

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; Notice of Proposed Priority

SUMMARY: The Secretary proposes a priority for the Special Education—Training and Information for Parents of Children with Disabilities program administered by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended. The Secretary may use this priority in Fiscal Year 1999 and subsequent years. The Secretary takes this action to focus Federal assistance on identified needs to improve results for children with disabilities. The proposed priority is intended to ensure wide and effective use of program funds.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before April 26, 1999.

ADDRESSES: All comments concerning this proposed priority should be addressed to: Debra Sturdivant, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Room 3521, Switzer Building, Washington, DC 20202-2641. Comments may also be sent through the Internet: comments@ed.gov

You must include the term "Training and Information for Parents of Children with Disabilities" in the subject line of your electronic message.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information regarding this proposed priority contact Debra Sturdivant. Telephone: (202) 205-8038. Individuals who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the TDD number at (202) 205-8953. FAX: (202) 205-8105 (FAX is the preferred method for requesting information). Internet: Debra_Sturdivant@ed.gov

Individuals with disabilities may obtain a copy of this notice in an alternate format (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) by calling (202) 205-8113.

On request the Department supplies an appropriate aid, such as a reader or print magnifier, to an individual with a disability who needs assistance to review the comments or other documents in the public rulemaking docket for this priority. An individual with a disability who wants to schedule an appointment for this type of aid may call (202) 205-8113 or (202) 260-9895.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This notice contains one proposed priority under the Training and Information for Parents of Children with Disabilities program authorized by IDEA. This proposed priority supports the National

Education Goals by helping to improve results for children with disabilities.

The Secretary will announce the final priority in a notice in the **Federal Register**. The final priority will be determined by responses to this notice, available funds, and other considerations of the Department. Funding of a particular project depends on the availability of funds, the content of the final priority, and the quality of the applications received. The publication of this proposed priority does not preclude the Secretary from proposing additional priorities, nor does it limit the Secretary to funding only this priority, subject to meeting applicable rulemaking requirements.

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.

Purpose of Program

The purpose of this program is to ensure that parents of children with disabilities receive training and information to help improve results for their children.

Under section 682(e)(1) and (e)(2) of IDEA, the Secretary is required to: (1) make at least one award to a parent organization in each State, unless the Secretary does not receive an application from such an organization in each State of sufficient quality to warrant approval; and (2) select among applications submitted by parent organizations in a State in a manner that ensures the most effective assistance to parents, including parents in urban and rural areas, in the State.

Eligible applicants for awards under this priority are parent organizations, as defined in section 682(g) of IDEA. A parent organization is a private nonprofit organization (other than an institution of higher education) that (1) has a board of directors, the parent and professional members of which are broadly representative of the population to be served and the majority of whom are parents of children with disabilities, that includes individuals with disabilities working in the fields of special education, related services, and early intervention; or (2) if the private nonprofit organization does not have such a board, it has a membership that represents the interest of individuals with disabilities and must establish a special governing board with the same requirements of paragraph (1) and develops a memorandum of understanding between this special governing board and the board of directors of the organization that clearly outlines the relationship between the

board and the committee and the decision making responsibilities and authority of each.

Priority

Under section 682 of the Act, and 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3), the Secretary proposes to give an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priority. The Secretary proposes to fund under this competition only those applications that meet this proposed priority:

Proposed Absolute Priority—Parent Training and Information Centers (84.328M)

Background

The IDEA Amendments of 1997 strengthen the role of parents and increase their involvement in decisions about their children's education. Other changes in the law, increased dependence on and the use of technology, and a greater emphasis on networking and promoting partnerships between parents and school personnel require the PTI centers to be strengthened and refocused. In order to allocate resources more equitably, create a unified system of service delivery, and provide the broadest coverage for the parents and families in every State, the Department will begin to make awards in four(4)-year cycles for each State. Beginning in FY 1999, applications for awards will be accepted for the following States: Arizona, Delaware, District of Columbia, Iowa, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.

In addition to the above State awards, the Secretary intends to fund a maximum of two awards. One award that focuses on the needs of Native-American families who have children with disabilities and one award that focuses on the needs of Military families who have children with disabilities.

Until the first four(4)-year cycle is completed, there may be a need to have an interim schedule for awards in States where there are more than one PTI and their current awards do not have the same end date. Therefore, we will hold a competition for one or more awards in these States for the time periods needed to match the end date of the last Center funded. Applications will be accepted for FY 1999 interim competitions for the following States: (1) California—3-year award, (2) Illinois—3-year award, and (3) New York—2-year award.

