

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

RIN 1820-ZA29

**Special Demonstration Programs—
Model Demonstrations To Improve the
Literacy and Employment Outcomes of
Individuals With Disabilities****AGENCY:** Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education.**ACTION:** Notice of proposed priorities.

SUMMARY: The Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) proposes priorities under the Special Demonstration Programs. The Assistant Secretary may use these priorities in fiscal year (FY) 2003 and in later years. We take this action to focus attention on the adult literacy needs of individuals with disabilities pursuing employment under the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program. We intend that projects funded under these priorities will demonstrate that certain specific literacy services may raise the literacy levels and earnings of individuals with disabilities compared to individuals who receive the usual vocational rehabilitation (VR) services.

DATES: We must receive your comments on or before August 25, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Address all comments about these proposed priorities to Susan-Marie Marsh, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW., Switzer Building, room 3316, Washington, DC 20202-2641. If you prefer to send your comments through the Internet, use the following address: *Susan-Marie.Marsh@ed.gov*.

You must include the term "Model Demonstrations to Improve the Literacy and Employment Outcomes of Individuals With Disabilities" in the subject line of your electronic message.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Susan-Marie Marsh. Telephone: (202) 358-2796 or via Internet: *Susan-Marie.Marsh@ed.gov*.

If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), you may call the TDD number at (202) 205-8133.

Individuals with disabilities may obtain this document in an alternative format (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, or computer diskette) on request to the contact person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Invitation To Comment**

We invite you to submit comments regarding these proposed priorities. We invite you to assist us in complying

with the specific requirements of Executive Order 12866 and its overall requirement of reducing regulatory burden that might result from these proposed priorities. Please let us know of any further opportunities we should take to reduce potential costs or increase potential benefits while preserving the effective and efficient administration of the program.

During and after the comment period, you may inspect all public comments about these proposed priorities in room 3038, Switzer Building, 330 C Street, SW., Washington, DC, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday of each week except Federal holidays.

**Assistance to Individuals With
Disabilities in Reviewing the
Rulemaking Record**

On request, we will supply 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 record for these proposed priorities. If you want to schedule an appointment for this type of aid, please contact the person listed under **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT**.

We will announce the final priorities in a notice in the **Federal Register**. We will determine the final priorities after considering responses to this notice and other information available to the Department. This notice does not preclude us from proposing or funding additional priorities, subject to meeting applicable rulemaking requirements.

Note: This notice does not solicit applications. In any year in which we choose to use these proposed priorities, we invite applications through a notice in the **Federal Register**. When inviting applications we designate the priority as absolute, competitive preference, or invitational. The effect of each type of priority follows:

Absolute priority: Under an absolute priority, we consider only applications that meet the priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(3)).

Competitive preference priority: Under a competitive preference priority, we give competitive preference to an application by either (1) awarding additional points, depending on how well or the extent to which the application meets the competitive priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(2)(i)); or (2) selecting an application that meets the competitive priority over an application of comparable merit that does not meet the priority (34 CFR 75.105(c)(2)(ii)).

Invitational priority: Under an invitational priority, we are particularly interested in applications that meet the

invitational priority. However, we do not give an application that meets the invitational priority a competitive or absolute preference over other applications (34 CFR 75.105(c)(1)).

Priorities**Background**

Preliminary data from the *Longitudinal Study of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program* suggest reading achievement levels are highly positively correlated with earnings. Data also indicate that VR agencies provide basic literacy services to only one percent of the VR population. As a result of these findings, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) is testing two instructional reading curricula: The Lindamood-Bell Language Program (LBLP) and the Wilson Reading System® (WRS). Both curricula have proven effective with adults with disabilities. However, the impact of these curricula on the literacy skills of adults with disabilities has not been assessed, and neither curriculum has been studied in a VR setting by RSA. Thus, RSA is interested in testing the impact of each curriculum on the literacy of adults with disabilities against the traditional services provided by VR.

Both curricula are phonics-based, but their instructional models differ. The WRS, based on the principles of Orton-Gillingham methodology, focuses on decoding and spelling for adults who have been unable to learn encoding and decoding through traditional basal methods, whole language, or other phonics programs and who require multisensory language instruction to master the phonological coding system of English. Teaching models of direct instruction with drill are implemented. The WRS Web site address is: <http://www.WilsonLanguage.com>.

The LBLP is used to develop students' cognitive and linguistic abilities in the areas of phonemic and orthographic awareness (symbol imagery) for decoding and spelling, and concept imagery for vocabulary development and oral and written language comprehension. The curriculum is student-driven, sequential, and constructivist-based, aimed at ultimately developing students' thinking or reasoning skills necessary for effective language processing (including reading), including all those areas predictive for reading success, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. All of LBLP's instructional approaches use a Socratic pedagogy whereby the teacher leads the