

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**Regional Resource and Federal Center Programs**

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of proposed waiver and additional activities.

SUMMARY: The Secretary proposes to waive the requirements in EDGAR at 34 CFR 75.261 as applied to the currently-funded Regional Resource Centers and to require the Centers to carry out certain additional activities. Section 75.261 sets forth the conditions for extending a project period, including the general prohibition against extending projects that involve the obligation of additional Federal funds. The Secretary proposes to issue continuation awards to the Regional Resource Center Programs in order to ensure the most efficient use of Federal funds. The Department is therefore soliciting public comment on the proposed waiver and the new activities that the RRCs would undertake.

DATES: Comments must be received on April 27, 1998.

ADDRESSES: All comments concerning this proposal should be addressed to Debra Sturdivant or Marie Roane, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, SW., Room 3527, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202-2641.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Debra Sturdivant, Telephone: (202) 205-8038, or Marie Roane, Telephone: (202) 205-8451. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8:00 A.M. and 8:00 P.M. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday.

Individuals with disabilities may obtain this document in an alternate format (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, or computer diskette) on request to the contact person listed in the preceding paragraph.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On December 14, 1992, the Department issued a Notice Inviting Applications for New Awards under the Regional Resource Center Program for Fiscal Year 1992. In this notice the Department announced that it would make six awards of up to 60 months under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which directed the Secretary to support the establishment of Regional Centers that provide consultation, technical assistance and training to State educational agencies and, through those

State educational agencies, to local educational agencies and to other appropriate public agencies providing special education and related services and early intervention services.

The grant period for the six centers ends May 31, 1998. In order to carry out activities relating to implementation of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 as stated by the Senate Appropriations Committee in its report accompanying the Department's fiscal year 1998 appropriations act, it is necessary to issue continuation awards to the existing grantees. Specifically, the Senate report states that the Secretary should provide training and disseminate information to State and local administrators, teachers, related services personnel, parents of children with disabilities, and other appropriate parties on the implementation of the 1997 amendments.

The Department is utilizing a number of strategies to carry out this directive. Because the Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) have a primary role in assisting States in implementing the IDEA Amendments of 1997, these organizations are well-positioned to play a key part in this training and information effort. In particular, the Secretary plans for the RRCs to conduct a series of regional institutes for educational excellence. The purposes of the regional institutes are:

(1) To ensure that State education agency personnel, local school personnel and parents receive high-quality, accurate training on the IDEA Amendments of 1997 in order to improve results for students with disabilities through improved teaching and learning;

(2) To build field support as part of the implementation of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 that is community-based and grounded in the context of improving schooling and results for children; and

(3) To ensure the involvement of State education agencies, local school personnel, parents, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)—supported technical assistance and dissemination services, State technical assistance providers, and topical research centers in the development of strategies and models to implement the IDEA Amendments of 1997.

Because the regional institutes would be held during the summer of 1998, the project period for the current Regional Resource Centers must be extended to enable the RRCs to both plan and conduct the institutes. The Secretary believes that it is essential that the RRCs conduct the institutes given the RRCs

technical assistance expertise and experience in carrying out similar activities.

Based on the foregoing, the Secretary believes that it makes the most programmatic sense and is the most efficient use of Federal funds to issue continuation awards. However, to do so, the Department must waive the requirements in EDGAR at 34 CFR 75.261 as well as provide for the new activities stated in this notice. That provision includes a prohibition against project period extensions that involve the obligation of additional Federal funds.

Reasons

There is an immediate need to provide training and information to the populations that will be targeted by the regional institutes. Waiting until after a new RRC competition to hold the institutes would severely hinder the Department's efforts to address the critical needs that are now present in the regions. The current RRCs have already conducted extensive training and information activities related to State implementation of the Amendments and are best suited to conduct the regional institutes.

Therefore, the Department proposes to issue continuation awards to the current grantees for four (4) months.

Regulatory Flexibility Act Certification

The Secretary certifies that the proposed waiver and additional activities would not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities.

The small entities that would be affected by this proposal are the six Centers currently receiving Federal funds. However, the proposal would not have a significant economic impact on the Centers because the waiver and additional activities would not impose excessive regulatory burdens or require unnecessary Federal supervision. The proposal would impose minimal requirements to ensure the proper expenditure of program funds, including requirements that are standard to continuation awards.

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980

This proposal has been examined under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1980 and have been found to contain no information collection requirements.

Intergovernmental Review

This program is subject to the requirements of Executive Order 12372 and the regulations in 34 CFR Part 79. The objective of the Executive order is to foster an intergovernmental

partnership and a strengthened federalism by relying on processes developed by State and local governments for coordination and review of proposed Federal financial assistance.

In accordance with the order, this document is intended to provide early notification of the Department's specific plans and actions for this program.

Invitation To Comment

Interested persons are invited to submit comments and recommendations regarding this proposed waiver and additional activities.

All comments submitted in response to this proposal will be available for public inspection, during and after the comment period, in room 3521, 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.

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

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.028, Technical Assistance and Dissemination to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities)

Dated: March 20, 1998.

Curtis L. Richards,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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