

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of final priorities.

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces final priorities for programs administered by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Secretary may use these priorities in Fiscal Year 1997 and subsequent years. The Secretary takes this action to focus Federal assistance on identified needs to improve results for children with disabilities. The final priorities are intended to ensure wide and effective use of program funds.

EFFECTIVE DATE: These priorities take effect on July 10, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information on these final priorities contact the Grants and Contracts Services Team, 600 Independence Avenue, SW., room 3317, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202-2641. The preferred method for requesting information is to FAX your request to: (202) 205-8717. Telephone: (202) 260-9182.

Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205-9860. Individuals with disabilities may obtain a copy of this notice in an alternate format (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) by contacting the Department as listed above.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains five final priorities authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These final priorities support the National Education Goals by helping to improve results for children with disabilities.

On March 24, 1997, the Secretary published a notice of proposed priorities in the **Federal Register** (62 FR 13972).

The publication of these final priorities does not preclude the Secretary from proposing additional priorities, nor does it limit the Secretary to funding only these priorities, subject to meeting applicable rulemaking requirements. Funding of particular projects depends on the availability of funds, and the quality of the applications received.

Note: This notice of final priorities does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under these competitions is published in a separate notice in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

Analysis of Comments and Changes

In response to the Secretary's invitation in the notice of proposed priorities, forty-five parties submitted comments. An analysis of the comments and of the changes in the proposed priorities follows. Technical and other minor changes—as well as suggested changes the Secretary is not legally authorized to make under the applicable statutory authority—are not addressed.

Priority—Center on Implementing Inclusive Education for Children With Disabilities in Urban Districts, Particularly Students With Severe Disabilities, as Part of Systemic Education Reform Efforts

Comment: One commenter recommended that the priority require the center to collect and disseminate information on best practices in special education in areas other than inclusion. The commenter stated that collecting and disseminating information on inclusion practices, as required in the proposed priority, promoted one special education setting over another.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that collecting and disseminating information on best practices in special education is important, and notes that there are several ongoing Departmental initiatives to do just that. The Secretary prefers not to duplicate those ongoing efforts, and believes that there is a compelling need for the timely dissemination of information on inclusion practices to urban districts confronted with increasingly complex issues.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter recommended that the governance of the school district as well as the governance of schools be added to the priority.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees with the commenter that the governance of the school district affects the success of inclusion and systemic education reform initiatives.

Changes: The priority has been revised to add language on the governance of the school district. Under (f)(3), the language of the priority has been revised to include evaluation data at the building and district levels. Also, governance has been added to the language under (f)(7), and the priority now requires the analysis of policies, procedures, governance, and fiscal implications at the urban district level.

Comment: One commenter suggested that the Center should specifically look at how children with disabilities in urban districts are included in the State's accountability system with

special emphasis on how students with severe disabilities are assessed and accountability for student progress is ensured.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the Center's activities could complement other projects on accountability supported by the Department.

Changes: Language has been added to include State assessment and public accountability systems in the (f)(6) requirement for the Center to produce a variety of evaluation data including information about how project activities are integrated in broader school reform efforts.

Comment: One commenter requested clarification on whether or not the 60-month project is one single award for the Nation and if it is considered a pilot project.

Discussion: As stated in the priority, the Department plans to make one award, national in scope, the intent of which is to be a capacity building project to implement what we have learned thus far in urban settings.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter implied that the priority should also include a rural and suburban focus.

Discussion: The Secretary notes that there are many examples of inclusive practices occurring in suburban (e.g., Minnesota, Maryland) and rural (e.g., Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Kansas, Oregon) environments, but the issues around implementing integrated, inclusive practices in urban settings have been far more complex and problematic. Given that forty percent of our Nation's students attend four percent of the country's school districts, the need is compelling to focus on urban districts.

Changes: None.

Comment: Department staff received several comments indicating confusion between the title of the proposed priority and the requirements of the priority. Some individuals thought the Center was required to be located in an urban district, while others questioned whether or not the Center's activities were exclusively focused on students with severe disabilities.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees the title of the proposed priority could be confusing with regard to the location of the Center and the focus on students with severe disabilities. The Center is not required to be physically located in an urban district; however, the focus of the priority is inclusive education for students with disabilities in urban districts. In addition, although the priority includes all students with

disabilities, the primary emphasis is on students with severe disabilities.

Changes: The title has been changed to "Center on Implementing Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Urban Districts, Particularly Students with Severe Disabilities, as Part of Systemic Education Reform Efforts."

Priority—Center to Promote the Access to and Participation by Minority Institutions in Discretionary Programs Authorized Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Comment: One commenter stated that if the Regional Resource Centers are already conducting technical assistance (TA) activities on a national basis, then it may be less essential for the Center funded under this priority to provide TA to eligible institutions.

Discussion: The technical assistance activities of the Regional Resource Centers are much broader in scope and, unlike the activities identified in this priority, are not specifically designed to improve the capacity of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), other minority institutions (OMIs), and other eligible institutions (OEs) to prepare personnel to work with children with disabilities. The TA activities under this priority must be based on the personnel preparation needs of HBCUs, OMIs, and OEs and address those needs in the most effective and cost efficient way. To the extent that other technical assistance providers may be involved in related activities, the Secretary believes that the required coordination between the Center funded under this priority and other providers of technical assistance will enhance, not duplicate, the purposes of this grant.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter stated that this priority should require that plans for technical assistance, dissemination of materials on personnel preparation competitions under IDEA, and related analyses concerning HBCUs, OMIs, and OEs take into account the findings and plan developed under Priority 4—Focus 2, Developing a National Plan for Training Personnel to Teach Children with Blindness and Low Vision.

