

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Special Education and
Rehabilitative Services

Children With Disabilities Programs

AGENCY: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of proposed priorities.

SUMMARY: The Secretary proposes priorities for programs administered by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. 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 proposed priorities are intended to ensure wide and effective use of program funds.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before May 23, 1997 for the Directed Research Projects proposed priority. Comments on all other priorities must be received on or before April 23, 1997.

ADDRESSES: All comments concerning proposed priorities should be addressed to: Linda Glidewell, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 3521, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202-2641. Internet: NPP_Research@ed.gov

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information on these proposed priorities contact the U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., room 3317, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202-2641. Telephone: (202) 260-9182. FAX: (202) 205-8717 (FAX is the preferred method for requesting information).

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 contacting the Department as listed above.

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

The Secretary will announce the final priorities in a notice in the **Federal Register**. The final priorities will be determined by responses to this notice, available funds, and other

considerations of the Department. Funding of particular projects depends on the availability of funds, the content of the final priorities, and the quality of the applications received. Further, priorities could be affected by enactment of legislation reauthorizing these programs. The publication of these proposed 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.

Note: This notice of proposed priorities does not solicit applications. Notices inviting applications under these competitions will be published in the **Federal Register** concurrent with or following publication of the notices of final priorities.

Priorities

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

*Proposed Absolute Priority 1—Urban Center on Implementing Inclusive Education for Children 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; (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; and (7) analysis of policies, procedures, 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 ongoing 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.

Proposed 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 (OEs) 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 OEs in personnel preparation competitions authorized by IDEA; and (b) increase the capacity of HBCUs, OMIs, and OEs to prepare personnel to work with children with disabilities.

The Center must—

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

(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 OEI 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;

(5) 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;

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

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

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

(9) Provide advice as requested by the Department on strategies to further the

purposes of section 610(j) of the Act; and

(10) 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 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

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.

*Proposed 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. The purpose of this priority is to provide technical assistance for establishing, developing, and coordinating parent training and information projects (PTIs) supported under § 631(e) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. 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, laws and regulation, networking) as identified through the needs assessment;

(d) Maximize the computer and technological capabilities of the Federally-supported network of 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 (NICHCY) 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 that need such assistance in order to better serve underserved and underrepresented populations.

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

*Proposed 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 shall 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 Teach Blind and Low-Vision Children. In recent years, the number of institutions of higher education that offer teacher training programs for teachers of blind and low-vision children has significantly diminished. Today, very few vision training programs for teachers of visually impaired individuals 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 teach blind and low-vision children.

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 educate blind and low vision students, including strategies for solving this shortage problem, consideration and comparisons of the merits of each alternative strategy, and a recommended solution.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C 1431.

Proposed 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 would support 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., 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;

(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 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 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, D.C. 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.

Proposed Absolute Priority 6—Directed Research Projects

Background

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has, in prior years, announced priorities for the support of research projects under several of the programs authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Separate research priorities (competitions) have been announced under the Early Education Program for Children with Disabilities, Program for Children with Severe Disabilities, Secondary Education and Transitional Services for Youth with Disabilities Program, Program for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance, and the Research in Education of Individuals with Disabilities Program. The purpose of this priority is to group all priorities for directed research and apply a single set of requirements among the various competitions. By consolidating multiple priorities and announcements into one priority, OSEP endeavors to avoid unnecessary duplication and provide consistent information for all research competitions. The program authority for each focus is listed following each focus statement.

Priority

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, to provide such children effective instruction and enable them to learn successfully. Under this priority, projects must support innovation, development, exchange, and use of advancements in knowledge and practice designed to contribute to the improvement of early intervention, instruction, and learning of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

A research project must address one of the following focus areas:

Focus 1—Beacons of excellence.

Research projects supported under focus 1 must identify and study schools 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 those schools, and to identify factors contributing to exemplary learning results, and examine how those factors and other factors relate to achieving exemplary learning results for students with disabilities. Projects may focus on either secondary or elementary levels, or both. During the third year of the project, the Secretary will determine whether or not to fund an optional six-month period for extended dissemination activities arranged with OSEP.

Program Authority: Research in Education of Individuals with Disabilities Program, 20 U.S.C. 1441.

