

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 final priorities.**SUMMARY:** The Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services announces 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. These priorities are effective September 29, 2003.

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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: Data from the *Longitudinal Study of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program* suggest reading achievement levels are highly positively correlated with earnings. However, VR agencies provide basic literacy services to only one percent of the VR population. As a result of these findings, the Assistant Secretary is interested in testing the impact of two instructional reading curricula (the Lindamood-Bell Language Program (LBLP) and the Wilson Reading System(r) (WRS)) on the literacy of adults with disabilities against the traditional services provided by VR.

We published a notice of proposed priorities for this program in the **Federal**

Register on July 25, 2003 (68 FR 44186).

The notice of proposed priorities included a discussion of the significant issues and analysis used in the determination of these priorities.

Except for minor editorial and technical revisions, there are no differences between the notice of proposed priorities and this notice of final priorities.

Analysis of Comments and Changes

In response to our invitation in the notice of proposed priorities, three parties submitted comments on the proposed priorities. An analysis of the comments and of any changes in the priorities since publication of the notice of proposed priorities follows.

Generally, we do not address technical and other minor changes and suggested changes the law does not authorize us to make under the applicable statutory authority.

Comments: One commenter recommended that it would be better to compare a “phonics-based” approach with a “whole-word” approach using an “eclectic” approach to see which approach would provide the most gains in literacy skills and, thus, employment.

Discussion: While the idea of a comparison study in approaches is interesting, we are trying to rigorously test two research-based approaches to enhancing the literacy of adults with disabilities who are VR consumers. The interventions chosen fit those parameters. Current research suggests that we can teach to the consumers’ “weaknesses” effectively using these methods, and we are testing this specific population to identify those weaknesses and strengthen them. The problem with the “eclectic” approach or a method composed of elements drawn from various sources is that the treatment would vary, and this would jeopardize the research design and make it difficult to draw specific conclusions concerning the effectiveness of the treatment used.

Change: None.

Comments: Two commenters indicated that the interventions will enable adults with disabilities to participate in literacy curricula that may ultimately be necessary for successful employment and that persons with barriers to employment resulting from low reading ability will benefit greatly from the opportunity to increase skills in basic reading, writing, and language. Additionally, they noted that it is important that literacy programs such as the LBLP or the WRS be assessed to determine their effectiveness with persons with disabilities in VR settings.

Discussion: We agree with these comments.

Change: None.

Note: This notice does not solicit applications. In any year in which we choose to use one or more of these priorities, we invite applications through a notice in the **Federal Register**. When inviting applications we designate each 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**Model Demonstrations To Improve the
Literacy Skills and Employment
Outcomes of Individuals With
Disabilities**

This priority supports projects that demonstrate the effect literacy services and instruction have on improving literacy skills of targeted groups of VR consumers and the effect on their employment and earnings outcomes. Projects must demonstrate how VR offices can effectively integrate literacy services into their service delivery systems and can best provide literacy services and instruction to a targeted group of VR consumers.

Evaluation

Projects must assure cooperation with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and RSA’s outside evaluator in meeting the evaluation needs of the project and RSA. Project cooperation with RSA’s outside evaluator must include the following:

1. The assessment of all entering VR consumers in the designated project service area using brief methodologically acceptable screening instruments for learning disabilities and literacy levels to determine their eligibility for the project. The