

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; Special Studies Program****AGENCY:** Department of Education.**ACTION:** Notice of final priorities.

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces final priorities for the Special Studies Program. The Secretary may use these priorities in Fiscal Year 1996 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 July 5, 1996.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: The name, address, and telephone number of the person at the Department to contact for information on each specific priority is listed under that priority.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Special Studies Program, authorized by section 618 of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended, supports studies to evaluate the impact of the Act, including efforts to provide a free appropriate public education to children and youth with disabilities, and early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities. The results of these studies must be included in the annual report the Department is required to submit to the Congress.

On November 7, 1995, the Secretary published a notice of proposed priorities for this program in the Federal Register (60 FR 56201-56202).

These 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. Further, FY 1996 priorities could be affected by enactment of legislation reauthorizing these programs.

Note: This notice of final priorities does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under the Testing the Use of An Instrument to Measure Student Progress

competition 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—Testing the Use of An Instrument to Measure Student Progress

Comment: One commenter noted that the priority should evaluate the use of the PASS Instrument as it applies to students with disabilities at the different ages for which transition planning is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The commenter recommended that the appropriate age/age range defined by the term "transition" assessed by the PASS Instrument should include students ages 14 to exit, not just students at the age of exit (about age 18).

Discussion: The Secretary agrees with the commenter, but notes that the priority as written does not limit the evaluation of the PASS Instrument to any specific age. Rather, the priority allows projects to include a full range of ages as appropriate for transition planning under IDEA.

Changes: None.

Priority—State-Federal Administrative Information Exchange

Comment: One commenter indicated that importance should be given to the development of the information before better methods to exchange information are pursued.

Discussion: The priority as written requires the project to identify, analyze, and synthesize information relative to emerging issues; and provides for the convening of experts, special education administrators, and others to review, plan, and provide leadership in recommending multi-level actions that respond to the emerging issues. The Secretary believes that the commenter's concern regarding the development of information is addressed in other priorities and that this priority serves an important purpose in developing methods to exchange existing information.

Changes: None.

Comment: Four commenters stressed the continuing need for an efficient information exchange between State educational agencies and the Office of Special Education Programs. These four

commenters pointed to the fiscal benefits of using existing linkages and communication networks where they exist, rather than expending resources to create new infrastructure. These commenters also stressed the value of building on the knowledge and experience of an organization and staff that is presently providing services comparable to that envisioned under the priority. Three of the commenters specifically recommended that the applicants have extensive experience in special education and administration of the IDEA.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees with the commenters that it is important to stress fiscal efficiency and responsibility. The Secretary also agrees that the utilization of experience and knowledge that exist among State Directors of Special Education and their own communication networks with school districts and service providers in their States should be stressed. The Department will not limit a potential award to an existing provider. However, the Department does evaluate applications on the basis of cost effectiveness, quality of personnel, soundness of the proposal, and how the plan of operation meets the purposes of the priority.

Changes: The language of the priority has been revised to read as follows: "The project must—* * *(2) Organize, synthesize, interpret, integrate, and facilitate dissemination of information needed for program improvement using already existing information resources and communication networks;".

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

Absolute Priority 1—Testing the Use of An Instrument to Measure Student Progress

Background: The Office of Special Education Programs funded the development and testing of the PASS (Performance Assessment for Self-Sufficiency) system to respond to the needs of local, State, and Federal agencies for information on the post-school services required by students with disabilities as they make the transition to adult service delivery systems. The field test of PASS indicated that the system also had great potential for use in measuring student results. The findings from the field test on the utility of the PASS system

indicate that PASS may be useful for a wide range of purposes including:

- Developing a systematic method of estimating the post-school needs of exiting students with disabilities.
- Developing a transition planning tool that would be used to develop and monitor individualized education/transition plans (IEPs/ITPs), to track student progress, and to be used for follow-up purposes after exiting school.
- Documenting results, identifying programs and curriculum needs, and evaluating programs.
- Improving interagency coordination and teamwork.
- Providing a common database for use at local, State and national levels.

