

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**Educational Research and Development Centers Program****AGENCY:** Department of Education.**ACTION:** Notice of proposed priority for FY 1997.

SUMMARY: The Secretary proposes a priority under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program. The Secretary takes this action to support research on early reading. The priority is intended to produce research findings that will affect changes in early reading instruction and related practices.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before January 27, 1997.

ADDRESSES: All comments concerning this proposed priority should be addressed to Anne P. Sweet, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW., room 513A, Washington, DC 20208-5573. Comments can be faxed to Dr. Sweet at (202) 219-2135 or e-mailed through the internet to (anne_sweet@ed.gov).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Anne P. Sweet, telephone: (202) 219-2079. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The Office of Educational Research and Improvement, authorized under Title IX of Public Law 103-227, (20 U.S.C. section 6001 *et seq.*) supports educational research and development activities. The National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment and The National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education are two of five research institutes that carry out coordinated and comprehensive programs of research, development, evaluation, and dissemination activities designed to provide research-based leadership for the improvement of education.

As National Institutes, The National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment and The National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education support a range of research, development, and dissemination activities. They support long-term activities focused on core issues in education carried out by national research and development centers, as well as field-initiated studies carried out by individual investigators. The proposed priority for research on improving children's early reading is for a research and development center to be

supported jointly by the Student Achievement and the Early Childhood Institutes.

The Secretary believes that improving reading achievement in this country and increasing the capacity of the nation's education system to provide all members of society with equal opportunities to attain a high level of literacy depend on knowledge generated by an enduring program of education research and development. Knowledge gained from education research and development can help guide the national investment in education and support local and State reform efforts. Because they carry out sustained, long-term research and development, Centers are a primary mechanism for pursuing new knowledge about education. Center awards are made to institutions of higher education, institutions of higher education in consort with public agencies or non-profit organizations, and interstate agencies established by compact that operate subsidiary bodies to conduct postsecondary education research and development.

The Secretary invites comments on the priority described in this notice. Prior to this announcement and in conjunction with planning for Educational Research and Development Center competitions in fiscal year 1996, OERI engaged in a series of meetings, regional hearings, and Federal Register notices that solicited advice from parents, teachers, administrators, policy-makers, business people, researchers, and others to identify the most needed research and development activities. Following these activities and subsequent research priorities planning meetings in which OERI engaged, OERI prepared this notice of proposed priority. The proposed priority will be reviewed by OERI's National Research Policy and Priorities Board, whose mandate includes the development of a Research Priorities Plan. The final research and development center priority will be published following the Board's review and the public comment period.

Proposed Priority: Research to Improve Children's Early Reading

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3) the Secretary will give an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priority. The Secretary intends to fund only one application that meets the priority listed below. Funding this priority will depend on the availability of funds, the nature of the final priority, and the quality of applications received. The Secretary proposes to support a national research and development center on research to

improve children's early reading. This center must—

(a) Conduct a coherent, sustained program of research and development in early reading, using a well-conceptualized and theoretically sound framework;

(b) Contribute to the development and advancement of theory and practice in early reading;

(c) Conduct scientifically rigorous studies capable of generating findings that contribute substantially to understanding in the field;

(d) Conduct work of sufficient size, scope, and duration to produce definitive guidance for instructional improvement;

(e) Address issues of both equity and excellence in early reading education for all children;

(f) Conduct the following research and development activities—(1) Research on early reading acquisition;

(2) Multidisciplinary research, including as appropriate neuroscience, cognitive and developmental psychology, and the relevant social sciences, on the relations among the development of oral language, reading, and writing fluency for all children, including those who are from linguistically and culturally diverse populations;

(3) Research that applies a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodologies to describe and to assess the efficacy of current practices in early reading instruction and to provide a knowledge base to make early reading instruction more effective;

(4) Research on theory-based diagnostic and assessment tools for early reading;

(5) Research on social, motivational, and affective factors that play a part in early reading acquisition; and

(6) Research on the relationships among early reading, writing, and content knowledge acquisition; and

(g) Document, report, and disseminate information about its research findings and other accomplishments in ways that will facilitate effective use of that information for teachers and other early childhood professionals, families, and community members, as appropriate.

Post-Award Requirements

The Secretary established the following post-award requirements consistent with the Educational Research, Development, Dissemination and Improvement Act of 1994. A grantee receiving a center award must—

(a) Provide OERI with information about center projects and products and other appropriate research information so that OERI can monitor center

progress and maintain its inventory of funded research projects. This information must be provided through media that include an electronic network;

(b) Conduct and evaluate research projects in conformity with the highest professional standards of research practice;

(c) Reserve five percent of each budget period's funds to support activities that fall within the center's priority area, are designed and mutually agreed to by the center and OERI, and enhance OERI's ability to carry out its mission. Such activities may include developing research agendas, conducting research projects collaborating with other federally-supported entities, and

engaging in research agenda setting and dissemination activities; and

(d) At the end of the award period, synthesize the findings and advances in knowledge that resulted from the Center's program of work and describe the potential impact on the improvement of American education, including any observable impact to date.

Note: This notice of proposed priority does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under this competition will be published in the Federal Register concurrent with or following publication of the notice of final priority.

Invitation to Comment

Interested persons are invited to submit comments and recommendations regarding this proposed priority.

Comments will be available for public inspection, during and after the comment period, in Room 513A, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday of each week except Federal holidays.

Program Authority: P.L. 103-227, Title IX (20 U.S.C. 6031)

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (84.305R) Educational Research and Development Centers Program)

Dated: December 10, 1996.

Sharon P. Robinson,

Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement.

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