grant competitions, can be viewed on the Department's electronic bulletin board (ED Board), telephone (202) 260– 9950; or 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. 1426.

Dated: May 3, 1996.

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

[FR Doc. 96-11472 Filed 5-8-96; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4000-01-P

## **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

## Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

**AGENCY:** Department of Education. **ACTION:** 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. 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 June 10, 1996.

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

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains three final priorities under two programs authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as follows: Training Personnel for the Education of Individuals with Disabilities Program (two final priorities); and the Program for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance (one final priority). The purpose of each program is stated separately under the title of that program.

On February 21, 1996, the Secretary published a notice of proposed priorities for these programs in the Federal Register (61 FR 6754–6758).

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. 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 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 priority, fifty-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—Preparation of Special Education, Related Services, and Early Intervention Personnel To Serve Infants, Toddlers, Children, and Youth With Low-Incidence Disabilities

Comment: Forty-two commenters expressed concern about the severe shortage of personnel specifically prepared to work with children and youth who are deaf-blind. The commenters felt that the priority should place more emphasis on preparing personnel to work with children and youth with deaf-blindness by specifically identifying deaf-blindness as a low-incidence disability. Identification of deaf-blindness, the commenters note, is necessary to preserve the uniqueness of this disability and to address the lack of qualified personnel who have the specialized skills to effectively work with deaf-blind children.

Discussion: The proposed priority defined the term "low-incidence disability" to include a "visual or hearing impairment, or simultaneous visual and hearing impairments." The proposed definition did not specifically identify deaf-blindness as a low incidence disability, although deaf-blindness clearly satisfies the definition. The Secretary agrees with the

commenters that there is a need to train additional personnel to work with the deaf-blind and notes that the Office of Special Education Programs currently funds seven programs that prepare personnel to work with this population. Projects proposing to prepare special education, related service, and early intervention personnel to work with children who are deaf-blind are eligible to receive an award under the final priority and are encouraged to apply.

Changes: The proposed priority has been amended to clarify that children with deaf-blindness would be considered individuals with "low-incidence" disabilities.

Comment: Four commenters expressed concern that there is a shortage of teachers of blind and visually impaired children. The commenters recommended that the Department establish a separate priority for the training of personnel to work with blind and visually impaired children since training programs for teachers of the visually impaired are highly specialized and rigorous.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that there is a shortage of teachers of the visually impaired and blind. The Secretary emphasizes that the final priority, like the proposed priority, authorizes funding of projects designed to train teachers to work with the blind and visually impaired.

Changes: None.

Comment: Five commenters questioned the collaborative, multidisciplinary aspects of the priority. Two commenters expressed concern that the priority required projects to demonstrate collaboration between their project and other departments and suggested that such collaboration is beyond the capability of most programs. In particular, one commenter stated that the complexity and intensity of training programs that prepare individuals to work with the visually impaired would make collaboration between these and other programs (e.g., nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and psychology) impossible. Other commenters mentioned the difficulty of an over-crowded curriculum and a lack of time and personnel as additional reasons for opposing the development of collaboration among programs. However, one commenter recommended that projects demonstrate partnerships with rehabilitation programs, independent living centers, employers, and other community resources that become critical as youth with lowincidence disabilities transition to

*Discussion:* The priority encourages, but does not require, collaboration

employment.

among several institutions and between training institutions and public schools. The priority also encourages, but does not require, projects that foster successful coordination between special education and regular education professional development programs in order to address the needs of children with low-incidence disabilities in inclusive settings. The Secretary is sympathetic to the level and diversity of knowledge needed to work with many of the low-incidence populations. However, students with low-incidence disabilities may experience multiple problems that need to be addressed through services in several disciplines (e.g., occupational, physical and speech therapy, social work, psychology). Special education, related service, and early intervention personnel that work with low-incidence populations, therefore, must possess sufficient knowledge of other disciplines to communicate with professionals in those areas, to function as a team member when assessing the students, and to cooperate knowledgeably when developing individualized education plans (IEPs). Multi-disciplinary training projects are encouraged for purposes of assisting students with low-incidence disabilities in reaching their maximum potential. Personnel trained under the priority, however, are not expected to become fully knowledgeable in other disciplines.

The Secretary realizes that the appropriateness of any collaboration and coordination is dependent upon the objectives of a particular project. Potential variation among projects is the reason that the collaboration and coordination is encouraged, not required.

