DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; Notice of Final Priorities

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces final priorities for two programs administered by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended. The Secretary may use these priorities to support grants in Fiscal Year 1998 and subsequent years. The Secretary takes this action to focus Federal assistance on identified needs to improve results for children with disabilities. These final priorities are intended to ensure wide and effective use of program funds.

EFFECTIVE DATE: These priorities take effect on June 3, 1998.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The Department address and telephone number to contact for information on each final priority is listed under the appropriate priority.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains three final priorities under two Special Education programs authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities (two proposed priorities); and Research and Innovation to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities (one proposed priority).

On February 19, 1998, the Secretary published a notice of proposed priorities for these programs in the **Federal Register** (63 FR 8530).

These final priorities support the National Education Goals by improving understanding of how to enable children and youth with disabilities to reach higher levels of academic achievement.

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. 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, six 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 1—Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Comment: One commenter recommended that the priority use the exact, broad, language of IDEA, i.e. ''strategies, including positive behavioral interventions and supports'', rather than the term ''positive behavioral support'', which the commenter believed would narrow the scope of interventions, strategies and supports that can be studied by the Center.

Discussion: It is the Secretary's intent to support a broad view of possible interventions. The language in the priority has been changed to be consistent with this intent.

Changes: The priority has been revised to refer to positive behavioral interventions and supports throughout.

Comment: One commenter suggested that the State policies, which the Center must evaluate, should include policies that support family involvement in the provision of services.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees with the commenter that family participation in the development and implementation of behavioral supports is important. The proposed priority would not have precluded projects from addressing this issue. Paragraph (a) purposely does not delineate the specific areas of State and local policy on school-wide positive behavioral supports and interventions that the Center must address. Applicants have the discretion to identify and evaluate the critical areas.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter suggested that the coordinated network under paragraph (b) be broadened to include, ''related services and other mental health professionals'', to ensure that the priority did not exclude contributions made to the mental health of children by school psychologists, school social workers, and other related services personnel.

Discussion: The term mental health professional as used in the proposed priority was not intended to exclude related services personnel who provide mental health services. The Secretary agrees that referring to ''related services professionals'' as part of the coordinated network would add further clarity.

Changes: The proposed priority has been revised to include related services professionals under paragraph (b).

Comment: One commenter suggested that the list of agencies with which the Center may conduct outreach activities under paragraph (b) include Child Mental Health Services and Maternal and Child Health at the Department of Health and Human Services since both programs fund demonstration projects and sponsor school health clinics.

Discussion: The priority lists some of the relevant agencies and federally supported technical assistance and information agencies and projects with which the Center may conduct outreach activities. While the list is not meant to be exhaustive, and applicants may identify additional collaborative agencies, the Secretary agrees that the two agencies identified by the commenter should be included among those listed in the priority.

Changes: The proposed priority has been revised to include OHS'' Child Mental Health Services, and Maternal and Child Health.

Comment: One commenter recommended that information exchanges under paragraph (c) involve an array or menu of methods for reporting positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports.

Discussion: It is the Secretary's intent to provide for a range of methods for exchanging information. While the proposed priority did not preclude such a range, the Secretary agrees that an array of methods should be required.

Changes: Paragraph (c) of the proposed priority has been revised to require that informational exchanges include an array of methods for sharing information.

Comment: One commenter recommended that the information dissemination efforts described in paragraph (e) include steps toward implementation, methods to sustain efforts, and mechanisms for ensuring increased replication and effective dissemination.

Discussion: The priority is intended to promote awareness of the value of school-wide positive behavioral supports and interventions and to build the necessary knowledge base, momentum, and resource network to encourage their widespread application. To the extent the Center acquires information regarding replication of supports and interventions, it may share that information with the field. However, requiring the Center to develop guidelines for replication are beyond the work scope of the priority. Implementation, on the other hand, will be conducted by the coordinated network under paragraph (b).

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter suggested that the blueprint described in paragraph (f) include underlying components necessary to institute an effective program.

Discussion: Paragraph (f) is intended to support the development of a blueprint that the Secretary may use to provide future technical assistance to LEAs and SEAs in implementing positive behavioral interventions and support programs. The components of the blueprint are left to the discretion and expertise of the Center.

Changes: The priority has been modified to clarify that the blueprint developed under paragraph (f) shall be submitted to the Secretary for purposes of providing future technical assistance on positive behavioral interventions and supports.

