

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RIN 1850-ZA01

21st Century Community Learning Centers Program**AGENCY:** Department of Education.**ACTION:** Notice of final priorities.

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces priorities for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). The Secretary may use these priorities in fiscal year 1998 and subsequent years. The Secretary takes this action to focus Federal assistance on stimulating and expanding significant learning programs available to children and youth beyond regular school hours. The absolute priority is also designed to ensure wide and effective use of program funds to support centers that provide expanded learning opportunities for children and youth in a safe and drug-free environment, and to engage the support of citizens in those efforts. Two competitive priorities concern serving early adolescents and middle school students and services related to core academic subjects.

DATES: These priorities take effect January 2, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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carol_j._mitchell@ed.gov or amanda_clyburn@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. Individuals with disabilities may obtain this document in alternate formats (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) on request to either contact person listed in the preceding paragraph.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The 21st Century Community Learning Centers Act authorizes the Secretary to award grants to rural and inner-city public elementary or secondary schools, or consortia of those schools, to enable them to plan, implement, or expand projects that benefit the educational, health, social service, cultural and recreational needs of a rural or inner-city community.

A Community Learning Center established in a local public school can,

among other things, be a stimulating, safe, supervised and cost-effective after-school, weekend or summer haven for children and youth—and their families. As reported in the recent Department of Education (ED) publication “Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-free Environment Before and After School,” recent research shows that a stimulating environment of this type can improve thinking and language performance of participating children and youth. Research also indicates that these programs reduce crime, delinquency, and victimization of children and youth. However, although the number of after-school child care programs has grown over the last 20 years, there are still far too few communities that offer effective, organized and extended opportunities for learning outside the regular school day. Of the 49,000 before- and after-school programs available in the United States in 1991, only about a third were housed in public schools. And, for in-school and out-of-school care programs, only a tiny percent served older children and youth. In 1995, there were 23.5 million school-age children with parents in the workforce. But as recently as the 1993-94 school year, only 3.4 percent of children in public elementary and combined schools were enrolled in any of the estimated 18,000 before- or after-school programs at public schools. Seventy percent of all public elementary and combined schools did not have before- or after-school programs.

The needs and demands are clear: a 1994 survey of parents found that 56 percent think that many parents leave their children alone too much after school, and a 1989 survey of school principals found that 84 percent agreed that there is a need for before- and after-school programs. But even though the number of after-school programs is growing, the demand is growing faster, as thousands of parents who currently care for their children during the day are encouraged to enter the workforce.

After-school programs are well positioned to reduce the incidence of drug use and violence and their detrimental effects on learning. Research by the Federal Bureau of Investigation indicates that the hours between 3 and 6 p.m. are when youth aged 12 to 17 are most at risk of committing or of being victims of violent acts. After-school programs located at Community Learning Centers will give youth a safe and supervised place to go during these hours.

The absolute priority supports centers that have a goal of providing learning opportunities for students in a safe and

drug-free environment. For example, before- and after-school programs can be a place in which tutors provide reading help to younger children or in which mentors guide older children to take challenging mathematics and science courses that pave the way to college, and help them succeed in those courses. However, programs applying for assistance are required to carry out at least four of the activities listed in section 10905 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. 8245), and should propose an array of inclusive and supervised services that include extended learning opportunities (such as enriched instruction, tutoring or homework help) but may also include safety and drug-abuse prevention programs, recreational, musical and artistic activities; and opportunities to use advanced technology, particularly for those children who do not have access to computers or telecommunications at home. Although the absolute priority requires that children and youth be served, applicants may propose projects that also serve and involve other members of the community.

The competitive priorities authorize ED to give a preference to applicants that propose to serve the academic needs of participating children and youth. These can include services that will assist students who need additional support to master reading and literacy skills, both by directly providing reading services as well as tutoring and mentoring programs in supervised locations. For younger children who are not reading as well as they should, Community Learning Centers can provide extended time in which to overcome the obstacles that have in the past prevented them from becoming good readers. The competitive priorities will also encourage schools to develop strategies to address the needs of students who can benefit from additional enrichment or challenge in mathematics or science, or who are not performing as well as they should. Community learning centers can provide extended hours for students to learn and review basic concepts they may have missed during class, to delve deeper into a more challenging curriculum, or to participate in enjoyable hands-on activities and experiments.