Discussion: The Minority Center will provide technical assistance (TA) to HBCUs, OMIs, and OEs based on the specific TA needs of each particular entity. If training personnel to teach children with blindness and low-vision is a specific TA need of a minority institution, as determined by the institution's particular needs assessment, then the Minority Center would provide that TA. It would be appropriate for the Minority Center, in

providing TA for the preparation of personnel to teach children with blindness and low vision, to consider the findings under Priority 4—Focus 2. However, given the variety of potential TA needs of those minority entities that will receive assistance from the Center, the Secretary prefers not to specify the particular areas of personnel preparation on which the Center must focus.

Changes: None.

Priority—Technical Assistance to Parent Projects

Comment: Four commenters suggested that the requirement in this priority to provide technical assistance (TA) and dissemination should be expanded to cover certain specific issues, including educational reform, assessment, alternative conflict resolution, and transition issues.

Discussion: The priority requires that direct TA and dissemination activities on relevant content areas (as identified through the needs assessment) be provided to individual parent training and information projects (PTIs) and authorizes the Technical Assistance to Parent Projects (TAPP) to provide TA and dissemination, as appropriate, on the specific topics identified by the commenter. The Secretary agrees, however, that educational reform and alternative conflict resolution are particularly important issues, and has added specific references to these issues within the priority.

Changes: The priority has been amended to identify educational reform and alternative conflict resolution as examples of content areas that may be addressed.

Comment: Twenty-nine (29) commenters wrote in support of including community-based parent resource centers that are not funded under IDEA, but are successfully serving traditionally underrepresented or underserved parents of children in urban and rural settings, as eligible recipients of all TA activities. Commenters suggested that these community-based parent resource programs, in addition to the PTIs currently supported under IDEA, should be able to receive assistance from the TAPP. Some of the commenters recommended that the purpose section of the priority specifically refer to these community-based parent resource centers, while others suggested that these centers be identified in each of the required activities listed in paragraphs (a) through (f) of the priority. In addition, some commenters recommended that regional leadership retreats for parent leaders of the

community-based parent resource centers be a required TA activity.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the community-based parent resource centers that do not currently receive funding under IDEA are providing important support to communities confronted with a host of societal challenges. The Secretary also agrees that including these projects in current TAPP activities has been beneficial to parents in many communities. Accordingly, the Secretary has amended the priority to clarify that non-IDEA parent resource centers are not necessarily precluded from participating in TAPP activities. In particular, the Secretary has revised the priority to enable community-based parent centers that are not funded under IDEA to receive TA in order to better serve underserved and underrepresented populations. However, the Secretary emphasizes that the primary purpose of the priority is to provide TA for establishing, developing, and coordinating parent training and information projects (PTIs) supported under IDEA and encourages community-based centers to compete for IDEA funding. Given the requirement that the TAPP focus on coordination between, and improvement of, IDEA parent projects, it is largely within the TAPP's discretion to determine the extent to which it can address the needs of other centers.

Changes: The proposed priority has been amended to authorize the TAPP to provide TA to parent resource organizations that are not funded under IDEA in order to improve services to underserved and underrepresented populations.

Comment: Seventeen commenters recommended that the TAPP be required to conduct a leadership retreat similar to the cross-regional retreat previously conducted by the current TAPP. Another commenter did not believe it necessary or beneficial for separate leadership retreats to be funded for community-based or experimental parent programs. The commenter believed that it was important for all parent training entities to be trained together and to receive and benefit from the information provided at each event. This commenter also suggested several content areas (e.g., transition, early intervention, and best practices in inclusive settings for various disabilities) that should be addressed at the national and regional conferences.

Discussion: The Secretary believes it is important to allow applicants the opportunity to propose what they believe to be the most effective approach for planning and conducting

the national and regional conferences, and any additional meetings or retreats they deem beneficial. The Secretary expects applicants to propose a management strategy or strategies for conducting the conferences, and to justify implementation of their particular plans.

Changes: None.

Comment: Four commenters expressed support for a regional approach toward delivering TA. One commenter stated that the regional conferences are essential, and that they should be conducted by personnel from each specific region and address issues pertinent to that particular region. Another commenter recommended that TAPP be organized on a regional basis. This commenter stressed that each region has its own unique characteristics, issues and problems that can be addressed most effectively by a regional unit. One commenter suggested that the TAPP include a full-time regional director in each of the four regions.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that a regional approach to providing TA is often beneficial, but believes that other approaches may be equally appropriate and beneficial. The Secretary believes it is the responsibility of the applicant to determine how best to provide TA in order to fulfill the purposes of the priority, and declines to impose more specific limitations on available TA approaches.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter suggested that the TAPP assist the PTIs to technologically link to information produced by specialized centers on transition, inclusion, and assistive technology, and by other centers funded under IDEA. This commenter also stated that the TAPP should help PTIs to link electronically to sources other than National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY), such as Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (ERIC), sources on genetic information, and other information resources that provide data on specific disability areas and identify the best practices for achieving educational success in relation to disability area, age level, and severity of disability.