Comment: One commenter suggested that the focus of the results-based evaluation under paragraph (h) be clarified.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the proposed priority did not sufficiently identify the focus of the results-based evaluation and has clarified the language.

Changes: Paragraph (h) has been revised to clarify that the results-based evaluation must be supported by evaluation data gathered from the project of the technical assistance provided under paragraphs (b), (c), (d), and (e) of the proposed priority.

Priority 2—National Center on Dispute Resolution

Comment: One commenter suggested that the priority include additional clarification regarding expectations associated with specific tasks, especially those with fiscal implications.

Discussion: The Secretary prefers to afford applicants the discretion to determine how best to accomplish the activities specified in the priority, including how (or if) to budget for certain tasks. Moreover, the Secretary believes it would be inappropriate to specify additional estimated costs in the priority.

Change: None.

Priority—Directed Research Projects

Focus 1—Beacons of Excellence

Comment: One commenter suggested that Focus 1—Beacons of Excellence under the proposed Directed Research Projects priority be changed to make explicit that the prime criterion for a beacon school is student performance measured in a valid and reliable manner.

Discussion: The priority as proposed required that projects ''identify and study schools or programs achieving exemplary results for students with disabilities.'' The commenter's suggested change may strengthen the emphasis on student results that are measured in a rigorous manner.

Changes: The priority has been changed to require that schools or programs be identified on the basis of valid and reliable measures of student results.

Focus 2—The Sustainability of Promising Innovations

Comment: One commenter suggested that Focus 2 be broadened to include research documenting the effectiveness of applying assistive technology to help students benefit from their educational experience.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees with the commenter that research documenting the extent to which assistive technology benefits students with disabilities is important, however, Focus 2 is primarily interested in issues of sustainability of innovations that hold positive results for children with disabilities within a school restructuring/reform context. OSEP supports research related to assistive technology under the Special Education—Technology and Media Services for Individuals with Disabilities program. The closing date for applications under that program for the fiscal year 1998 competition for the Steppingstones of Technology Innovations for Students with Disabilities priority, is May 8, 1998.

Changes: None.

Focus 6—Synthesize and Communicate a Professional Knowledge Base: Contributions to Research and Practice

Comment: One commenter suggested that the syntheses areas included in paragraphs (a)-(f) be rewritten to address the ''Method and effects of interventions on * * *'', so that the syntheses projects will not only identify and synthesize positive outcomes, but will also identify and synthesize those ''things'' which lead to positive outcomes. The commenter further suggested that the project assess what the field currently knows regarding self-determination and develop an agenda of future research questions.

Discussion: The Secretary believes that the concerns of the commenter are taken into account when rigorous research methods are applied in the design and execution of the meta-analysis for the synthesis project. With regard to the commenter's suggestion that the project assess what the field currently knows regarding self-determination and develop an agenda of future research questions, the Secretary emphasizes that it is the purpose of the synthesis project to assess what is known from research and report the findings. However, it is not the intent of this priority to develop an agenda of future research questions.

Change: None.

Focus 8—Educating Children with Disabilities in Inclusive Settings

Comment: One commenter suggested that assistive technology be listed as a systems change strategy worthy of investigation under Focus 8.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees with the commenter that assistive technology is a strategy worthy of investigation under this priority. As Focus 8 is written, there is nothing that precludes an applicant from using assistive technology as a strategy to promote access and inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms.

Change: None.

Special Education—Technical Assistance and Dissemination To Improve Services and Results For Children With Disabilities

Purpose of Program

The purpose of this program is to provide technical assistance and information through such mechanisms as institutes, regional resource centers, clearinghouses, and programs that support States and local entities in building capacity, to improve early intervention, educational, and transitional services and results for children with disabilities and their families, and to address systemic-change goals and priorities.

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 for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Background

Problem behaviors are one of the most common reasons children with disabilities are excluded from school, community, and work. Research on positive behavioral interventions and supports is rapidly developing and demonstrates how school-wide approaches to these interventions and supports can enable students with disabilities who exhibit problem behaviors to achieve independence and become participants and contributing

members in school, community, and work.

Despite this growing body of knowledge, however, awareness of the value of these approaches and their use in the educational environment remains limited. There is clearly a need to develop a greater awareness on the part of educators and others of the important contribution that positive behavioral interventions and supports can make in achieving successful results for children with disabilities who exhibit challenging problem behaviors and for improving the overall climate of schools.

