believes that it is included under paragraph (f)(2) in the priority.

Changes: None.

Comments Related to Enhanced Learning in Different Subjects/Skills

Comments: One commenter asserted that early math, for example, is much more wanting than early reading and recommended that enhanced learning in many different subjects/skills be included.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that enhanced learning in different subjects/skills is important and believes that it is appropriately included in this center under paragraph (f)(6) in the priority.

Changes: None.

Comments Related to Brain Development

Comments: One commenter asserted that the central study area for early learning should be brain development. This commenter stated that reading is but one function of brain development and should be studied accordingly.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that brain development is important and believes that it is included under paragraph (f)(2) in the priority. The Secretary has also added language to clarify that, as the topic of study, "early reading" may include this work.

Changes: None.

Comments Related to Motivational and Affective Factors

Comments: One commenter observed that (f)(5) (to conduct research in the areas of motivation and affective factors) seemed more narrow and limiting when compared to the other items under (f). This commenter argued that the relative importance of this factor is diminished next to issues that address knowledge about the reading process, about how reading instruction might best occur, about reading teachers' knowledge, practice, and change, and about the global nature and influences (classroom and community) on reading.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the topics subsumed under (f)(1-3) may appear to be quite comprehensive and that (f)(4-6) may be viewed as less so. The Secretary has not assigned weights to the elements under (f)(1-7), and thus expects that applicants will submit applications that reflect their own views

on the relative importance of these elements.

Changes: None.

[FR Doc. 97-7677 Filed 3-21-97; 3:28 pm]

BILLING CODE 4000-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[CFDA Number: 84.305R]

Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)—Education Research and Development Centers Program; Notice Inviting Applications for a New Award for Fiscal Year (FY) 1997

Purpose of Program: To support a national research and development center to carry out sustained research that will lead to improvements in early reading instruction and related practices.

Eligible Applicants: Institutions of higher education, institutions of higher education in consort with public agencies or private nonprofit organizations, and interstate agencies established by compact that operate subsidiary bodies established to conduct postsecondary educational research and development.

Deadline for Transmittal of Applications: May 28, 1997.

Applications Available: March 28, 1997.

Estimated Available Funds: The estimated funding level over the five-year project period for the national research center on early reading is \$2,500,000 each year. Actual funding will depend upon the availability of funds and needs as reflected in the approved application.

Estimated Number of Awards: 1.

Note: The Department is not bound by any estimates in this notice.

Project Period: Up to 60 months.

Applicable Regulations: (a) The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR Parts 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86; and (b) The regulations in 34 CFR Part 700.

Priority: The absolute priority in the notice of final priority and post-award requirements for this program, as published elsewhere in this issue of the **Federal Register** apply to this competition.

Selection Criteria

(a)(1)(A) The Secretary uses the selection criteria in 20 U.S.C. 6031(c)(3)(E)(i)-(vi) and 34 CFR 700.30(e) to evaluate applications for new grants under this program.