

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

RIN 1820-ZA28

**Special Demonstration Programs—  
Model Demonstration Projects—  
Mentoring for Transition-Age Youth  
and Young Adults With Disabilities**

**AGENCY:** Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Department of Education.

**ACTION:** Notice of final priority, definitions, and application requirements.

**SUMMARY:** The Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services announces a priority, definitions, and application requirements for Special Demonstration Projects—Model Demonstration Projects—Mentoring for Transition-Age Youth and Young Adults With Disabilities. The Assistant Secretary may use this priority, definitions, and application requirements for competitions in fiscal year (FY) 2003 and later years. We take this action to focus attention on an area of national need. We intend the priority to increase meaningful postsecondary education and quality employment outcomes through a mentoring system within State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** This priority, definitions, and application requirements are effective September 30, 2003.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Alfreda Reeves. Telephone: (202) 205-9361 or via Internet: [Alfreda.Reeves@ed.gov](mailto:Alfreda.Reeves@ed.gov).

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If you use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD), you may call the TDD number at (202) 205-4475.

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

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** These model demonstration projects would test whether increases in meaningful postsecondary education and quality employment outcomes can be achieved through the use of mentors by State VR agencies.

The authority for these projects is in title III, section 303(b) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (the Act) (29 U.S.C. 762(b)(3)). Under this competition the Assistant Secretary makes awards to State VR agencies.

The educational and employment achievements of youth and young adults with disabilities lag significantly behind those of their peers without disabilities. The Office of Special Education Programs reports that only 57.4 percent of youth with disabilities graduate from high school with a standard diploma. In addition, the Final Report of the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, July 2002, estimates that only one-third of youth and young adults with disabilities receive appropriate job training and assistance. Some of the barriers to autonomy and achievement encountered by youth and young adults with disabilities include uncoordinated approaches to transition across service systems, discontinuity between schools and adult disability services, poor preparation of teens for adult life, lack of incentives or supports for early transition planning, and lack of school and community supports.

For transitioning youth and young adults with disabilities, developing positive self-confidence, resilience, and an expectation for achievement in a competitive, high-quality career must take place early in their academic career. Mentors or role models with whom students can identify, and who have shared interests, can have a positive impact that will last a lifetime. These individuals can play a vital role in eliminating barriers to autonomy, community integration, and achievement by motivating youth and young adults with disabilities to develop social competence, academic motivation, career awareness, and other appropriate skills needed for employment and independent living. Successful mentoring programs under this model demonstration program will provide appropriate supports, based on the individual's unique strengths, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. An overall objective of the mentoring program is to encourage youth and young adults with disabilities in meeting and achieving a desired optimal career goal or postsecondary education.

We published a notice of proposed priority, definitions, and application requirements for this program in the **Federal Register** on August 5, 2003 (68 FR 46422). Except for minor editorial and technical revisions, there are no differences between the notice of

proposed priority, definitions, and application requirements and this final notice.

**Analysis of Comments and Changes**

In response to our invitation in the notice of proposed priority, definitions, and application requirements, six parties submitted comments. An analysis of the comments and of any changes in the priority, definitions, and application requirements since publication of the proposed notice 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.

**Comment:** Two commenters supported the priority as written. One stated that the priority should retain the requirement for involvement by consumer-controlled organizations, since these organizations are better at ensuring that disabled individuals receive significant encouragement to achieve their highest level potential. In addition, this commenter supported the definition of “mentor” as it appears in the notice of proposed priority, definitions, and application requirements. The second commenter stated that research demonstrates that there is a greater potential for success if consumers are involved and, thus, the commenter supports the requirement that applicants collaborate with consumer-controlled organizations.

**Discussion:** We agree that consumer involvement is essential to the design of the demonstration projects funded under this priority and that consumer-controlled organizations may be best situated to identify and provide appropriate mentors for transition-age youth and young adults with disabilities.

**Change:** None.

**Comment:** Three commenters stated that we are excluding a vast array of individuals with diverse backgrounds that could serve as exceptional mentors by limiting mentors to individuals with disabilities. One of these commenters suggested revising the definition of “mentor” and “mentoring” to mean a more successful, experienced person, preferably with a disability. Another of these commenters suggested expanding the definition of “mentor” and “mentoring” to include parents of disabled youth. The third objection to the definition of mentor suggested that it should include both adults who have disabilities and adults who do not have disabilities. This commenter believes that it is a challenge to recruit and retain qualified adult mentors from the general