Changes: None.
Comment: Some commenters
requested that certain occupations be
identified in the priority as types of
careers to which training projects could
be directed. Commenters suggested that
transition staff, direct care professionals,
case managers, orientation and mobility
instructors, interveners and
paraprofessionals be specifically
mentioned in the priority.

Discussion: The priority provides support for related services personnel who provide developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that assist children with low-incidence disabilities to benefit from special education. Transition staff, direct care professionals, case managers, orientation and mobility instructors, interveners and paraprofessionals are considered related service personnel under the priority. Because the population of individuals with low-

incidence disabilities requires multiple services, it would be difficult to provide an exhaustive list of all types of related service personnel that can be trained under this priority. Also, any list of related service personnel could be viewed as overly prescriptive. The Secretary prefers to allow individual projects the latitude to propose and justify their particular project concentration.

Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter requested clarification of the language in the priority that authorizes training of related service personnel through "comprehensive programs" or "specialty components of programs that emphasize children with low-incidence disabilities within a broader discipline."

*Discussion:* Comprehensive programs are those that are dedicated to the total area of preparation. Examples include, but are not limited to, programs that prepare psychologists to work with school-age children with disabilities, or physical therapy programs that prepare therapists to function within school settings. A specialty component of a program is a segment of a broader program devoted to a low-incidence disability. Examples include, but are not limited to, programs that prepare school psychologists to work with children who have traumatic brain injury or physical therapists to work with children birth to age three. Both types of preparation programs may be supported under this priority. The Secretary intends to include this clarifying information in the application package for the competition. Changes: None.

Comment: One commenter described the potential difficulty in using the State Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) to substantiate a State's need for trained personnel to serve children with low-incidence disabilities and asked if other means

might be used to document State needs.

Discussion: The Secretary believes that the CSPD should be used to support the need for qualified personnel. However, the Secretary also recognizes that projects may have to supplement, where appropriate, information provided in a particular State's CSPD. In the past, if a State's CSPD did not support its need for qualified personnel, other sources of data have been accepted for purposes of documenting need. The Secretary agrees that applicants should continue to have the option to use documentation in addition to the CSPD to demonstrate the lack of qualified personnel in a particular State. Regardless of the documentation used, it remains the responsibility of the

applicant to describe, support, and justify the personnel needs addressed by a particular project.

Changes: The priority has been amended to allow projects to use documentation in addition to the CSPD to show how their proposed activities address the need for trained personnel in a particular State.

Comment: One commenter asked that the priority emphasize the need to train males for careers in special education in light of the shortage of males who pursue such training.

Discussion: The Secretary recognizes that the majority of personnel serving the needs of children and youth with low-incidence disabilities are female. However, the general shortage of qualified personnel able to serve the low-incidence population justifies the need for preparing all potential candidates, both male and female.

Changes: None.

Comment: Two commenters questioned the approximate percentages of available funds to be awarded to the three components in the priority-55 percent for careers in special education, 30 percent for careers in related services, and 15 percent for careers in early intervention. One commenter sought a decrease in the percentage of funds allocated to the preparation of special educators, while another commenter recommended decreasing the percentage of funds reserved for special education and related services training projects in order to support a separate allocation for preparation of individuals who work with the visually impaired.

*Discussion:* The priority combines elements of three previous competitions that were funded separately and are now being combined to target the needs of the low-incidence population. The percentages in the priority are approximates and have been developed in consideration of past levels of support for the different competitions. Funding of particular projects depends on the availability of funds, the quality of the applications received, and the results of the peer review process. However, the Secretary notes that the amount of proposed funding for this competition currently surpasses the total amount of past awards for the three separate competitions.

*Changes:* None.

Comment: One commenter requested the priority be limited to special education personnel and specifically questioned the appropriatness of related service and early intervention specialists to work with the low-incidence population. The commenter asserted that narrowly prepared related

service personnel may not find employment because children with low-incidence disabilities are often widely dispersed among geographical locations. As a result, such programs may experience logistical difficulties and may be uneconomical.