Priority

The Secretary proposes to establish an absolute priority to support parent training and information centers that—

(a) Provide training and information that meets the training and information needs of parents of children with disabilities in the area served by the center, particularly underserved parents and parents of children who may be inappropriately identified;

(b) Assist parents to understand the availability of, and how to effectively use, procedural safeguards under IDEA, including encouraging the use, and explaining the benefits, of alternative methods of dispute resolution, such as the mediation process described in IDEA;

(c) Serve the parents of infants, toddlers, and children with the full range of disabilities;

(d) Assist parents to—

(1) Better understand the nature of their children's disabilities and their educational and developmental needs;

(2) Communicate effectively with personnel responsible for providing special education, early intervention, and related services;

(3) Participate in decision making processes and the development of individualized education programs and individualized family service plans;

(4) Obtain appropriate information about the range of options, programs, services, and resources available to assist children with disabilities and their families;

(5) Understand the provisions of the Act for the education of, and the provision of early intervention services to, children with disabilities; and

(6) Participate in school reform activities;

(f) Contract with the State education agency, if the State elects to contract with the parent training and information center, for the purpose of meeting with parents who choose not to use the mediation process to encourage the use, and explain the benefits, of mediation consistent with sections 615(e)(2)(B) and (D) of IDEA;

(g) Network with appropriate clearinghouses, including organizations conducting national dissemination activities under section 685(d) of IDEA, and with other national, State, and local organizations and agencies, such as protection and advocacy agencies, that serve parents and families of children with the full range of disabilities;

(h) Establish cooperative relations with the Community Parent Resource Center or Centers in their State in accordance with section 683(b)(3) of IDEA; and

(i) Annually report to the Secretary on—

(1) The number of parents to whom it provided information and training in the most recently concluded fiscal year, and

(2) The effectiveness of strategies used to reach and serve parents, including underserved parents of children with disabilities; and

(j) If there is more than one parent center in a particular State, coordinate their activities to ensure the most effective assistance to parents in that State.

An applicant must identify the strategies it will undertake—

(a) To ensure that the needs for training and information of underserved parents of children with disabilities in the areas to be served are effectively met, particularly in underserved areas of the State; and

(b) To work with the community-based organizations, particularly in the underserved areas of the State.

A parent training and information center that receives assistance under this absolute priority may also conduct the following activities—

(a) Provide information to teachers and other professionals who provide special education and related services to children with disabilities;

(b) Assist students with disabilities to understand their rights and responsibilities on reaching the age of majority, as included under section 615(m) of IDEA; and

(c) Assist parents of children with disabilities to be informed participants in the development and implementation of the State improvement plan under IDEA.

A project's budget must include funds to attend a two-day Project Directors' meeting to be held in Washington, D.C. each year of the project.

In order to demonstrate eligibility to receive a grant, an applicant must describe how its board or special governing committee meets the criteria for a parent organization in section 682(g) of IDEA. In addition, any parent organization that establishes a special governing committee under section 682(g)(2) of IDEA must demonstrate that the by-laws of its organization allows the governing committee to be responsible for operating the project (consistent with existing fiscal policies of its organization).

Current funding levels, population of school age children, and the relative proportion of children living in poverty will be considered in determining funding levels for grants.

Intergovernmental Review

The Training and Information for Parents of Children with Disabilities program in this notice 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 priority.

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, SW, 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.

Electronic Access to This Document

Anyone may view this document, as well as all other Department of Education documents published in the **Federal Register**, in text or portable document format (pdf) on the World Wide Web at either of the following sites:

<http://ocfo.ed.gov/fedreg.htm>

<http://www.ed.gov/news.html>

To use the pdf you must have the Adobe Acrobat Reader Program with Search, which is available free at either of the previous sites. If you have questions about using the pdf, call the U.S. Government Printing Office at (202) 512-1530 or, toll free at 1-888-293-6498.

Anyone may also view these documents in text copy only on an electronic bulletin board of the Department. Telephone: (202) 219-1511 or, toll free, 1-800-222-4922. The documents are located under Option G—Files/Announcements, Bulletins, and Press Releases.

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

(Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1482)
(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: Training and Information for Parents of Children with Disabilities, (84.328))

Dated: March 19, 1999.

Curtis L. Richards,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

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