

Secretary will consider the requirements of 34 CFR 75.253(a), and in addition—

(a) The recommendation of a review team consisting of experts selected by the Secretary which review will be conducted during the last half of the project's second year in Washington, DC. Projects must budget for the travel associated with this one-day intensive review;

(b) The timeliness and effectiveness with which all requirements of the negotiated cooperative agreement have been or are being met by the Center; and

(c) Evidence of the degree to which the Center's activities have contributed to a changed practice and improved student outcomes.

Absolute Priority 3—The National Coordination and Dissemination Center To Improve Strategies for the Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children With Disabilities (84.326P)

Background

The National Commission on Teaching for America's Future (NCTAF) and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) emphasize the importance of well-qualified teachers to ensuring student achievement. NCLB, in fact, defines what is required for a teacher to be "highly qualified" and establishes deadlines for the employment of highly qualified teachers.

State reported data indicate persistent shortages of special education teachers including large numbers of vacant positions or positions filled by teachers who were not fully certified.

The characteristics of children with disabilities have also changed, adding complexity to the task of providing appropriate services. There are more children who have entered life with marked disabilities, who are expected to continue to thrive, and who require interdisciplinary approaches that provide essential support. Additionally, the cultural and linguistic characteristics of the student population have changed significantly.

In 1998, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) funded the National Clearinghouse on Careers and Professions Related to Early Intervention and Education for Children with Disabilities (Professions Clearinghouse). At one time, clearinghouses took the passive role of providing information to those who requested it, but as national needs changed, a more proactive approach was necessary. The Professions Clearinghouse took the first steps towards this approach by providing

technical assistance to several States to help them improve their recruitment and retention plans, and targeting recruitment campaigns toward new populations of potential teachers and related services providers. These technical assistance and support activities need to be extended and additional creative strategies must be designed and implemented so that more highly qualified personnel are available to meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Priority

The purpose of this priority is to fund a cooperative agreement to support a national coordination and dissemination center to enhance the Nation's capacity to recruit, prepare, and retain a highly qualified, diverse work force of early intervention personnel, educators, and related service personnel to improve services and outcomes for infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities. To accomplish this objective, the Center must:

(a) Conduct nationwide outreach activities to encourage individuals, including individuals with disabilities and individuals from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds, to pursue careers in early intervention, special education, and related services, including paraeducators and related services assistants. The Center must develop, implement and maintain comprehensive and coordinated communication campaigns that:

(1) Utilize a wide range of media outlets; and

(2) Are customized to attract individuals from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds, individuals with disabilities, and individuals across a broad age range including mid-career changers.

(b) Assist individuals interested in pursuing a career in early intervention, special education, or related services by helping them to identify positions in high demand and providing information about specific training opportunities appropriate to their needs. The Center must:

(1) Develop and regularly update information on ongoing and emerging areas of personnel need identified by States, LEAs, early intervention service providers, and other entities;

(2) Develop and maintain a comprehensive, up-to-date, easily accessible, database of personnel preparation opportunities available across the country. This database must reflect the full range of preparation opportunities, including both traditional and alternative routes and both

professional and paraprofessional programs;

(3) Develop and regularly update information on available trainee financial support including ED-supported financial assistance, Federal loans, and other public and private sources of trainee support; and

(4) Conduct broad-based outreach efforts and establish effective linkages with other information providers to ensure widespread use of the Center services by interested individuals, including individuals with disabilities as well as culturally and linguistically diverse individuals.

(c) Provide assistance to State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), institutions of higher education (IHEs), community colleges (CCs), agencies that administer IDEA Part C programs, and other appropriate entities by disseminating information that will help them to improve the quality of professionals and paraprofessionals who serve infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities, including children with limited English proficiency and children from culturally diverse backgrounds. The Center must:

(1) Synthesize, and disseminate information on research-based approaches to professional preparation and career development for special education, related services, and early intervention personnel with a particular focus on evidence-based mentoring and induction strategies to promote personnel retention. In particular, in collaboration with the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative, the Center must coordinate activities with urban districts;

(2) Disseminate information on national and State professional certification and licensure standards, with a particular focus on how standards are changing to reflect research-based knowledge and practice and new legal requirements such as those in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act;

(3) Disseminate information on effective strategies for promoting the credentialing of currently practicing personnel who are less than fully qualified for their positions;

(4) In collaboration with appropriate entities, develop and disseminate guidelines for instituting certification standards for paraeducators where such standards do not yet exist; and,

(5) Develop and disseminate periodic highlights or reviews of pressing issues, trends, and emerging research regarding preparation and career development for early intervention, special education, and related services personnel.