Ďiscussion: The Secretary is aware of the logistical and economic difficulties associated with serving infants. toddlers, children and youth with lowincidence disabilities in rural and isolated areas, as well as in public school settings. The Secretary is also aware of many instances in which several children with low-incidence disabilities are educated within a single location. Regardless of setting, however, special educators, related service and early intervention personnel must be prepared appropriately to meet the needs of children with low-incidence disabilities. The Secretary encourages programs preparing personnel to include information and experience with low-incidence disabilities so that graduates of their programs are able to serve their customers in their areas of expertise no matter where they are found, as single students in an isolated setting or as one of a group found in aggregate settings. Federal support of these programs is intended to reduce the need for special educators, related service and early intervention personnel to learn on the job, which could otherwise be detrimental to students. Change: None.

Priority—Center To Promote Collaboration and Communication of Effective Practices for Children With, or At Risk of Developing, Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)

Comment: One commenter wrote that the allocation of funds under this priority would be more effective if provided directly to States with flexibility on how these funds are used. The commenter felt this would allow each State to address issues relating to the education of students with emotional disabilities specific to the needs of that State as identified by school districts and other agencies.

Discussion: One of the purposes of the Program for Children and Youth with Serious Emotional Disturbance is, "To provide information and training for those involved with, or who could be involved with children and youth with serious emotional disturbance" (34 CFR 328.1(b)(2)). The proposed Center is targeted toward the information aspect of this purpose as stated in the program regulations. There are other purposes of the Program, and some of those are also targeted by the priority, but to a lesser extent.

Given the limited resources, the Department believes that it would be most efficient, and have the greatest impact, to concentrate the funds rather than to distribute the resources in significantly smaller portions to the States. Particularly, the Secretary feels that in the area of information development and transfer, multiple smaller efforts by the States would generate more duplication and redundancy, and would have less overall impact and efficiency than one Center.

Changes: None.

Training Personnel for the Education of Individuals With Disabilities Program

Purpose of Program: The purpose of Grants for Personnel Training is to increase the quantity and improve the quality of personnel available to serve infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

Priorities: 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—Preparation of Special Education, Related Services, and Early Intervention Personnel To Serve Infants, Toddlers, Children, and Youth with Low-Incidence Disabilities

#### Background

The national demand for educational, related services, and early intervention personnel to serve infants, toddlers, children and youth with low-incidence disabilities exceeds available supply. However, because of the small number of these personnel needed in each State, institutions of higher education and individual States are reluctant to support the needed professional development programs. Of the programs that are available, not all are producing graduates with the prerequisite skills needed to meet the needs of the lowincidence disability population. Federal support is required to ensure an adequate supply of personnel to serve children with low-incidence disabilities and to improve the quality of appropriate training programs so that graduates possess necessary prerequisite

Priority: The Secretary establishes an absolute priority to support projects that increase the number and quality of personnel to serve children with low-incidence disabilities. This priority supports projects that provide preservice preparation of special

educators, early intervention personnel, and related services personnel at the associate, baccalaureate, master's, or specialist level.

The term "low-incidence disability" means a visual or hearing impairment, or simultaneous visual and hearing impairments (including deaf-blindness), significant mental retardation, or an impairment such as severe and multiple disabilities, severe orthopedic disabilities, autism, and traumatic brain injury, for which a small number of highly skilled and knowledgeable personnel are needed.

Applicants may propose to prepare one or more of the following types of personnel:

(1) Special educators including early childhood, speech and language, adapted physical education, and assistive technology personnel;

(2) Related services personnel who provide developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that assist children with low-incidence disabilities to benefit from special education. Both comprehensive programs and specialty components within a broader discipline that prepares personnel for work with the low-incidence population may be supported; or,

(3) Early intervention personnel who serve children birth through age 2 with disabilities and their families. Early intervention personnel include persons prepared to provide training for, or be consultants to, service providers and case managers.

The Secretary particularly encourages projects that address the needs of more than one State, provide multidisciplinary training, and include collaboration among several institutions and between training institutions and public schools. In addition, projects that foster successful coordination between special education and regular education professional development programs to meet the needs of children with lowincidence disabilities in inclusive settings are encouraged.

Projects must:

(a) Show how their proposed activities address the demands for trained personnel to serve children with low-incidence disabilities in the State or States whose needs the project is expected to meet. The extent of the need for trained personnel in a particular State must be supported by the State's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), or the CSPD supplemented by other additional relevant sources which the applicant demonstrates to be reliable and accurate.