Part B of IDEA includes provisions intended to guide and assist schools in cases in which the behavior of a child with a disability impedes learning. For example, the Act specifies that teams developing individualized education programs (IEPs) consider, when appropriate, positive behavioral interventions and supports and other strategies to address behavior problems. The following priority is intended to assist schools in designing and implementing effective school-wide positive behavioral intervention and support programs by creating a greater awareness of these research-based approaches, including identifying effective State and local policies which support the approaches, and by building the necessary knowledge base, momentum, and resource network to encourage their widespread application.

Priority

The Secretary establishes an absolute priority for the purpose of supporting a Center for Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports that builds awareness and motivation for schools to design and implement school-wide support for children with disabilities who exhibit challenging problem behaviors. The Center must, at a minimum:

(a) Evaluate the state of policy and practice regarding school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports, including relevant State and local policies and guidelines, and financing and cross-agency coordination strategies for supporting behavioral intervention and support services. Develop and apply criteria for identifying exemplary programs of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports. Identify and publicize schools implementing such programs.

(b) Establish a coordinated network of researchers, educators, parents, related services, and mental health professionals, and policy makers who will serve as resources to schools and each other in designing and implementing school-wide positive behavioral intervention and support programs. Conduct outreach activities with relevant federally supported technical assistance and information activities and projects (e.g., the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research programs, the Federal Resource Center, Regional Resource Centers, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools program, the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Department of Health and Human Services' Child Mental Health Services and Maternal and Child Health programs), State and local organizations, and other relevant organizations and projects to promote public awareness of positive behavioral intervention and support practices and the availability of information, supports, and services.

(c) Provide for information exchanges between researchers and practitioners who direct exemplary behavioral intervention and support programs and educators who seek to design and implement effective school-wide programs. Information must be exchanged through an array of methods, including, but not limited to, two regional forums during each of the first four years of the project, and a national forum in the fifth year. The forums must be designed to expand the coordinated network, develop awareness of research-based practices, and create a dialogue about school-wide positive behavioral intervention and support programs. The forums must include examples and descriptions of exemplary school-wide programs and effective State and local policies, and may include other appropriate activities such as visits to exemplary sites.

(d) Provide information to the national information center for children with disabilities. Collaborate with the national information center for children with disabilities on the development and dissemination of materials on positive behavioral interventions and supports. Establish linkages with the national information center for children with disabilities to ensure timely and accurate dissemination of information to customers.

(e) Organize, synthesize, and report information to teachers, administrators, parents, and other interested parties regarding research, policy, and practice advances on positive behavioral interventions and supports. Develop and disseminate products that are easy to use and accessible (e.g., print and electronic formats). Respond to written and telephone inquiries with research-based information.

(f) Develop, and submit to the Secretary, a blueprint for providing further technical assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and State educational agencies (SEAs), which includes alternative designs of effective school-wide positive behavioral intervention and support programs and alternative approaches to delivering technical assistance in their implementation. Identify barriers to assisting school districts across the country in developing and implementing school-wide positive behavioral interventions and support programs and develop strategies for overcoming these barriers.

(g) Budget for two trips annually to Washington, D.C., for: (1) A two-day Research to Practice Division Project Directors' meeting; and (2) a meeting to collaborate with the Research to Practice Division project officer and the other related projects, and to share information and discuss findings and methods of dissemination.

(h) Conduct, every two years, a results-based evaluation supported by evaluation data gathered from the project of the technical assistance provided under activities (b), (c), (d), and (e). Such an evaluation must be conducted by a review team consisting of three experts approved by the Secretary, and must measure elements such as—

(1) The type of technical assistance provided and the perception of its quality by the target audience;

(2) The changes that occurred as a result of the technical assistance provided; and

(3) The review team will examine the progress that the Center has made with respect to the objectives in its application.

The services of the review team, including a two-day site visit to the Center is to be performed during the last half of the Center's second and fourth years 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 years two and four. These costs are estimated to be approximately $4,000 for each evaluation cycle.

Under this priority, the Secretary will make one award for cooperative agreements 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 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 cooperative agreement have been or are being met by the Center; and

(b) The degree to which the Center's design and methodology demonstrates the potential for advancing significant new knowledge.