The results of the field test, however, lead the Office of Special Education Programs to conclude that deployment of the PASS at this time is premature and an investigation of the feasibility and utility of the PASS system as a tool for transition planning, and for measuring student results, should continue.

The PASS System. The PASS system has two main components: The PASS Instrument, and the PASS Expert System. The PASS instrument obtains teachers' assessments of four major competency areas related to functional performance skills demanded by adult life. First, teachers complete the PASS instrument which provides ratings of students for a broad array of functional performance indicators in four general domains: Daily Living, Personal and Social Development, Employment, and Educational Performance. The specific skills and behaviors targeted on the PASS instrument are ones that are typically required for adult life and that have service implications. For example, very low performance ratings on several specific indicators—such as “moves self about in immediate neighborhood” (e.g., walking, bicycling), “uses public transportation if available” (e.g., bus, taxi), “uses maps and bus schedules when appropriate”, etc.—suggest differing needs for assistance with mobility and transportation aspects of daily living. The PASS also provides information about the student's training, education, and employment, as well as major problem behaviors. No special assessment is required: teachers complete the PASS based on what they already know about the student from direct observation or input from colleagues who work with the student. The instrument was developed in collaboration with well-known transition experts, and involved considerable interaction with State and local administrators and practitioners in both special education and adult

services. It has been produced in a machine-scanable format.

The second component is the PASS expert system which is a micro-computer-based program that converts the PASS data into projected service estimates for individuals and groups based on data from the PASS questionnaire. The prototype expert system, which incorporates the knowledge and expertise of more than 30 special education and adult services practitioners across the country, was field tested in over 100 school districts in 10 States to test the feasibility of administrative procedures for collecting PASS data from schools and to guide refinement of the PASS instrument and expert system prototype.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) developed the rudimentary prototype PASS system and tested its administrative feasibility. AIR developed the following products, which are available from the Office of Special Education Programs: Evaluation of the Utility of the PASS System; Technical Documentation for the PASS Expert System; Technical Manual for the PASS Instrument; User Guide to the PASS Expert System; Report on the Administrative Feasibility of the PASS System; Technical Documentation for the PASS Expert System; Recommendations and Rationales for Revisions to the PASS Instrument and Instructions.

Priority: The Secretary establishes an absolute priority for a project, through a cooperative agreement, to assist the Office of Special Education Programs in evaluating the feasibility and utility of the PASS system: (a) As a tool for transition planning, across all disability categories and levels of severity; and (b) as a tool for measuring student results, across all disability categories and levels of severity. Additionally, the project will validate the expert system's decision rules.

The project must:

- (a) Develop the conceptual framework for the study;
- (b) Establish a stakeholder group that will advise the project on the study design;
- (c) Develop data collection methods and instruments;
- (d) Develop methods of data analysis;
- (e) Carry out a field test;
- (f) Provide guidance and support to States participating in the field test;
- (g) Analyze the results of the field test and prepare a final report on the findings of the study; and
- (h) Budget for two trips to Washington, D.C. each year. One trip to meet with the OSEP Project Officer and

one trip to attend the annual Project Director's Meeting.

For Further Information Contact:
Susan Sanchez, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 3524, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202-2641.
Telephone: (202) 205-8998. FAX: (202) 205-8105. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205-8953. Internet:
Susan_Sanchez@ed.gov

Absolute Priority 2—State-Federal Administrative Information Exchange

Background: Information for decisionmaking and policy development to ensure appropriate and effective education and early intervention for all infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities is critically important. State and Federal decisionmakers responsible for the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must have access to valid statistics, research findings, and policy options, as well as current information on trends in the providing of special education and related services.

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) within the U. S. Department of Education has the responsibility for Federal administration of IDEA. State education agencies (SEAs), or other designated State agencies under Part H of IDEA, oversee the administration of IDEA at State and local levels. This project will facilitate the access and analysis of administrative and policy information to and from the States and other jurisdictions, and will ensure the flow of communication between the Federal Government and administrators of IDEA at State and local levels.

Priority: The Secretary establishes a priority to facilitate communication between the U.S. Department of Education and State and local administrators of IDEA, and to synthesize national program information that will improve the management, administration, delivery, and effectiveness of programs and services provided under IDEA. The cooperative agreement funded under this priority will provide the Department with a mechanism and resources for analyzing policies and emerging issues that are of significant national concern.