(b) Prepare personnel to address the specialized needs of children with low-

incidence disabilities from different cultural and language backgrounds;

(c) Incorporate best practices in the design of the program and the curricula;

- (d) Incorporate curricula that focus on improving results for children with lowincidence disabilities;
- (e) Promote high expectations for students with low-incidence disabilities and foster access to the general curriculum in the regular classroom, wherever appropriate; and
- (f) Develop linkages with Education Department technical assistance providers to communicate information on program models used and program effectiveness.

Under this absolute priority, the Secretary plans to award approximately:

- 55 percent of the available funds for projects that support careers in special education, including early childhood educators;
- 30 percent of the available funds for projects that support careers in related services; and
- 15 percent of the available funds for projects that support careers in early intervention.

For Further Information Contact: Verna Hart, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 3519, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202–2641. Telephone: (202) 205–5392. FAX: (202) 205–9070. Internet: Verna Hart@ed.gov

Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205–7381.

Absolute Priority 2—Preparation of Personnel To Serve Children and Youth with High-Incidence Disabilities

# Background

In many States, there are insufficient numbers of personnel available to meet the needs of children with high-incidence disabilities. In addition, the quality of personnel preparation programs needs to be improved so that professionals will be better prepared to help children with high-incidence disabilities reach their individual developmental goals and meet challenging standards.

Priority: The Secretary establishes an absolute priority to support projects that increase the number and quality of personnel to serve children ages 3 through 21 with high-incidence disabilities such as mild or moderate mental retardation, speech or language impairments, emotional disturbance, or specific learning disabilities. This priority supports projects that provide preservice preparation of special educators, including early childhood

educators and related services personnel.

A preservice program is defined as one that leads toward a degree, certification, or professional standard, and may be supported at the associate, baccalaureate, master's or specialist level. A preservice program may include the preparation of currently employed personnel who are seeking additional degrees, certifications, or endorsements.

Applicants may propose to prepare one or more of the following types of personnel:

- (1) Special educators including speech and language, adapted physical education, and adaptive technology personnel;
- (2) Related services personnel who provide developmental, corrective, and other supportive services that assist children with high-incidence disabilities to benefit from special education; and
- (3) Early childhood special education or related services personnel who address the needs of children age three through five with high-incidence disabilities and their families.

The Secretary particularly encourages projects that foster successful coordination between special education and regular education professional development programs to meet the needs of children with high-incidence disabilities in inclusive settings.

Projects must:

(a) Show through letters of acknowledgement from States or other documentation that the proposed professional development activities support the Comprehensive Systems of Personnel Development of the State or States where personnel prepared by the project are expected to be employed;

(b) Show through letters of acknowledgement from States or other documentation that the proposed personnel preparation meets the standards for employment in the State or States where personnel prepared by the project are expected to be employed;

(c) Prepare personnel to address the needs of children with high-incidence disabilities from different cultural and language backgrounds;

(d) Incorporate best practices in the design of the program and curricula;

(e) Incorporate curricula that focus on improving results for children with high-incidence disabilities;

(f) Promote high expectations for children with high-incidence disabilities and foster access to the general curriculum in the regular classroom, wherever appropriate; and,

(g) Develop linkages with Education Department technical assistance providers to communicate information on program models used and program effectiveness.

Under this absolute priority, the Secretary plans to award approximately:

- 55 percent of the available funds for projects that support careers in special education;
- 30 percent of the available funds for projects that support careers in related services; and,
- 15 percent of the available funds for projects that support careers in early childhood education.

For Further Information Contact:
Martha Bokee, U.S. Department of
Education, 600 Independence Avenue,
S.W., Room 3078, Switzer Building,
Washington, D.C. 20202–2641.
Telephone: (202) 205–5509. FAX: (202)
205–9070. Internet: Marth\_a
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Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number: (202) 205–7381.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1431.

Program for Children and Youth With Serious Emotional Disturbance

Purpose of Program: To support projects designed to improve special education and related services to children and youth with serious emotional disturbance. Types of projects that may be supported under the program include, but are not limited to, research, development, and demonstration projects. Funds may also be used to develop and demonstrate approaches to assist and prevent children with emotional and behavioral problems from developing serious emotional disturbance.