Funding of particular projects depends on the availability of funds, the priorities, the quality of the applications received, and the requirements in the law for equitable representation nationally and within States of rural and inner-city programs. The first cycle of awards will be made from fiscal year

1998 funds. If applications of high quality remain unfunded, additional awards may be made in fiscal year 1999 or future fiscal years, pending availability of funds. The publication of these 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.

On September 30, 1997, the Assistant Secretary published a notice of proposed priorities (NPP) for this program in the **Federal Register** (62 FR 51089–51091). There are no differences between the NPP and this notice of final priorities.

Analysis of Comments

In response to the Assistant Secretary's invitation to comment on the proposed priorities, eighteen parties representing concerned individuals and members of organizations submitted comments. An analysis of the comments follows. Major issues are grouped according to subject or proposed priority. Minor editorial changes—and comments recommending changes the Secretary is not legally authorized to make under the applicable statutory authority—are not addressed.

Population to be Served

Comments: One commenter believed that only "at-risk" students were to be served by this program and suggested that ED explain more clearly that all children are eligible to participate. However, another commenter believed two new priorities were needed to ensure that the needs are met for (1) students from low-income families and (2) students considered "at-risk."

Discussion: The 21st Century Community Learning Centers Act authorizes the Secretary to make grants to rural and inner-city public elementary and secondary schools, or consortia of those schools. The term "at-risk" is not mentioned in the legislation or in the proposed priorities, but it is implied, by limiting eligibility to "rural" or "inner-city" communities, that the program will provide services to high-needs neighborhoods. The legislation is also clear that Centers must be open to all the members of the community. The Secretary does not believe that additional priorities need to be established to assist students in either of these categories.

Changes: None.

Eligible Applicants and Collaboration

Comments: One commenter believed that only public schools and public school systems were eligible to carry out

programs under this legislation and desired more emphasis on non-traditional service providers who are not part of the public school system. Another commenter believed that existing community-based organizations that have played a leading role in providing after-school programs should be made eligible for grants under this program. Another commenter felt that priority should be given to projects with a set category of community partners and a built-in governance system that allows for family and community decision making and involvement in partnership with the schools. Several other commenters recommended specific language either requiring or giving priority to community collaboration projects.

Discussion: While the authorizing legislation specifically states that only rural or inner-city public elementary and secondary schools, or consortia of those schools, are eligible to receive a grant under this program, it also states that these entities "should collaborate with other public and nonprofit agencies and organizations, local businesses, educational entities (such as vocational and adult education programs, community colleges, and universities), recreational, cultural, and other community and human service entities, for the purpose of meeting the needs of, and expanding the opportunities available to, the residents of the communities served by such schools." By statute, applications must include "a description of the collaborative efforts to be undertaken by community-based organizations, related public agencies, businesses, or other appropriate organizations." The notice of proposed priorities stated that "although the proposed absolute priority requires that children and youth be served, applicants may propose projects that also serve and involve other members of the community." For instance, community-based organizations can, under this statute, provide youth development services within the public schools.

Changes: None.

Proposed Competitive Priority 1: Serving Early Adolescents and Middle-School Students

Comments: One commenter thought this priority's focus would come too late for at-risk children between the ages of 7 and 11 and fail to block their downward spiral. Another thought that lowering the priority age-range to at least fourth grade was necessary for insuring continuity between elementary and middle-school. A third commenter felt lowering the range to pre-

kindergarten to grade 3 would be more preferable.

Discussion: The authorizing statute provides that 21st Century Community Learning Centers must be open to all children in inner-city and rural neighborhoods where Centers have been established. While the program may serve all children, statistics show that children between the ages of 12–17 are at-risk of committing or being victims of violent acts between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., and that available after-school programs tend to serve younger rather than older children. Therefore, the Secretary has given a competitive priority to serving the early adolescent population.

Changes: None.

Proposed Competitive Priority 2: Assisting in Meeting or Exceeding State and Local Standards in Core Academic Subjects Such as Reading, Mathematics or Science

Comments: Two commenters thought this priority too narrow in its focus on cognitive competencies and should be broadened to include social, physical, emotional and moral competencies as well.

Discussion: The Secretary recognizes the importance of well-rounded programs for after-school enrichment. The authorizing legislation requires programs to offer a range of services to benefit members of the community; these services can include social, physical, nutritional and other activities. Because the statute does not specifically require activities that focus on academic subjects, the Secretary believes a competitive priority is necessary to encourage applications for after-school programs that will offer enhanced learning opportunities, help children reach or exceed State and local academic standards, and provide some continuity between the school day and after-school activities.