Absolute Priority 2—National Center on Dispute Resolution

Background

Disputes within the education community affect systemic change and results for children with disabilities. An alternative dispute resolution process such as mediation is less costly to schools and families, can help to minimize adverse effects on a child's progress in school, and is more apt to foster positive relationships between families and educators than would litigation. Technical assistance that focuses primarily on alternative dispute resolution procedures would assist State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and families to resolve their differences in a less adversarial and more responsive manner than through standard due process hearing procedures, while enabling State and local entities to achieve systemic change and promoting improved early intervention, educational, and transitional results for children with disabilities. This priority would support a national center to provide technical assistance to SEAs, LEAs, and families on resolving their differences. The center would provide technical assistance on mediation and other effective dispute resolution procedures that do not impede parental rights under IDEA or otherwise conflict with the statute. As such, the center would provide technical assistance as needed in order to facilitate the effective use of due process procedures. The chief aim of the center, however, would be to provide needed technical assistance to enable parties to effectively resolve their disputes through more expedient and less confrontational means, including mediation.

Priority

The Secretary establishes an absolute priority to support a national technical assistance center on dispute resolution procedures, including mediation. The center must—

(a) Provide technical assistance on dispute resolution procedures (with an emphasis on procedures other than due process hearings) to all States, outlying areas, and the freely associated States (to the extent such States participate in Parts B or C of IDEA), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. At a minimum, the center must—

(1) Conduct annual needs assessments;

(2) Develop technical assistance agreements with each entity; and

(3) Provide technical assistance, training, and on-going consultation based on the technical assistance agreements (including technical assistance, training, and on-going consultation at the local level, as appropriate).

(b) Coordinate with the existing technical assistance to parent project to provide technical assistance to all parent training and information centers and community parent resource centers on dispute resolution procedures;

(c) Develop informational exchanges about dispute resolution procedures between the center and other technical assistance and information dissemination systems;

(d) Establish an advisory group of persons with complementary expertise on dispute resolution procedures to advise the center on its technical assistance activities;

(e) Collect information on the use and effectiveness of mediation and other dispute resolution procedures. The effectiveness of any such procedure would be based on the degree to which all parties feel satisfied with the result and agree that an efficient and expeditious process has been followed;

(f) Identify, and disseminate information on, best practices in dispute resolution;

(g) Maintain an information data base that includes: (1) State practices on dispute resolution, including information on mediator training and the implementation of the mediation requirements in Parts B and C of IDEA; and (2) research, literature, and products about dispute resolution procedures.

(h) Examine the effectiveness of State efforts regarding mediation and other dispute resolution proceedings. Analyze information on the number of due process hearings, mediation sessions, and other dispute resolution proceedings conducted and on the outcome of each such hearing, session, or proceeding;

(i) Collaborate with the national information center on children with disabilities regarding the dissemination of information to respond to information needs. Establish linkages with the national information center on children with disabilities to ensure timely and accurate dissemination of information to customers;

(j) Serve as a clearinghouse for information on dispute resolution procedures;

(k) Conduct an annual forum each year of the project that identifies the unique features of dispute resolution procedures, the strengths of the procedures, and the potential for adopting the procedures. At least one forum must address the specific needs of underrepresented and underserved populations; another must address dispute resolution procedures (including mediator training issues) in the context of general education reform;

(l) Evaluate the impact of the center's technical assistance system and its components relative to the—

(1) Assessed needs of States and jurisdictions;

(2) Needs of parents; and

(3) Linkages with other technical assistance and information dissemination systems; and

(m) Budget for two trips annually to Washington, D.C., for: (1) a two-day Research to Practice Division Project Directors' meeting; and (2) a meeting to collaborate with the Research to Practice Division project officer and the other related projects to share information, and to discuss findings and methods of dissemination.

(n) Conduct, every two years, a results-based evaluation of the technical assistance provided. Such an evaluation must be conducted by a review team consisting of three experts approved by the Secretary and must measure elements such as—

(1) The type of technical assistance provided and the perception of its quality by the target audience; and

(2) The changes that occurred as a result of the technical assistance provided; and

(3) The progress that the center has made with respect to the objectives in its application.

The services of the review team, including a two-day site visit to the center, 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.

Under this priority, the Secretary will make 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 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 cooperative agreement have been or are being met by the center.