Discussion: The priority requires the TAPP to electronically link the PTIs to each other, to NICHCY, and to other information sources and also requires the project to implement additional strategies for maximizing the computer and technological capabilities of the PTIs. The Secretary supports each of the suggestions recommended by the commenter and emphasizes that each is

authorized under the priority. The Secretary prefers, however, that applicants be given the opportunity to propose and justify their own approach toward linking PTIs electronically within the limited parameters outlined in the priority.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter recommended that both the National TAPP director and the Regional TAPP directors be parents. The commenter pointed to the growth of the parent movement and the strength of parental leadership to support the position that parents assume these positions.

Discussion: The Secretary cannot direct that the TAPP appoint particular classes of people to director positions. The Secretary agrees, however, that parent leadership development and mentoring should come largely from other parents. This position is supported by the authorizing legislation for the PTI program which provides for extensive involvement of parents of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities in the operation of PTIs.

Changes: None.

Comment: Three commenters noted that evaluation was not specifically identified as a required activity of the TAPP project. The commenters recommended that TAPP be required to evaluate regularly the results of its technical assistance system.

Discussion: The Secretary acknowledges the importance of evaluating the technical assistance system and of seeking feedback from users of the system. The Secretary notes, however, that the commenters' concerns are addressed by the application review process. The selection criteria for this competition require the reviewers to determine the quality of the evaluation plan for the project described in each application, including the extent to which the applicant's methods of evaluation are appropriate for the project, are objective and produce data that are quantifiable. The information on selection criteria is included in the application package each applicant receives rather than in the priority itself.

Changes: None.

Priority—Special Projects—National Initiatives

Focus 1—An Academy: Linking Teacher Education to Advances in Research

Comment: One commenter suggested that the Academy use computer-assisted instruction and select appropriate software as part of its responsibility to enhance educational results for children with disabilities through the use of technology.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the use of computer-assisted instruction and the selection of appropriate software can be effective strategies in improving results for children with disabilities. The Secretary emphasized that the priority does not preclude an applicant from proposing either of these methods. Nevertheless, the Secretary prefers to retain the broad authority in the priority that affords applicants the discretion to propose and justify those technological strategies that they consider appropriate.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter recommended that the Academy address a broader range of research that has demonstrated positive results for children with disabilities (i.e., empirically validated methods). The commenter suggested that applicants could then put together their "best package" of methods to be covered, and supply the data to support that package.

Discussion: While there exists a broader range of research-based designs that identify validated approaches, the Academy must focus its resources on addressing national needs through advances in research. At this time, the Secretary believes that the selected topics are the most critical national needs for which there is sufficient research to inform practice.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter requested clarification as to whether the Academy must address all three focus areas: (a) Teaching reading to children with learning disabilities; (b) using technology to enhance educational results for children with disabilities; and (c) using positive behavioral supports to teach children with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviors.

Discussion: The priority requires the Academy to focus its staff and resources on all three of the identified focus areas.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter requested clarification as to how researchers will benefit from the Academy's activities and asked whether only original researchers can apply for the Academy.

Discussion: The priority states the teacher education programs will benefit by integrating research advances into their respective preservice preparation programs, and that researchers will benefit from learning how the findings of their research impact and may be used to improve personnel preparation programs. Both statements were intended as examples of the potential benefits of bridging the gap between research and practice, and were not

intended to impose any restrictions on the pool of eligible applicants.

Changes: None.

Focus 2—Developing a National Plan for Training Personnel to Serve Blind and Low-Vision Children

Comment: One commenter requested that Focus 2 of the priority use "person-first language" (e.g., "children with blindness") as opposed to "blind children."

Discussion: The Secretary agrees with commenter and has amended the priority accordingly.

Changes: The Secretary has changed all references to "blind and low-vision children" in the proposed priority to "children with blindness and low-vision."

Comment: Two commenters recommended that the needs of students with multiple and severe disabilities (including vision loss) be addressed by the priority. One of the commenters stated that the curricula at the institutions of higher education should support the development of knowledge and skills related to the education of children who are blind and have multiple disabilities, including those with deaf-blindness.

Discussion: The intent of the priority is to understand the systemic nature of the problem of preparing personnel to teach children with blindness and low-vision. The project, based on a systemic and systematic needs assessment, shall design a comprehensive approach that includes strategies for solving the shortage problem of personnel in this area. While curricula at institutions of higher education might address the needs of children who are blind and have multiple disabilities, it would be premature to require that such issues be part of an eventual strategy. The Secretary prefers to retain the broad language of the priority, and allow the project to identify and address critical issues (including, if appropriate, severe and multiple disabilities such as deaf-blindness) and to recommend a solution in the National Plan.

Changes: None.

Comment: Three commenters recommended that the National Plan for training personnel to meet the needs of children with blindness and low-vision include training of both orientation and mobility specialists and teachers of children with deaf-blindness. One commenter noted that students often enter dual certification programs for orientation and mobility instructors and teachers of children with deaf-blindness or other visual impairments. One commenter recommended requiring early childhood, adolescence, and

technology issues, and collaboration techniques as part of the plan developed under Focus 2.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees with the commenters that personnel with a wide range of skills and knowledge are necessary to address the various needs of children with visual impairments. At the same time, however, the Secretary believes that it is particularly important to address the need for teachers.