Focus 2—Prevention and early intervention services for children with emotional and behavioral problems. Many young children with emotional and behavioral problems experience years of repeated preschool and school failure, permanent damage to their self-esteem, and escalation of their problems, before they receive appropriate services. Research projects supported under this focus must identify, examine, and document information about the specific factors that contribute to effectiveness in collaborative, community-based, prevention and early intervention services to prevent children with emotional and behavioral problems from developing serious emotional disturbance. The target population for these projects includes children in

preschool, kindergarten, and the primary grades (1–4), and their families.

The research may focus, for example, on child find, screening, early identification, assessment, pre-referral strategies, child and family intervention and prevention services, and results. Research must include but is not limited to services and programs funded under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Additional programs with collaborative, community-based services appropriate for study may include, where available, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, other early childhood service programs, primary care and mental health programs, child care center programs, and public and private preschools and elementary school programs. Each research project must include an evaluation of the collaboration and coordination of prevention and early intervention services across multiple service providers and agencies working with these children and their families.

Program Authority: Program for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance, 20 U.S.C. 1426.

Focus 3—Students approaching graduation and the supplemental security income program. Many children and youth with disabilities receiving special education services also receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Administered by the Social Security Administration, the SSI program provides cash assistance, Medicaid eligibility, and work incentives such as the Impairment-Related Work Expense incentive and the Plan for Achieving Self-Support. National data indicate that these work incentives are under-utilized and that most working-age SSI recipients are unemployed. To address this problem, the National Academy of Social Insurance (1996) recommended that information about the SSI work incentives should be incorporated in the transition planning process required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The SSI work incentives may therefore enhance the employment results of transitioning youth with disabilities.

The purpose of focus 3 is to develop and test innovative strategies for increasing the utilization of the SSI work incentives. Projects must: (a) Examine the barriers to employment for young adults with disabilities who are receiving SSI benefits; (b) develop innovative strategies and materials for promoting the utilization of work incentives through the transition planning process; and (c) apply qualitative and quantitative research

methods to determine the relative efficacy of technical assistance strategies, toward improving work incentive utilization developed under (b).

Program Authority: Secondary Education and Transitional Services for Youth with Disabilities Program, 20 U.S.C. 1425.

Focus 4—The sustainability of promising innovations. A growing body of practice-based research and model demonstration work in schools and local districts, including projects supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), has focussed on meeting the needs of, and improving the results for, students with disabilities in schools and districts involved in reform and restructuring initiatives. Some of this work is yielding promising positive results for students 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 4 is designed to study the implementation of practices that have been found to be effective in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in reform/restructuring initiatives in local and district schools. The practices must have been included as part of projects designed to implement those practices. The study must address: (1) The extent to which those practices have been sustained beyond the term of the projects; and (2) factors that influence the determined 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 school organizational or structural contexts or both; (d) the level of penetration of the innovation; (e) the actual and perceived costs and benefits for participants; (f) constancy of site leadership, school staff, and school policy requirements; (g) the extent of consonance or dissonance between critical features of the innovations and existing (and emerging) school and district practices and policies; and (h) resource access and allocation. Within focus 4, projects must provide comprehensive descriptions of the targeted effective practices to be studied, and convincing documentation of resulting positive results for students with disabilities. In addition, projects must dedicate the

bulk of support requested within focus 4 to research on the issues of sustainability and on continuing documentation of results for students with disabilities. Within focus 4, the Secretary particularly encourages an in-depth case study research design where the sites to be studied are the cases.

Program Authority: Research in Education of Individuals with Disabilities Program, 20 U.S.C. 1441.

Focus 5—Educating children with severe disabilities in inclusive settings. Focus 5 supports research projects to (a) identify new or improved strategies to address the educational and related service needs of children and youth with severe disabilities in inclusive general education settings and extracurricular activities, and (b) describe how the school inclusion strategies as identified in (a) are aligned with systemic reform and school improvement strategies for all students.

Additional research is needed to identify, describe, and examine: (1) The efficacy and linkages of existing systemic reform and school inclusion strategies, (2) how school systems provide supports and collaborative teaming to meet the needs of students with severe disabilities, and other diverse learners; (3) how standards and authentic assessment practices are implemented for students with severe disabilities and their impact on inclusive and systemic reform efforts, (4) social support strategies that promote positive interactions among students with severe disabilities and other students, and their same-aged peers to foster cohesive school and classroom communities; and (5) the types of peer-mediated strategies that actively involve all students, including students with severe disabilities, in inclusive educational programs.

To be considered for funding under focus 5, 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.