Changes: None.

Duration of Services

One commenter encouraged ED to give priority to applications that propose year-round programming.

Discussion: The Secretary believes the quantity and scheduling of extended time proposed by an applicant are matters for local decision.

Changes: None.

Measurable Goals

Comments: One commenter believed that an application's proposed measurable goals and objectives be made a priority for funding. However, another commenter urged ED not to hold programs to an expectation of

showing measurable change. The latter commenter noted that "effecting such change requires complex, comprehensive, intense and long term interventions."

Discussion: Two of the selection criteria that will be used by reviewers to rate applications will address the issue of program impact. These are (under *Quality of Project Services*) the "likely impact of the services to be provided by the proposed project on the intended recipients of those services," and (under *Quality of Project Evaluation*) the "extent to which the methods of evaluation provide for examining the effectiveness of project implementation strategies." In addition to locally designed evaluations of program effects, the Government Performance and Results Act requires ED to develop performance indicators for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program at the national level.

Changes: None.

PRIORITIES

Absolute Priority: Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet the absolute priority in the next paragraph. The Secretary funds under this competition only applications that meet this absolute priority.

Activities to Expand Learning Opportunities

The Secretary funds *only* those applications for 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants that include, among the array of services required and authorized by the statute, activities that offer significant expanded learning opportunities for children and youth in the community and that contribute to reduced drug use and violence.

Competitive Priorities: Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(2)(i), the Secretary gives preference to applications that meet one or both of the two competitive priorities in the next two paragraphs. The Secretary awards up to five (5) points for each competitive priority addressed in an application (for a maximum of 10 points if an application addresses both competitive priorities). These points are in addition to the 100 points an application may earn under the selection criteria which will be published in the application package.

Competitive Priority 1—Projects that propose to serve early adolescents and middle-school students.

Competitive Priority 2—Projects designed to assist students to meet or exceed State and local standards in core academic subjects such as reading, mathematics or science, as appropriate

to the needs of the participating children.

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

Executive Order 12866: This notice of final priorities has been reviewed in accordance with Executive Order 12866. Under the terms of the order the Secretary has assessed the potential costs and benefits of this regulatory action.

The potential costs associated with the notice of final priorities are those resulting from statutory requirements and those determined by the Secretary as necessary for administering this program effectively and efficiently.

In assessing the potential costs and benefits—both quantitative and qualitative—of this notice of final priorities, the Secretary has determined that the benefits of the priorities justify the costs.

To assist the Department in complying with the specific requirements of Executive Order 12866, the Secretary invites comment on whether there may be further opportunities to reduce any potential costs or increase potential benefits resulting from these final priorities without impeding the effective and efficient administration of the program.

Summary of potential costs and benefits: There are no identified costs associated with this notice of final priorities. Announcement of these priorities will not result in costs to State and local governments or to recipients of grant funds.

Intergovernmental Review: This program is subject to the requirements of Executive Order 12372 and the regulations in 34 CFR Part 79. The objective of the Executive order is to foster an intergovernmental partnership and a strengthened federalism by relying on processes developed by State and local governments for coordination and review of proposed Federal financial assistance.

In accordance with the order, this document is intended to provide early notification of the Department's specific plans and actions for this program. Individuals with disabilities may obtain this document in an alternate format (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) on request to the contact person listed in the preceding paragraph.

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Note: The official version of a document is the document published in the **Federal Register**.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 8241-8247.

Dated: November 25, 1997.

Ricky T. Takai,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.287, 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program)

[FR Doc. 97-31567 Filed 12-1-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4000-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[CFDA No. 84.287]

21st Century Community Learning Centers; Notice inviting applications for new awards for fiscal year 1998

Purpose of Program: The 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program was established by Congress to award grants to rural and inner-city public schools, or consortia of such schools, to enable them to plan, implement, or expand projects that benefit the educational, health, social services, cultural and recreational needs of the community. School-based community learning centers can provide a safe, drug-free, supervised and cost-effective after-school, weekend or summer haven for children, youth and their families.

Eligible Applicants: Only rural or inner-city public elementary or secondary schools, consortia of those schools, or LEAs applying on their behalf, are eligible to receive a grant under the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program. An LEA with many interested schools is encouraged to submit a consortium application on their behalf. Applicants must