Changes: The priority has been revised in its title and in the text to refer to personnel to "serve" rather than "teach" or "educate" children with blindness and visual impairments. However, language has also been added to the priority to emphasize the importance of addressing the need for qualified personnel "particularly in the area of teaching".

Comment: Two commenters recommended that the National Plan under Focus 2 be developed as quickly as possible. One commenter suggested that the Department require the project to be completed in 2 years given the immediate need for personnel to teach children with blindness and low-vision. Specifically, the commenter proposed a 5–6 month period to conduct the needs assessment, and one and a half years to develop the National Plan.

Discussion: The Secretary is committed to developing a comprehensive National Plan as quickly as possible, and believes a two-year time frame is adequate. The project period (up to 24 months) is identified in the application notice for this competition.

Changes: None.

Comment: Two commenters made suggestions concerning the funding level needed to develop a National Plan for training personnel to teach children with blindness and low vision. One commenter stated that a total allocation of \$300,000 would be sufficient, while another commenter recommended that funding be sufficient to allow all interested parties (e.g., parents, teachers, universities, consumers, State and local educational agencies, professional organizations, national service agencies, national accreditation agencies) to participate in the development of the plan by traveling to meetings and/or utilizing distance technologies (e.g., video conferencing). The latter commenter stated that if all such parties collaborate during the development of the National Plan, the plan is more likely to be implemented successfully.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that a funding level of \$300,000 for up to two years should be sufficient to develop a national strategy that includes appropriate collaboration of interested parties. This maximum award level is

reflected in the application notice for this competition.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter stated that the project under Focus 2 identify and utilize the most accurate data regarding the numbers of children served in connection with the needs assessment. The commenter noted various discrepancies in counts and stated that the discrepancies exist because the annual count provisions under IDEA require State departments of education to categorize children by a primary disability. The commenter asserted that the project's analysis of the personnel shortage will be faulty without identifying all children with blindness and low-vision and their service needs, and that the analysis must account for the numbers of children underserved or not currently served.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the accuracy of the number of children with blindness and low-vision, types of services needed, and the personnel needed to provide necessary services are important issues that may be considered in determining the extent of the personnel shortage and in developing the National Plan. The commenter has raised a few of the many potential issues that applicants may address in describing their plan for conducting the needs assessment. Nevertheless, the Secretary prefers to retain the broad authority in the priority that affords applicants the discretion to propose and justify the needs assessment plan that they consider most appropriate.

Changes: None.

Comment: Two commenters recommended that the National Plan ensure that programs preparing personnel to teach children with blindness and visual impairments meet nationally-recognized personnel standards. One commenter specifically recommended that: (1) University programs be required to adhere to the "Standards for University Personnel Preparation Programs in Education of Students with Visual Impairments" recently developed by the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER); (2) the curriculum of university teacher preparation programs recognize and address teacher competencies related to the "Core Curriculum for Students With Visual Impairments: Developed in Conjunction with Goal #8 of the National Agenda for Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities"; and (3) the curriculum of each university program address teacher competencies relative to meeting the cultural, racial, and ethnic

diversities of students, and to the extent possible, assure that those diversities are reflected in the personnel preparing to enter the field.

Discussion: The Secretary expects that the National Plan will address standards and curriculum for preparing capable and qualified personnel to educate children with blindness and low-vision. Given the variety of approaches to preparing personnel who are capable and qualified to teach children with varying levels of visual disabilities, the Secretary prefers to afford applicants the discretion to propose, as appropriate, curricula or personnel standards based on the needs of children with blindness and visual impairments.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter identified the age ranges of students with blindness or low-vision as a major cause behind the shortages of personnel to teach children with visual impairments. The commenter stated that approaches and strategies for addressing educational and developmental needs of visually-impaired infants and pre-schoolers are far different from those used to teach high-school age students with visual impairments. Consequently, the commenter recommended that the required needs assessment under Focus 2 reflect the need for personnel to teach students of different ages.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the needs of children with blindness and low-vision vary according to their developmental and academic progress, and has revised the priority accordingly.

Changes: The priority has been revised to clarify the National Plan must address the need for qualified personnel to teach blind and low-vision children across all age ranges.

Comment: One commenter recommended that the needs assessment and the comprehensive approach under Focus 2 specifically address the underrepresentation of minorities among personnel working with children with low-vision and that the project develop strategies to address this problem.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the project should address the participation level of underrepresented populations in the field of teaching children with blindness and low-vision and has revised the priority accordingly.

Changes: The priority has been amended to require that the comprehensive approach for preparing personnel under Focus 2 address the level of participation among underrepresented populations in the applicable field.

Comment: One commenter recommended that Focus 2 of the

priority include more specificity about the source of public input in the development of the needs assessment and in the design of a comprehensive teacher preparation strategy. Specifically, the commenter recommended that the project be required to: (1) Obtain input from State departments of education, visually impaired professionals, university personnel, and other special education personnel; and (2) consider successful models in preparing personnel to teach children with blindness and low-vision.

Discussion: The Secretary expects applicants to obtain input from relevant sources in developing the needs assessment and recommended strategy. The approach recommended by the commenter is a permissible data gathering technique that applicants may consider. The Secretary prefers, however, to allow applicants the opportunity to propose and justify the particular approach for obtaining information that they believe is most useful.

Changes: None.

