

- If a State chooses to consolidate its use of State administration funds (under section 14201 of the ESEA), how the consolidation of these funds relates to the consolidated State plan under section 14302.

- Any critical timelines and benchmarks that will guide related and ongoing activities.

3. How will the State enable interested local educational agencies, in accordance with section 14305 of the ESEA, to develop their own consolidated plans for the use of Federal funds, and help to develop the capacity of LEAs and schools to use all of their funds to support high academic achievement for all intended program beneficiaries?

4. For an individual school whose activities are supported with Federal funds, how can the needs of its students be better met through implementation of the consolidated plan? The answer to this question might illustrate how a State's thinking about the usefulness of a consolidated plan is rooted in the daily activities of schools and students.

An SEA also would provide an update on any significant changes in the procedures for distribution of funds, as well as in the amounts and general uses of funds reserved for administrative and State-level activities, from those described in the preliminary consolidated plan.

Review of Consolidated Plans

The Secretary proposes that the State's preliminary consolidated plan be approved without peer review, but is strongly considering using a peer review process that involves the assistance and advice of State officials, and others with relevant expertise, for approving the final State consolidated plan.

Public Participation Requirements

Section 14303(7) of the ESEA requires, as one of the SEA's general assurances, that "before the [consolidated plan] was submitted to the Secretary, the State has afforded a reasonable opportunity for public comment on the plan * * * and has considered such comment." (This assurance applies both to consolidated State plans under section 14302 and to all individual State plans or applications submitted under individual programs.)

Invitation to Comment

The Secretary invites comments from all interested members of the public on this proposal for the content of the consolidated State plan. The Secretary is particularly interested in receiving comments on whether—

- There are additional grant programs, either formula or discretionary, that the Secretary should consider designating for possible inclusion in a consolidated State plan, and how that plan can best accommodate these programs.

- The proposed contents of the preliminary (first-year) consolidated plan are reasonable and whether they need to be modified or clarified.

- The issues proposed to be addressed in the final, (second-year) consolidated plan are clearly expressed and properly formulated, and what additional examples, if any, should be included to clarify the kind of information that the State would need to provide.

All comments submitted in response to this notice will be available for public inspection, during and after the comment period, in room 4000, Portals Building, 1250 Maryland Avenue SW., Washington, DC 20202.

Dated: January 6, 1995.

Thomas W. Payzant,

Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education.

Appendix A—Department of Education Preliminary Guidance Document: The IASA Consolidated Plan (December 1, 1994)

(Note: This document was distributed to those who attended the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education/Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs conference in Baltimore, Maryland, on December 2, 1994. It is intended to provide useful background information.)

A New Approach

- The recently enacted Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) stresses, in a variety of ways, the need to rethink how Federal, State and local education programs can fit together into a unified system that focuses on one principal goal: Enabling all students to achieve to challenging standards. The Act reinforces the Federal government's limited supporting role in this effort. At the same time, it encourages the Secretary of Education to remove barriers to State and local efforts to meet student educational needs. Indeed, the IASA permits the Secretary to take steps to ensure that the way in which the Department administers its programs is itself a part of, rather than a hindrance to, educational reform.

- The IASA authorizes the Secretary to waive statutes or regulations that impede efforts to increase the quality of student instruction or improve student academic performance. It also permits the Secretary to eliminate the need for States to submit to the Department a myriad of different program funding applications. Instead, the IASA authorizes submission of a single consolidated plan that, for the programs that it covers, focuses on cross-program coordination, integration of services and improved service delivery as keys to student achievement. This authority extends to State

formula grant programs in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA),¹ as well as to the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and State leadership programs under the Perkins Vocational Education Act.

- To make educational reform truly comprehensive, its reach must extend beyond challenging content standards and new teaching methods to the very way in which we administer our many programs. A consolidated plan can become a driving force for thinking about how all Federal, State and local activities might work together in a common and coherent effort. Indeed, this consolidated plan, when used along with other means of promoting State systemic reform under the IASA, Goals 2000 and the School-to-Work Act, can go a long way toward helping all of us change the way in which we do business, so that student academic achievement, rather than individual program administration, truly is the focus of our work.

The Department's Strategy

General Approach to Consolidated Planning. The new authority that the IASA gives to the Secretary to approve a consolidated program plan offers an unprecedented opportunity to tap the full potential of Federal programs. This authority can convert the current program-by-program application process into a process for renewed thinking about how these programs collectively can fit together, notwithstanding their distinct purposes and different beneficiaries, to increase the quality of student instruction and the level of student academic performance.² A truly consolidated application—one that is more than a repackaged compilation of even the best individual program applications—can reflect the kind of broad, creative planning effort that is needed to complement other educational reform efforts and strategies.

The Department is working hard to develop criteria for a State's consolidated plan that can help State and local officials, teachers and other school staff, and parents begin to take advantage of the opportunities that a consolidated plan presents. Because the law was only recently passed, because the issues are complex, and because extensive collaboration with stakeholders is required, any decisions thus far are preliminary. However, knowing the substantial interest that the prospect of a consolidated plan has generated, and the reality that State planning under the IASA already has begun, the Department wants to offer whatever guidance that it currently can provide about what a plan might contain and how it might be developed. The Department expects to provide more information in coming weeks.

¹ The ESEA was reauthorized in Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act.

² Congress expressed the purpose of consolidating existing program applications into a single plan in section 14301 of the ESEA: "To improve teaching and learning by encouraging greater cross-program coordination, planning, and service delivery under this Act and enhanced integration of programs under this Act with educational activities carried out with State and local funds."