(b) The degree to which the center's design and methodology demonstrates the potential for advancing significant new knowledge.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information on the priorities under the Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities Program contact the U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, SW., room 3527, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202–2641. Telephone: (202) 205–8038. FAX: (202) 205–8105. Internet: Debra__Sturdivant@ed.gov

Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205–8953.

Program Authority: Section 685 of IDEA.

Special Education—Research and Innovation To Improve Services and Results For Children With Disabilities

Purpose of Program

To produce, and advance the use of, knowledge to: (1) Improve services provided under IDEA, including the practices of professionals and others involved in providing those services to children with disabilities; and (2) improve educational and early intervention results for infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities.

Priority

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priority. The Secretary will fund under this competition only applications that meet this absolute priority.

Absolute Priority—Directed Research Projects

This priority provides support for projects that advance and improve the knowledge base and improve the practice of professionals, parents, and others providing early intervention, special education, and related services, including professionals who work with children with disabilities in regular education environments and natural environments, to provide those children effective instruction and interventions that enable them to learn and develop successfully. Under this priority, projects must support innovation, development, exchange of information, and use of advancements in knowledge and practice designed to contribute to the improvement of early intervention, instruction, and learning of infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities.

A research project must address one of the following focus areas, and the Secretary intends to award at least one project in each focus area:

Focus 1—Beacons of Excellence

Research projects supported under Focus 1 must identify and study schools or programs achieving exemplary results for students with disabilities in the context of efforts to achieve exemplary results for all students. Projects must develop and apply procedures and criteria to identify these schools or programs on the basis of valid and reliable measures of student results. Projects must also identify factors contributing to exemplary learning or developmental results, and examine how those factors and other factors relate to achieving exemplary learning or developmental results for children with disabilities. Projects may focus on early intervention, preschool, elementary, or secondary levels, or a combination of levels. Following the second year of the project, the Secretary may fund an optional six-month period for additional dissemination activities.

Focus 2—The Sustainability of Promising Innovations

A growing body of practice-based research and model demonstration work in schools, local districts, and early intervention programs, including projects supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), has focused on meeting the needs of, and improving results for, children with disabilities in schools, districts, or early intervention programs involved in reform and restructuring initiatives. Some of this work is yielding promising positive results for children with disabilities. However, little is known about the extent to which the innovations developed and implemented in these efforts are sustained in project sites beyond the term of time-limited external support and assistance.

Focus 2 supports projects to study the implementation of practices that have been found to be effective in meeting the needs of children with disabilities by reform and restructuring initiatives in local and district schools, or early intervention programs. The study must address: (a) The extent to which practices that have been shown to be effective have been sustained beyond the existence of the projects; and (b) factors that influence the level of sustainability. Factors to be studied may include, but are not limited to: (a) The nature of the innovations and the extent to which the innovations have undergone adaptation or alteration over time; (b) the type and extent of support strategies employed during initial implementation stages and over time; (c) planned and unplanned changes in agency, school organizational or structural contexts, or both; (d) the level of penetration of the innovation; (e) the actual or perceived, or both, cost and benefit for participants; (f) constancy of site leadership, staff, and policy requirements; (g) the extent of consonance or dissonance between critical features of the innovations and existing (and emerging) school and district or agency practices and policies; and (h) resource access and allocation. Projects must provide comprehensive descriptions of the targeted effective practices to be studied, and evidence of positive results for children with disabilities. In addition, projects must dedicate the bulk of support requested to research on the issues of sustainability including the ability to sustain the project results beyond the life of the project. The Secretary particularly encourages an in-depth case study research design where the site or sites to be studied is the case (unit of analysis).

Focus 3—Research on Improving Reading Comprehension Results for Children with Learning Disabilities

In recent years, research has advanced our understanding of how skilled readers comprehend and instructional strategies that support children with learning disabilities to comprehend text. Comprehension is not merely a text-based process where meaning resides in the text and the role of the reader is to get the meaning. Meaning comes from both the text and the reader. Many children with learning disabilities need an instructional program that: (a) Teaches them how to access prior knowledge (e.g., strategies such as story grammar elements, semantic mapping, or think aloud sheets); (b) motivates and supports persistence on a task (e.g., including expressions of a student's own thoughts when reading and writing, questioning the expert or inquiry, or using technology or grouping practices); and (c) teaches them cognitive and metacognitive strategies for reading with understanding, including how to monitor one's own progress (e.g., summarizing, generating questions, mnemonics, or imagery).