Priority—Research Institute on Secondary Education Services for Children and Youth With Disabilities

Comment: One commenter recommended adding to the priority requirements to study: (1) The inclusion of students in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and their progress on the various areas of assessment; (2) strategies that are being used to assist students to access the general education curriculum; (3) the extent to which students with disabilities are progressing toward standards established by States and districts; and (4) the rates of graduation with a regular diploma, special diploma, and GED.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the NAEP, State, and district standards, and rates of graduation are important issues for secondary students with disabilities, and notes that the Department is currently funding projects that address those concerns. The Secretary also notes that the priority, as written, does not preclude an applicant from proposing to include those issues in its application for funding. The recommendation to include the study of strategies that assist students with disabilities in accessing the general education curriculum would be included under the requirement for the study of effective strategies for restructuring academic and vocational courses to accommodate students with disabilities. The Secretary concurs that adding language to the priority would clarify that accessing the general

education curriculum is included under the requirement.

Changes: Language has been added to the priority to clarify that the institute requirements include the study of strategies to assist students with disabilities in accessing the general education curriculum.

Comment: One commenter expressed the concern that the priority addresses only macro-type factors such as classroom restructuring and more effective use of counseling services, while ignoring important micro-type factors such as skill acquisition routines or practice strategies for insuring student mastery of critical concepts. The commenter recommended that the priority be revised to require applicants to address questions surrounding effective instructional conditions that result in successful skill acquisition and generalization as well as successful understanding and mastery of critical content.

Discussion: The priority, as written, requires the study of effective support strategies, supplementary aids, and services aimed at improving educational results for secondary students with disabilities. It was intended that the reference in the priority to "support strategies, supplementary aids and services" included instruction. The Secretary concurs that the priority should be clarified to include the study of effective instructional practices that result in successful skill acquisition and generalization as well as successful understanding and mastery of critical content.

Change: The priority has been amended to clarify that the study of effective instructional practices aimed at improving educational results for secondary students with disabilities is included in the requirements.

Comment: One commenter recommended that successful transition to postsecondary settings be the major focus of a separate priority.

Discussion: The priority, as written, requires the research institute to study issues surrounding transition to postsecondary education and employment. The Secretary agrees that successful transition to postsecondary settings is critical for improving results for secondary students with disabilities, and notes that a number of the Department's funded projects address this issue. Also, projects proposing to address this issue in more depth are eligible to submit an application under this priority and are encouraged to apply.

Changes: None.

General Comments

Comment: One commenter recommended that all Department of Education grants should be capped at some reasonable indirect rate, such as 8 percent, regardless of whether the grant category is personnel preparation, model demonstration, outreach, or research.

Discussion: The subject of indirect cost rates is a Department-wide issue, and is addressed in the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR). It is not an issue that can be addressed in individual priority announcements. The Department will consider the indirect cost rate issue in its review of the EDGAR regulations.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter stated that collaboration with other important service providers such as Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities agencies or programs, mental health and health care providers, and University Affiliated Programs, etc. should be required elements in all of the proposed priorities.

Discussion: The Secretary acknowledges that collaboration with other service providers is often an important element in improving results for children with disabilities. As written, the various priorities include language on evaluating, coordinating, and collaborating with other stakeholders, other technical assistance providers, other information sources, other experts and researchers in related subject matter and methodological fields, etc; and none of the priorities preclude an applicant from proposing collaboration with the agencies and programs recommended by the commenter. Given the variety of potential collaboration strategies applicants could propose, the Secretary believes it would be impossible to provide a comprehensive list in any priority. The Secretary prefers to maintain the broad language of the priorities, and allow applicants to propose and justify their particular strategy.

Changes: None.

Priorities

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet one of the following priorities. The Secretary will fund under these competitions only applications that meet one of these absolute priorities:

Absolute Priority 1—Center on Implementing Inclusive Education for Children With Disabilities in Urban Districts, Particularly Students With Severe Disabilities, as Part of Systemic Education Reform Efforts

Background

During the past ten years research and demonstration activities related to inclusive education have expanded dramatically. Increasing numbers of State and local education agencies are involved in school reform and inclusion efforts to ensure that all students, including those with severe disabilities, are provided with equal educational opportunities, meaningful access to the general curriculum, and effective educational and related services in their neighborhood schools.

However, in the midst of multiple social and economic problems, urban districts are confronted with increasingly complex issues that have made the pursuit of inclusion and systemic education reform initiatives difficult. The need is compelling, considering that forty percent of our Nation's students attend four percent of the country's school districts.

Priority: This priority is national in scope and is designed to help bridge the gap between the knowledge base and the state of practice in urban districts by: (a) Incorporating extant theory and research findings about the inclusion of students with disabilities, particularly students with severe disabilities, into systemic educational reform efforts, including efforts to improve education in multicultural environments; (b) increasing the capacity of urban school districts to provide high quality inclusive educational opportunities for students with disabilities, particularly students with severe disabilities; and (c) creating a national network of parents, education professionals (including teacher's organizations and unions), and advocacy groups interested in pursuing inclusion of students with disabilities, particularly students with severe disabilities, as a component of systemic education reform in urban districts in order to facilitate increased exchange of information and collaborative problem solving among these stakeholders.