All projects funded under focus 5 must identify and describe how these

inclusion efforts benefit students with severe disabilities including the reciprocal benefits of inclusive schooling for all students.

Program Authority: Program for Children with Severe Disabilities, 20 U.S.C. 1424.

Requirements for All Directed Research Projects

In addition to addressing focus (1), (2), (3), (4), or (5) above, 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.

Selection criteria for evaluating applications under proposed absolute priority 6. The Secretary proposes to use the following criteria to evaluate applications under proposed absolute priority 6—Directed Research Projects. The maximum score for all the criteria is 100 points.

(a) *Importance* (10 points). The Secretary reviews each application to determine the importance of the project in leading to the understanding of, remediation of, or compensation for, the problem or issue that relates to the early intervention with or special education of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

(b) *Technical soundness* (40 points). The Secretary reviews each application to determine the technical soundness of the research, including—

(1) The design;

(2) The proposed sample;

(3) Instrumentation; and

(4) Data analysis procedures.

(c) *Plan of operation* (10 points).

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine the quality of the plan of operation for the project.

(2) The Secretary looks for—

(i) High quality in the design of the project;

(ii) An effective plan of management that insures proper and efficient administration of the project;

(iii) A clear description of how the objectives of the project relate to the purpose of the program; and

(iv) The way the applicant plans to use its resources and personnel to achieve each objective.

(3) The quality of the evaluation plan for the project including the extent to which the methods of evaluation are appropriate for the project and, to the extent possible, are objective and produce data that are quantifiable.

(Cross Reference: 34 CFR 75.590, Evaluation by the grantee.)

(d) *Quality of key personnel* (10 points).

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine the qualifications of the key personnel that the applicant plans to use on the project.

(2) The Secretary considers—

(i) The qualifications of the project director (if one is to be used); and,

(ii) The qualifications of each of the other key personnel to be used in the project; and

(iii) The time that each person referred to in paragraphs (d)(2) (i) and (ii) of this section will commit to the project.

(3) To determine personnel qualifications, the Secretary considers experience and training in fields related to the objectives of the project, as well as other evidence that the applicant provides.

(e) *Underrepresented populations* (10 points). The Secretary reviews each application for information that shows the extent to which the applicant, as part of its nondiscriminatory employment practices, employs members of underrepresented populations as project staff. The Secretary looks for—

(1) Employees who are members of underrepresented populations, including members of racial or ethnic minority groups and individuals with disabilities; and

(2) Procedures to provide training and other necessary support to retain and advance qualified personnel from underrepresented populations.

(f) *Adequacy of resources* (5 points).

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine if the applicant plans to devote adequate resources to the project.

(2) The Secretary considers the extent to which—

(i) The facilities that the applicant plans to use are adequate; and

(ii) The equipment and supplies that the applicant plans to use are adequate.

(g) *Impact* (5 points). The Secretary reviews each application to determine the probable impact of the proposed research and development products and the extent to which those products can be expected to have a direct influence on infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities or personnel responsible for their education or early intervention services.

(h) *Organizational capability* (5 points). The Secretary considers—

(1) The applicant's experience in special education or early intervention services; and

(2) The ability of the applicant to disseminate the findings of the project to appropriate groups to ensure that they can be used effectively.

(i) *Budget and cost effectiveness* (5 points).

(1) The Secretary reviews each application to determine if the project has an adequate budget and is cost effective.

(2) The Secretary considers the extent to which—

(i) The budget for the project is adequate to support the project activities; and

(ii) Costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives of the project.

Intergovernmental Review

Except for focus areas 1 and 4 in the Directed Research Projects priority, all other priorities 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 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.

Invitation To Comment

Interested persons are invited to submit comments and recommendations regarding these proposed priorities.

All comments submitted in response to this notice will be available for public inspection, during and after the comment period, in Room 3524, 300 C Street, S.W., Washington, D.C., between

the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday of each week except Federal holidays. Individuals with disabilities who need assistance to review the comments will be provided with appropriate aids, such as readers or print magnifiers. To schedule an appointment call (202) 205-8113 or (202) 260-9895. Persons using a TDD should call the Federal Information Relay Service.

Dated: March 19, 1997.

(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; Secondary Education and Transitional Services for Youth with Disabilities Program, 84.158; and the Program for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance)

Howard R. Moses,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

[FR Doc. 97-7364 Filed 3-21-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4000-01-P