Therefore, becoming a skilled reader is not automatic. Teachers need to teach reading comprehension, and, in particular, children with learning disabilities need effective instructional approaches.

Under Focus 3, a research project must pursue a systematic program of applied research that focuses on one or more issues related to improving reading comprehension results of children with learning disabilities related to reading. These issues include, but are not limited to:

(a) The extent to which children with learning disabilities need differential strategies to comprehend narrative and expository text;

(b) The types of effective comprehension instruction for children with learning disabilities in grades K–2, 3–5, and 6–8 inclusive; the components of particularly effective programs for children with learning disabilities; the basal materials, supplemental materials, and instructional strategies used by teachers; and how families support the instructional program;

(c) The types of effective questioning strategies used by teachers, peers, and experts affecting comprehension; and

(d) The kind of contexts that promote critical analysis and evaluation for comprehension and learning, and the grouping practices, instructional strategies, and curricula that promote comprehension and problem solving.

Focus 4—Studying Models That Bridge the Gap Between Research and Practice

Educational research most often includes the following phases: (1) Planning and preparation; (2) information gathering; (3) analysis and interpretation; (4) reporting and dissemination; and (5) use of findings. In traditional research models, the researcher is solely or primarily responsible for all phases but the last. Using research findings is seen as a job for the practitioner. However, it has been observed that research knowledge rarely translates directly into practice.

In recent years, a variety of promising models have been developed to bridge the gap between research and practice by altering the roles of researchers and practitioners for one or more phases of the research. In some models (e.g., interactive research and development, practitioner-researcher, partnership research) researchers and practitioners collaborate in all phases of the research process. Some of these models include parents on their site-based research teams. In other models, practitioners, working individually (e.g., practitioner-research linkers), in groups (e.g., practitioner study groups), or in pairs (e.g., peer coaching) interpret extant research to understand how to integrate research into practice. In some models, teachers conduct research (e.g., action research, or collegial experimentation). To date there have been few systematic examinations of the effectiveness of the various models to improve practice in special education or early intervention.

Under Focus 4, research projects must implement and examine a model or models for using research knowledge to improve educational practice and results for children with disabilities.

In studying a model or models, projects must apply methodologies with the capacity to determine the effectiveness of the model or models as implemented in practice settings. The projects must identify the knowledge utilization model or models to be studied, specify the components of the knowledge utilization model or models selected or created, the supports and policies necessary to support the model or models, both alterable and unalterable factors affecting practice improvement, and the effect of the model or models to improve organizational culture, practitioner attitudes and practices, and child results. In judging effectiveness, the projects must address improvements for researchers, practitioners, and children with disabilities.

The projects must report their findings in a manner which can serve as a ''blueprint'' so that practitioners in other school districts or agencies can implement the model using research knowledge to improve practice in special education or early intervention.

Focus 5—Inclusion of Students With Disabilities in Large-Scale Assessment Programs

IDEA includes a number of provisions to ensure the participation of students with disabilities in general State and district-wide assessment programs. Students with disabilities must participate in large-scale assessment programs if they are to benefit from the educational accountability and reforms that are linked to these assessments. While much information has been gained from prior efforts to include disabled students in assessments such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, applied research is needed to build on this base of information in order to provide technical and implementation information to guide the effective inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale assessment programs.

Focus 5 supports projects that pursue systematic programs of applied research to determine how State and local educational programs can best meet one or more of the following requirements:

(a) Including students with disabilities in either general State or district-wide assessment programs or both;

(b) Developing and using appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities on general State or district-wide assessments, or both;

(c) Developing and using alternate assessments for students with disabilities who cannot participate in State and district-wide assessment programs;

(d) Reporting on the participation or performance or both of students with disabilities in either general assessment programs, or on alternate assessments, or both; and

(e) Making decisions during the development of individualized education programs concerning individual modifications in the administration of State or district-wide assessments, or individual participation in alternate assessments.

Focus 6—Synthesize and Communicate a Professional Knowledge Base: Contributions to Research and Practice

Traditionally researchers have communicated their findings from individual research projects and systematic lines of research through journal publications and conference presentations. These findings are communicated to other researchers and engage researchers in dialogues. These dialogues contribute to innovation and development in special education and early intervention. In recent years the OSEP has sought to expand these traditional approaches. While continuing to support innovation and development, OSEP has established a goal to foster the use of a professional knowledge base by professionals who serve children with disabilities and parents who are involved in the education and development of their children with disabilities.