The Center must—

(a) Prepare a synthesis of the relevant extant systemic reform, systems change, and inclusion theory and research with emphasis on urban schools with diverse populations to serve as the conceptual and empirical basis for center activities;

(b) Translate this knowledge base into educational practices and materials that promote the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education

programs, and can be used by program implementers and policy makers in urban areas at district, building, and classroom levels;

(c) Provide training and technical assistance via direct technical assistance as well distance learning and other innovative methods in the adoption, use, and maintenance of inclusive educational practices involving access to the general education curriculum in urban settings;

(d) Evaluate the effectiveness of the center's activities in promoting inclusive educational practices in multiple urban settings by assessing: (1) The number of school sites where activities are conducted; (2) the number of people trained; (3) the types of follow-up activities that appear most valuable; and (4) the number of children with disabilities who are served in inclusive educational programs;

(e) Evaluate the effect of the Center's activities on results for children with disabilities;

(f) Produce a variety of evaluation data, including: (1) Factors that contribute to the successful adoption, use, and maintenance of inclusive educational efforts in urban districts; (2) descriptions of the instructional contexts and settings, and classroom instructional supports; (3) school governance, organizational, and administrative patterns at the building and district levels; (4) the attitudes and involvement of school administrators, school personnel, union membership, families, students, and other stakeholders; (5) information about student results and the social validity of project activities; (6) information about how project activities are integrated in broader school reform efforts including State assessment and public accountability systems; and (7) analysis of policies, procedures, governance, and fiscal implications at the urban district level;

(g) Develop linkages with U.S. Department of Education technical assistance providers and disseminators to communicate findings and distribute products;

(h) Coordinate activities on an on-going basis with other relevant efforts sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), including the Consortium for Inclusive Schooling Practices, and State-wide Systems Change projects;

(i) Provide training and experience in translating research to practice, materials development, technical assistance, dissemination, and program evaluation for a limited number of graduate students including students

who are from traditionally underrepresented groups;

(j) Conduct topical meetings and other activities on issues and emerging or promising inclusion practices in urban education; and

(k) Collect and ensure timely dissemination of information on inclusion to urban policymakers and program implementers.

Under this priority, the Secretary anticipates making one award for a cooperative agreement with a project period of up to 60 months subject to the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a) for continuation awards. In determining whether to continue the Urban Center for the fourth and fifth years of the project, the Secretary, in addition to considering factors in 34 CFR 75.253(a), will consider—

(a) The recommendation of a review team consisting of three experts selected by the Secretary. The services of the review team, including a two-day site visit to the project are to be performed during the last half of the Center's second year and may be included in that year's evaluation required under 34 CFR 75.590. Costs associated with the services to be performed by the review team must also be included in the Center's budget for year two. These costs are estimated to be approximately \$4,000;

(b) The timeliness and effectiveness with which all requirements of the negotiated cooperative agreement have been or are being met by the Center; and

(c) The degree to which the Center's technical assistance, evaluation, and dissemination activities demonstrate the potential for significantly increasing the capacity of urban schools to serve children with disabilities in inclusive school and community settings.

This award will be jointly funded under two statutory authorities: (1) The Research in Education of Individuals with Disabilities Program; and (2) the Program for Children with Severe Disabilities. The Secretary has determined that this joint award is necessary to address not only the needs of children with severe disabilities in urban settings, but also the broader needs of all children with disabilities in urban settings.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1441 and 1424.

Absolute Priority 2—Center to Promote the Access To and Participation By Minority Institutions in Discretionary Programs Authorized Under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Background

The Congress has found that the Federal Government must be responsive to the growing needs of an increasingly diverse society and that a more equitable distribution of resources is essential for the Federal Government to meet its responsibility to provide an equal educational opportunity for all individuals, including children with disabilities. Specifically, the Congress has concluded that increasing the participation in awards for IDEA grants, cooperative agreements and contracts by Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), other institutions of higher education whose minority enrollment is at least 25 percent (OMIs), and other eligible institutions as defined under section 312 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (OELs) can greatly improve our success in educating children with disabilities from diverse backgrounds.

Priority: This priority is part of the Secretary's plan for increasing participation of minority entities in grant competitions. The purpose of this priority is to improve educational results for children with disabilities from diverse backgrounds by supporting a national center to: (a) Promote the participation of HBCUs, OMIs, and OELs in personnel preparation competitions authorized by IDEA; and (b) increase the capacity of HBCUs, OMIs, and OELs to prepare personnel to work with children with disabilities. The Center must—

(1) Identify the universe of HBCUs, OMIs, and OELs;

(2) Establish and maintain contacts with the minority entities;

(3) Conduct needs assessments and negotiate technical assistance agreements on an annual basis with each HBCU, OMI, or OEL requesting assistance. The Center may propose cross-institutional activities if similar objectives are established in several agencies and if combining activities could create cost savings or extend benefits to minority entities requesting assistance. In developing these activities, the Center must analyze the needs of each entity and determine the most effective and cost efficient means of addressing those needs. In developing each specific technical assistance agreement, the Center must—

(i) Reconcile the needs identified by the entity with the Center's resources and its ability to respond;

(ii) Describe the strategies and mechanisms it will use to respond to the technical assistance and professional development needs;

(iii) Identify the persons involved in the technical assistance activity;

(iv) Specify the beginning and end date of the activity;

(v) Describe how the technical assistance activity will contribute to promoting the immediate and long-term goals of the project, including improved educational results for children with disabilities; and

(vi) Describe a plan for coordinating with other technical assistance providers (e.g., the Regional Resource Centers) that may be involved in related activities;

(4) Analyze the performance of grantees to serve as a basis for providing technical assistance, especially in the areas of recruitment and retention of students in personnel preparation programs, improving the quality of those programs, placement of students after graduation, and other areas that contribute to improved results for children with disabilities;

(5) Develop materials and implement strategies that are necessary to carry out the center's activities.

