

including those of parents and teachers, where appropriate.

(D) Whether there is substantial staff commitment to the work of the center.

(E) The contributions of primary researchers (other than researchers at the proposed center) and the appropriateness of such researchers' experiences and expertise in the context of the proposed center activities, and the adequacy of such primary researchers' time and commitment to achievement of the mission of the center.

(F) The manner in which the results of the education research will be disseminated for further use, including how the center will work with the Office of Reform Assistance and Dissemination.

For Applications or Information Contact: Ron Anson, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20208-5510. Telephone: (202) 219-2214. Internet address: (ron_anson@ed.gov). 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.

Information about the Department's funding opportunities, including copies of application notices or 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://gcs.ed.gov); or on the World Wide Web (at <http://gcs.ed.gov>).

However, the official application notice for a discretionary grant competition is the notice published in the **Federal Register**.

Program Authority: 20 U.S.C. 6031(c)(1)(B)(i).

Dated: April 7, 1997.

Ramon C. Cortines,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement.

[FR Doc. 97-9314 Filed 4-10-97; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Educational Research and Development Centers Program

AGENCY: Department of Education.

ACTION: Notice of final priority for fiscal year (FY) 1997.

SUMMARY: The Secretary announces a final priority under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program. The Secretary takes this action to support research on policymaking

and policy structures to achieve excellence in teaching.

EFFECTIVE DATE: This priority takes effect on May 12, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ron Anson, U.S. Department of Education, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW., Washington, DC 20208-5510. Telephone: (202) 219-2214. Internet: (ron_anson@ed.gov). 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. 6001 *et seq.*) supports educational research and development activities. The National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policy-Making, and Management is one 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.

The National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policy-Making, and Management supports a range of research, development, and dissemination activities focused on core issues in education. Activities are carried out by national research and development centers, field-initiated studies, and a variety of directed research, development, and dissemination activities.

The Secretary believes that increasing the capacity of the nation's education system to improve the quality of education depends 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 improvement efforts. The final priority for research on policy and teaching excellence is for a research and development center to be supported by the National Institute on Educational Governance, Finance, Policy-Making, and Management.

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.

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, the Secretary published a notice of proposed priority in the **Federal Register** on February 18, 1997 (62 FR 7218) for a national educational research and development center that would carry out sustained research and development to address problems and issues related to policy and teaching excellence. Written public comments were to be submitted to the Secretary by March 20, 1997.

The Secretary reviewed the written public comments and made no changes to the proposed priority. The reasoning for this decision is explained in the Appendix to this notice.

Analysis of Comments and Changes

In response to the Secretary's invitation in the notice of proposed priorities, eight parties submitted written comments. An analysis of the comments is published as an appendix to this notice of final priority. Major issues are grouped according to subject. Technical and other minor changes and suggested changes the Secretary is not legally authorized to make under the applicable statutory authority are not addressed.

Absolute Priority: Policy and Teaching Excellence

Under 34 CFR 75.105(c)(3) the Secretary gives an absolute preference to applications that meet the following priority. The Secretary funds only one application that meets the priority listed below. Funding this priority will depend on the availability of funds and the quality of applications received. The Secretary supports a national research and development center on research on policy and teaching excellence.

(A) This center must—

(1) Conduct a coherent, sustained program of research and development to address problems and issues of national significance in the specific priority area, using a well-conceptualized and theoretically sound framework;

(2) Contribute to the development and advancement of theory in the specific priority area;

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

(4) Conduct work of sufficient size, scope, and duration to produce definitive guidance for improvement efforts and future research;

(5) Address issues of both equity and excellence in education for all students in the specific priority area; and

(6) Document, report, and disseminate information about its research findings and other accomplishments in ways that will facilitate effective use of that information by decisionmakers and others as appropriate.

(B) In carrying out its program of work, the center must also:

(1) Conduct research and development on the full range of policy issues relevant to teaching excellence and other associated policy issues;

(2) Conduct a program of research and development that will aid policymakers throughout the Nation at all levels of government and at all levels of the educational system to improve policies and policy decisions, as well as policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes, in order to achieve the goal of teaching excellence and ensure continuous efforts related to that goal;

(3) Examine the effects that different policies for fostering or sustaining teaching excellence, or both, have on continuous school improvement, teacher performance, and student learning;

(4) Examine the interactions of various policies affecting teacher performance and teaching excellence and the costs and benefits of different policies;

(5) Examine the role of policy coordination and alignment in the creation of an overall policy structure that supports excellence in teaching; and

(6) If appropriate, investigate education policies in other nations as they relate to and can inform education policies in the United States.