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 an application that meets this absolute priority:

Absolute Priority—Center To Promote Collaboration and Communication of Effective Practices for Children With, or At Risk of Developing, Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED)

# Background

"Collaboration" is one of the seven strategic targets identified in the National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children and Youth with SED, developed by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) with extensive participation by a variety of individuals and organizations. Collaboration is critically important, at Federal, State, and local levels: "To promote systems change resulting in the

development of coherent services built around the individual needs of children and youth with and at risk of developing SED." In the past, there has been too little interaction between agencies and service providers, e.g., education, mental health, child welfare, and juvenile justice. Lack of coordination between and across agencies has had a negative impact on children and families. The new direction, demonstrated in many of the projects currently funded by OSEP and other agencies, is toward more "seamless" and "wrap-around" service delivery models built around the needs of students, families, and communities—systems that coordinate services, articulate responsibilities, and provide system-wide and agency-level accountability.

Many of these new model programs are only in their infancy, but are already documenting their effectiveness. It is essential that mechanisms be put in place to foster the identification, development, and exchange of information about these innovative projects—to communicate their findings and approaches nationally to other communities and agencies that are seeking solutions to the needs of children with mental health problems and their families.

Priority: The Secretary establishes an absolute priority to support one cooperative agreement for a center to promote Federal, State, and local interagency collaboration and facilitate the identification, development, and exchange of information on effective practices to improve services for children with SED and for children with emotional and behavioral problems who are at risk of developing SED. The center must coordinate and collaborate with related centers and activities across agencies, including but not limited to: OSEP's ongoing activities to validate and communicate the SED National Agenda; other OSEP and Departmentsupported technical assistance and information exchange activities; and the two rehabilitation research and training centers (RRTCs) on children's mental health jointly funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS). The center must provide and support information identification, development, and exchange for Federal, State, and community-based projects and programs providing services for

children with or at risk of SED in accordance with a plan that describes the centers schedule.

The center must:

- (1) Establish working relationships with Federal, State, and local programs and projects to identify and develop useful and usable information for, and to foster the exchange of usable and useful information with—
- (a) Federal, State, and communitybased programs and projects to assist them in their efforts; and
- (b) Broader audiences of individuals and organizations including parents and family members of children with or at risk of serious emotional disturbance.
- (2) Ensure and facilitate access, including electronic and telecommunication access, to information on SED, including information on projects funded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services; other offices in the Department of Education; the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Justice; and other sources such as foundations and associations, as appropriate.
- (3) Evaluate the impact of information identification, development, and exchange activities.

It is anticipated that initial information exchanges will rely heavily upon information already produced by programs and projects, but that additional information will be synthesized and developed by the center based on findings from the available research and information/findings provided to the center by programs and projects.

The center must also ensure that the targets and cross-cutting themes of OSEP's National Agenda for Achieving Better Results for Children and Youth with SED are addressed in the center's information activities. Four areas of particular interest that must be addressed in information activities are: (1) Early identification, intervention. and prevention; (2) behavior management, conflict resolution, and other approaches to creating more productive and safe educational environments for all students; (3) personnel preparation; and (4) evaluation of community-based (local) program and service effectiveness.

Under this priority, the Secretary intends to award one 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 will consider, in addition to the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a), the factors noted below, and the recommendation of a review team consisting of three experts selected by the Secretary. The services of the review team, including a two-day visit to the center, are to be performed during the last half of the center's second year and must be included in that year's evaluation required under 34 CFR 75.590. In its budget for the second year, the center must set aside funds to cover the costs of the review team. These funds are estimated to be approximately \$4,000.

The Secretary will also consider the following:

- (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 evaluation methods and information activities demonstrate the potential for advancing significant new knowledge.

The Secretary particularly encourages applicants for this cooperative agreement to incorporate technologically innovative approaches in all aspects of center activities, to improve their efficiency and impact.

The project must budget for two trips annually to Washington, D.C., for: (1) A two-day Research Project Directors' meeting; and (2) another meeting, in the first quarter of each project year, to meet and review project plans and accomplishments with the OSEP project officer and other OSEP and other agency staff to share information on the project.

For Further Information Contact: Tom V. Hanley, U.S. Department of Education, 600 Independence Avenue, S.W., Room 3526, Switzer Building, Washington, D.C. 20202–2641.
Telephone: (202) 205–8110. FAX: (202) 205–8105. Internet: Tom\_Hanley@ed.gov

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

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1426.

Dated: May 3, 1996.

Judith E. Heumann,

Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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