(6) Prepare and disseminate materials explaining personnel preparation competitions under IDEA to the HBCUs, OMIs, and OELs;

(7) Analyze the results of each competition in terms of the degree to which the HBCUs, OMIs, and OELs applied, and the degree to which they were successful, and submit this analysis to the Department and the HBCUs, OMIs, and OELs served by the project;

(8) Provide advice as requested by the Department on strategies to further the purposes of section 610(j) of IDEA; and,

(9) Disseminate state-of-the-art practices in personnel preparation, recruitment, and retention through linkages with U.S. Department of Education dissemination and technical assistance providers, in particular those technical assistance providers supported under IDEA.

The Secretary anticipates making one award for a grant with project period of up to 60 months subject to the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a) for continuation awards. In determining whether to continue the Center for the fourth and fifth years of the project period, the Secretary, in addition to the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a), will consider—

(a) The timeliness and effectiveness with which all requirements of the negotiated scope of work have been or are being met by the Center; and

(b) The degree to which minority entities applied and were successful in participating in personnel preparation programs under IDEA.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1409(j) and 1431.

Absolute Priority 3—Technical Assistance to Parent Projects

This priority is issued under the Program for Training Personnel for the Education of Individuals with Disabilities—Parent Training and Information Centers. This priority focuses primarily on the provision of technical assistance for establishing, developing, and coordinating parent training and information projects supported under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (hereinafter referred to as PTIs). The project must:

(a) Plan and conduct one national and four regional conferences each year;

(b) Conduct an assessment of the training and information needs of the PTIs;

(c) Provide direct technical assistance and disseminate information through a variety of mechanisms to individual parent training and information projects on management processes or content areas (e.g., special education and related services issues, educational reform, laws and regulations, alternative dispute resolution, networking) as identified through the needs assessment;

(d) Maximize the computer and technological capabilities of the PTIs by: (1) Systematizing data collection to conduct needs assessments (e.g., of who is and is not being served, where and what kinds of problems or successes exist in States, tracking effects of Federal and State initiatives), (2) linking the PTIs together electronically using a web page and bulletin boards that are user-friendly, enable PTIs to access and communicate with each other, and link PTIs directly to the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHY) and other information sources, and (3) implementing other appropriate strategies.

(e) Identify effective strategies for working with parents, families, and schools, and incorporate these strategies into training materials, technical assistance activities, and conferences; and

(f) Provide direct technical assistance to PTIs and other parent centers (including, as appropriate, non-IDEA funded community-based centers) that serve underserved and underrepresented populations.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1431(e).

Absolute Priority 4—Special Projects—National Initiatives

This priority is issued under the Program for Training Personnel for the Education of Individuals with Disabilities. The purpose of this priority is to support projects of national significance related to the preparation of personnel needed to serve infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Projects funded under this priority must address one of the following focus areas:

Focus 1—An Academy: Linking Teacher Education to Advances in Research

The purpose of this project will be to link teacher education programs with recent advances in research that have documented successful methods and strategies for assisting children with disabilities to achieve better results. The teacher education programs will benefit by integrating these research advances into their respective preservice preparation programs for preparing personnel to work with children with disabilities, including special education, early intervention, related services personnel, and regular educators. The researchers will benefit from understanding how the findings of their research impact and improve the personnel preparation programs. A preservice program is defined as one that leads toward a degree, certification, or professional license or standard, and may be supported at the associate, baccalaureate, master's or specialist level.

The Academy must focus its staff and resources on research advancements that improve results for children with disabilities in: (a) Teaching reading to children with learning disabilities; (b) using technology to enhance educational results for children with disabilities; and (c) using positive behavioral supports to teach children with disabilities who exhibit challenging behaviors.

Activities: The Academy must—

(a) Design an approach, consistent with principles of effective professional development, for linking teacher education programs to the recent advances in research listed above. The professional development approach must consider a range of strategies for facilitating the exchange of knowledge between researchers and individuals who prepare personnel to work with children with disabilities. Strategies may include, for example, face to face meetings, electronic networks, seminars, retreats, mentoring agreements, and building local resource banks;

(b) Design a comprehensive approach for reaching out to teacher education

programs across the country in each of the three research areas identified above;

(c) Design innovative tools to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, such as experiential activities, videos, course syllabi, interactive media, etc.; and

(d) Evaluate the progress of linking research advances to teacher education programs.

Focus 2—Developing A National Plan for Training Personnel to Serve Children With Blindness and Low-Vision

In recent years, the number of institutions of higher education that offer teacher training programs for teachers of children with blindness and low-vision has significantly diminished. Today, very few vision training programs for teachers of individuals with visual impairments exist across the country. In some geographic areas, no such program exists. There has also been a concurrent reduction in the number of personnel available to meet the needs of children who are blind or have low-vision. Institutions currently respond to this shortage by offering abbreviated courses, off-campus courses, and distance learning. Both individual institutions and regional organizations are seeking more effective responses to this problem.