Post-Award Requirements

The Secretary establishes 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) Collaborate with OERI and appropriate clients in identifying significant new issues and 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) 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. These 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

(c) Provide yearly summaries of findings usable by education decisionmakers and practitioners and others as appropriate and, 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 final priority does not solicit applications. A notice inviting applications under this competition is published elsewhere in this issue of the **Federal Register**.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number 84.308B: Educational Research and Development Centers Program)

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

Dated: April 7, 1997.

Ramon C. Cortines,

Acting Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement.

Appendix—Analysis of Comments and Changes

Summarized below are comments which referred to the Absolute Priority.

Focusing Research on Specific Subject Matter Areas

Comments: Two commenters advocated that research on teaching excellence be done in specific subject matter areas. One commenter further recommended making secondary mathematics and science a priority for a subject area to be researched.

Discussion: The Secretary believes that grant applicants should be allowed maximum flexibility to propose research agendas within the absolute priority area. Therefore, those applicants who wish to make the case for a subject-specific approach to this area are free to do so.

Changes: None.

Range of Issues Related to Teacher Development

Comments: Two commenters indicated that the research should address the sequence of teacher professional development, i.e., recruitment, pre- and in-service training, induction, allocation of teachers across and within schools, retention, and the provision of appropriate organizational settings and economic and psychological incentives to enhance and maintain teaching excellence.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that policies concerning the range of issues related to teaching are important and believes these are covered under (B)(1) which asks for research on "the full range of policy issues relevant to teaching excellence and other associated policy issues."

Changes: None.

Gender Equity

Comment: One commenter recommended that the center include a project for preparing and supporting teachers to promote gender equity.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that promotion of gender equity is an important topic and believes this topic is covered under (A)(5) and may be included as the applicant sees fit.

Changes: None.

Broader Context of Education Reform and Its Effects on Teaching Excellence

Comments: Three commenters addressed issues concerning the broader context in which teaching excellence takes place. Their comments stated that too narrow a focus on teaching policy will not include the many ways policy affects teaching excellence. In particular they mentioned the need to study the interaction between subsystems such as finance, governance, teaching expectations, teacher testing, outside school influences, public opinion, labor relations, and economic, organizational and psychological influences.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the study of policy and teaching excellence includes the study of the context in which teaching excellence occurs and believes such concerns are covered in the multiple statements under (B) (2) to (5) and may be included as the applicant sees fit.

Changes: None.

Relationship Between Teaching and Learning

Comment: Two commenters recommended that the connection between teaching and student learning or educational productivity be made more explicit.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that the relationship between teaching and learning is important and believes it is addressed in (B)(3), “* * * the effects that different policies for fostering or sustaining teaching excellence or both have on continuous school improvement, teacher performance, and student learning.”

Changes: None.

Variable Policy Effects Depending on Geographic and Demographic Variation

Comment: One commenter noted that policies may have different effects depending upon the state or region in which policies are carried out or the demographics of those being affected, e.g., the disproportionate relationship between the number of male administrators and of female teachers or the racial imbalance in predominately minority school districts.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that there may be variability in the effects of policies and believes that (A) (3) and (4), which require “scientifically rigorous studies” that are of “sufficient size, scope * * *” address this concern. In

addition, the priorities addressing context, (B) (2) to (5), also address these issues.

Changes: None.

Involvement of a Variety of Researchers and Decisionmakers in Carrying Out the Research

Comment: One commenter recommended that experts outside the traditional education system be part of the research framework and stated that substantive connections with the policy community are essential.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that research on policy and teaching excellence should take advantage of a wide range of expertise and experience and believes (A) (3) and (4), requiring “rigorous studies” of “sufficient * * * scope” plus (B) (2) to (5) address this concern.

Changes: None.

Unintended Consequences of Policies

Comment: One commenter stated that we often learn most from looking at how well-intended policies may inhibit the education system by over prescription and allowing micro-management.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that studying unintended consequences of policies is often important and believes this is addressed under (B) (3) and (4).

Changes: None.

Diversity and the Teacher Workforce

Comment: One commenter encouraged a specific focus for the research on the role of minorities in the teaching workforce due to the diversity of the student population.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that issues concerning minorities in the teaching workforce are important and believes that (A)(1) “to address problems and issues of national significance” and (B)(1) to “conduct research and development on the full range of policy issues relevant to teaching excellence and other associated policy issues” include the opportunity to address the issues surrounding minorities in the teaching workforce.

Changes: None.

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