The project must—

- (1) Identify national and State program improvement information that is needed to obtain better results in education and provide early intervention services for infants,

toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities;

(2) Organize, synthesize, interpret, integrate, and facilitate dissemination of information needed for program improvement using already existing information resources and communication networks;

(3) Analyze emerging policy or program issues regarding the administration of special education, early intervention, and related services at the Federal, State and local levels; and

(4) Facilitate the use of information at Federal, State and local levels for program improvement for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

The project must organize, coordinate, and maintain a data base of laws, policies, and regulations that govern special education within the States and other jurisdictions; communicate, on a regular basis, with State educational agencies to identify emerging policy issues; obtain, analyze and synthesize information relative to the emerging issues; and convene experts, special education administrators, and others to review, plan, and provide leadership in recommending multi-level actions that respond to the emerging issues. The project must communicate regularly with the Office of Special Education Programs to ensure the continuing flow and development of information that may be required at the Federal level to facilitate the improvement and efficiency of administration of IDEA by the U.S. Department of Education.

Upon request of the OSEP project officer, the project should meet with other funded projects of OSEP for purposes of cross-project collaboration and information exchange. The project must also budget for two trips annually to Washington, D.C. for: (1) A two-day Research Project Directors' meeting; and (2) another meeting to meet and collaborate with the OSEP project officer.

For Further Information Contact: Jane C. Williams, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue S.W., Room 3529, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202-2641. Telephone: (202) 205-9039. FAX: (202) 205-8105. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf

(TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205-8125. Internet: Jane Williams@ed.gov *Applicable Program Regulations:* 34 CFR part 327.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1418.
Dated: April 26, 1996.

Howard R. Moses,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.159, Special Studies Program)

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[CFDA No.: 84.159H]

Special Studies Program; Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards for Fiscal Year (FY) 1996

Purpose of Program: To support studies to evaluate the impact of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including efforts to provide a free appropriate public education to children and youth with disabilities, and early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities.

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.

Eligible Applicants: Public or private agencies, institutions, organizations, and other appropriate parties.

Applicable Regulations: (a) The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR Parts 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 85, and 86; and (b) The regulations for this program in 34 CFR Part 327.

Priority:

Absolute Priority—Testing the Use of An Instrument to Measure Student Progress (84.159H)

The priority Testing the Use of An Instrument to Measure Student Progress in the notice of final priorities for this program, published elsewhere in this issue of the Federal Register, applies to this competition.

Note: The regulations in 34 CFR Part 86 apply to institutions of higher education only.

Deadline for Transmittal of Applications: June 24, 1996.

Applications Available: May 7, 1996.

Estimated Number of Awards: 1.

Project Period: Up to 36 months.

Available Funds: In fiscal year 1996, the Department proposes to allocate approximately \$300,000 to support one award for the first twelve months of the project. In years two and three, the project will be level funded unless there are increases in costs attributable to significant changes in activity level.

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

For Applications and General Information Contact: Claudette Carey, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Switzer Building, Room 3525, Washington, D.C. 20202-2641. Telephone (202) 205-9864. FAX: (202) 205-8105. Internet: Claudette_Carey@ed.gov

Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205-8953. Applications are available in alternative formats upon request.

For Technical Information Contact: Susan Sanchez, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Switzer Building, Room 3528, Washington, D.C. 20202-2641. Telephone: (202) 205-8998. FAX: (202) 205-8105. Internet: Susan Sanchez@ed.gov

Information about the Department's funding opportunities, including copies of application notices for discretionary grant competitions, can be viewed on the Department's electronic bulletin board (ED Board), telephone (202) 260-9950; on the Internet Gopher Server at GOPHER.ED.GOV (under Announcements, Bulletins, and Press Releases); or on the World Wide Web at <http://www.ed.gov/money.html>. However, the official application notice for a discretionary grant competition is the notice published in the Federal Register.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1418.

Dated: April 26, 1996.

Howard R. Moses,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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