These problems are significant. Thus, immediate attention must be devoted to developing a national strategy for addressing the need for qualified personnel to serve children with blindness and low-vision across all age ranges, particularly in the area of teaching.

Activities: The project must—

(a) Conduct a systemic and systematic needs assessment of the personnel shortage identified above; and

(b) Design a comprehensive approach for preparing capable and qualified personnel to serve students with blindness and low-vision across all age ranges, including strategies for solving this shortage problem, consideration and comparisons of the merits of each alternative strategy, and a recommended solution. The comprehensive approach shall also address the level of participation in the profession by underrepresented populations.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C 1431.

Absolute Priority 5—Research Institute on Secondary Education Services for Children and Youth With Disabilities

This priority is issued under the Secondary Education and Transitional Services for Youth with Disabilities Program. This institute supports a strategic program of research to study a variety of strategies to improve

educational results for students with disabilities in secondary education settings (including urban, rural, and suburban community settings), and promote their successful transition to postsecondary settings.

The secondary research institute must design and conduct a strategic program of research to study—

(a) The range of effective support strategies, supplementary aids, and services (e.g., instructional practices, counseling, tutoring, assistive technology) aimed at improving educational results for students with disabilities in a wide range of typical secondary education experiences (e.g., academic, vocational, extracurricular) as well as their retention in school and their engagement in the educational process. This includes the study of strategies to assist students in accessing the general education curriculum;

(b) Effective strategies that secondary school personnel can use to restructure academic and vocational courses to accommodate students with disabilities with diverse learning needs and styles;

(c) The extent to which secondary schools are effectively implementing the transition services requirement of IDEA;

(d) The extent to which secondary academic and vocational curricula promote postsecondary education and employment; and

(e) Standards and models for developing instructional and transition plans for students who are entering or enrolled in secondary school programs.

The program of research must include, but need not be limited to, studying school based exemplars, or designing and implementing interventions using a rich array of research methods to reach the intended goals of this priority as articulated by the proposed research hypotheses. In addition, the research must be designed in a manner that is likely to lead to improved services and results for children and youth with disabilities, including those who are members of cultural, linguistic, or racial minority groups.

The institute must—

(a) Design and conduct a strategic program of research across multiple sites to represent organizational and demographic diversity;

(b) Collect, analyze, and communicate student results data and supporting context data; and multiple results data for teachers, parents, and administrators, as appropriate;

(c) Collaborate with other research institutes supported under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and experts and researchers in related subject matter and

methodological fields, to design and conduct the activities of the institute;

(d) Carry out the research within a conceptual framework, based on previous research or theory, that provides a basis for the issues that will be studied, the research methods and instrumentation that will be used, and the specific target populations and settings that will be studied;

(e) Collaborate with communication specialists and professional and advocacy organizations to ensure that findings are prepared in formats that are useable for specific audiences such as teachers, administrators, and other service providers;

(f) Develop linkages with U.S. Department of Education dissemination and technical assistance providers, in particular those supported under IDEA, to communicate research findings and distribute products;

(g) Provide training and research opportunities for a limited number of graduate students, including students who are from traditionally underrepresented groups;

(h) Coordinate research and dissemination activities with other relevant efforts sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and with the U.S. Department of Labor, including other research institutes, and information clearinghouses; and

(i) Meet with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) project officer in the first four months of the project to review the program of research and communication approaches.

The Institute must budget for two trips annually to Washington, DC. for: (1) A two-day Research Project Directors' meeting; and (2) another meeting to collaborate with the OSEP project officer.

Under this priority, the Secretary anticipates making one award for a cooperative agreement with a project period of up to 60 months subject to the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a) for continuation awards. In determining whether to continue the Institute for the fourth and fifth years of the project period, the Secretary, in addition to the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a), will consider—

(a) The recommendation of a review team consisting of three experts selected by the Secretary. The services of the review team, including a two-day site visit to the project, are to be performed during the last half of the Institute's second year and may be included in that year's evaluation required under 34 CFR 75.590. Costs associated with the services to be performed by the review team must also be included in the

Institute's budget for year two. These costs are estimated to be approximately \$4,000;

(b) The timeliness and effectiveness with which all requirements of the negotiated cooperative agreement have been or are being met by the Institute; and

(c) The degree to which the Institute's research designs, methodologies, and activities demonstrate the potential for advancing significant new knowledge.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1425.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Numbers: Research in Education of Individuals with Disabilities Program, 84.023; Training Personnel for the Education of Individuals with Disabilities Program—Grants for Personnel Training and Parent Training and Information Centers, 84.029; Program for Children with Severe Disabilities, 84.086; and Secondary Education and Transitional Services for Youth with Disabilities Program, 84.158)

Dated: June 4, 1997.

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice inviting applications for new awards for fiscal year 1997.

SUMMARY: This notice provides closing dates and other information regarding the transmittal of applications for fiscal year 1997 competitions under programs authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This notice supports the National Education Goals by helping to improve results for children with disabilities.

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

Priorities: Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3) the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priorities. The Secretary will fund under these competitions only those applications that meet any one of these absolute priorities:

Absolute Priority 1—Center on Implementing Inclusive Education for Children With Disabilities in Urban Districts, Particularly Students With Severe Disabilities, as Part of Systemic Education Reform Efforts (84.086C)

The priority Center on Implementing Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in Urban Districts,