Focus 6 supports projects that synthesize and communicate an extant professional knowledge base on curricular, instructional, early intervention, or organizational strategies and approaches that would contribute to professional practice as a means for achieving better results for children with disabilities. In past years, the Department has supported syntheses on positive behavioral supports of children who exhibit challenging behaviors, grouping practices in reading, differences between children with learning disabilities and low achieving students, instructional approaches for special education students who speak English as a second language,

generalization strategies for using augmentative communication devices, interventions for children with learning disabilities, and effects of setting on social and academic outcomes. Building upon these previous efforts, the Secretary intends to support and fund a limited number of new syntheses in other areas such as—

(a) Effects of self-determination and self-advocacy interventions on children with disabilities;

(b) Effects of interventions on children with disabilities that promote generalization of academic or developmental skills;

(c) Effects of teacher or practitioner efficacy on children with disabilities' achievement or development;

(d) Effects of technology for improving literacy results for children with disabilities;

(e) Effects of school-wide approaches for improving reading results of children with disabilities; or

(f) Effects of school-wide approaches for improving math results of children with disabilities.

Under Focus 6, a synthesis project must—

(a) Identify the topical focus and the relevant and irrelevant concepts under review, and pose hypotheses around which the synthesis would be conducted;

(b) Identify and implement rigorous social science methods for synthesizing the professional knowledge base (e.g., integrative reviews (Cooper, 1982), best-evidence synthesis (Slavin, 1989), meta-analysis (Glass, 1977), multi-vocal approach (Ogawa & Malen, 1991), and National Institute of Mental Health consensus development program (Huberman, 1977));

(c) Develop hypotheses with input from potential consumers of the synthesis to enhance the usability and validity of project efforts. Consumers include researchers, technical assistance providers, policy makers, educators, other relevant practitioners, individuals with disabilities, and parents;

(d) Develop linkage of synthesis with technical assistance providers and disseminators and prepare products for use by practitioners, technical assistance providers, and disseminators;

(e) Implement procedures for locating and organizing the extant literature and ensure that these procedures address and guard against potential threats to the integrity, including generalization of findings;

(f) Establish criteria and procedures for judging the appropriateness of studies;

(g) Meet with the Office of Special Education Programs to review the project's topical focus and methodological approach for conducting the synthesis prior to the start of its synthesis;

(h) Analyze and interpret the professional knowledge base, including identification of general trends in the literature, points of consensus and conflict among the findings, and areas of evidence where the literature base is lacking. The interpretation of the literature base must address the contributions of the findings for improving the practice of professionals serving children with disabilities; and

(i) Submit a draft report in the 21st month of the project and, based on peer reviews, revise and submit a final report of the synthesis in the 24th month. During the second year of the project, the Secretary may fund an optional six-month period for additional dissemination activities.

Focus 7—Improving the Delivery of Special Education and Related Services or Early Intervention Services to Children who are English Language Learners

Appropriate instruction and intervention for children with disabilities who are limited in their English language proficiency can be achieved in a variety of ways. Ultimately, the responsibility for assuring that the English language learner is receiving appropriate access to the curriculum or intervention rests with the school district or agency in its provision of necessary training and ongoing support to the teachers or practitioners. Providing native speakers of the child's language in the classroom or intervention program, including parents, may not be sufficient to assure delivery of appropriate education or interventions. Limitations of resources and availability of qualified bilingual personnel to provide special education, related services, or early intervention services throughout the Nation suggest that other approaches should be investigated that will enhance the availability and assurance of the provision of meaningful education.

Under Focus 7 projects must pursue a systematic program of applied research that focuses on one or more areas related to improved approaches to the delivery of special education and related services or early intervention services to children who are English language learners. These areas may include, for example—

(a) Examination of early reading practices (K–3) for children with learning and behavior issues who are limited in their English proficiency;

(b) Improvement of reading comprehension in content area instruction in grades 4–8;

(c) Examination of alternatives in the delivery of services to children with disabilities who are English language learners (e.g., is placement optimal in regular classes or programs with support from special education resources or is the child better served in placements with other children with similar disabilities with support from bilingual resources?);

(d) The role cultural issues play in the provision of services (e.g., how do the perceptions of families regarding disabilities and services affect delivery of services?);

(e) The preferred strategies to support the transition from bilingual to mainstream English speaking classes or programs (e.g., what teaching or intervention strategies are most effective?);

(f) Examination of specific instructional approaches that promote problem solving and comprehension in reading, science, math, and social studies;

(g) Examination of instructional or intervention approaches for growth in English language learning for these children;

(h) Factors that improve the effectiveness of cooperative learning and classwide peer tutoring for English language learners;

(i) The techniques that improve the transfer of proven practices to practitioner; and

(j) The qualitative differences that exist in implementation of proven practices with practitioner and children who are English language learners who are located in inner-city schools or served through inner-city agencies (e.g., what is the involvement of families?).

Focus 8—Educating Children With Disabilities in Inclusive Settings

Focus 8 supports research projects to (a) identify new or improved systems change strategies that provide all children with disabilities, including children with severe disabilities, effective access to the general curriculum in regular classrooms as well as to nonsegregated extracurricular activities, and (b) describe how these school inclusion efforts as identified in (a) are aligned with systemic reform and school improvement strategies for all students.

Each project will identify, describe, and examine: (1) The efficacy and linkages of existing systemic reform and school inclusion strategies; (2) how school systems provide administrative and other supports in general education

settings to meet the needs of students with disabilities and other diverse learners; (3) how standards established for all children and authentic assessment practices are implemented for students with disabilities, and (4) social support strategies, including peer mediated strategies, that promote positive interactions among students with disabilities and their same-aged peers to foster cohesive school and classroom communities.

To be considered for funding under Focus 8, a research project must—

(a) Identify specific interventions or strategies to be investigated;

(b) Design the research activities in a manner that is likely to improve services for all students in inclusive classrooms, including students with severe disabilities;

(c) Conduct the research in schools pursuing systemic education reform and school inclusion; and

(d) Use methodological procedures designed to produce findings useful to program implementers and policy makers regarding the impact and interaction effects of systemic reform and school inclusion strategies in State and local contexts and demonstrate the benefits to students including the reciprocal benefits of inclusive schooling for all students.

Program Authority: Section 672 of IDEA.

Requirements for All Directed Research Projects:

In addition to addressing one of the above mentioned focus areas, projects must—

(a) Apply rigorous research methods (qualitative or quantitative, or both) to identify approaches contributing to improved results for children with disabilities;

(b) Provide a conceptual framework, based on extant research and theory to serve as a basis for the issues to be studied, the research design, and the target population;

(c) Prepare dissemination materials for both researcher and practitioner audiences and develop linkages with U.S. Department of Education dissemination and technical assistance providers, in particular those supported under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, to communicate research findings and distribute products; and

(d) Budget for two trips annually to Washington, D.C., for: (1) a two-day Research to Practice Division Project Directors' meeting; and (2) another meeting to collaborate with the Research to Practice Division project officer and the other projects funded under this priority, and to share information and discuss findings and methods of dissemination.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information on the priority under the Research and Innovation to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities Program contact the U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, SW., room 3527, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202–4641. Telephone: (202) 205–8038. FAX: (202) 205–8105. Internet: Debra __ Sturdivant@ed.gov

Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205–8953. Individuals with disabilities may obtain a copy of this notice in an alternate format (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) by calling (202) 205–8113.

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Intergovernmental Review

The programs (except for the Research and Innovation Projects) included in this notice are 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 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.

Dated: April 28, 1998.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Numbers: Research and Innovation to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities, 84.324; and Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities, 84.326)

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

[FR Doc. 98–11720 Filed 5–1–98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year 1998

SUMMARY: This notice provides closing dates and other information regarding the transmittal of applications for fiscal year 1998 competitions under two programs authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended. This notice supports the National Education Goals by improving understanding of how to enable children and youth with disabilities to reach higher levels of academic achievement.

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

Special Education—Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children With Disabilities [CFDA No. 84.326]

Purpose of Program

The purpose of this program is to provide technical assistance and information through such mechanisms as institutes, regional resource centers, clearinghouses, and programs that support States and local entities in building capacity, to improve early intervention, educational, and transitional services and results for children with disabilities and their families, and to address systemic-change goals and priorities.

Eligible Applicants: State and local educational agencies; institutions of higher education; other public agencies; private nonprofit organizations; outlying areas; freely associated States; Indian tribes or tribal organizations; and for-profit organizations.

Applicable Regulations: (a) The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86; and (b) the selection criteria included in regulations for these programs in 34 CFR 320.30.