

agrees that supportive and secure learning environments are particularly important concerns at the local and school levels.

Changes: The priority has been revised to emphasize the importance of research on local and school level factors that influence student learning with particular emphasis on supportive and secure learning environments.

Comments Regarding Student Standards

Comments: Seven respondents commented on the topic of student standards. Most emphasized the importance of the topic. One recommended that work on this topic be coordinated with Title 1 evaluations and with the work the National Science Foundation is sponsoring on standards-based reform. Two argued that such work must be content-based.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that student standards are an important topic for investigation. The Secretary will coordinate work on this topic with the evaluation of Title 1 and with the work being supported by the National Science Foundation. Applicants will be free to propose content-based approaches to this topic. The center is encouraged to coordinate its work, including the work on student standards, with other related activities in the field.

Changes: The priority has been amended to add as a new topic (b)(2), "State and local finance strategies that support improved learning by all students including aligning elements of the education system to achieve challenging student standards and providing incentives for reform."

Comments Regarding Finance Issues

Comments: Six commenters noted the importance of finance issues. One recommended a center on this topic alone. Another called explicitly for studies of the cost-effectiveness of alternative strategies. Several commenters recommended research on finance strategies that are integrated with other elements of reform.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that finance issues are important and that the discussion of them in the priority should be expanded.

Changes: The priority has been amended to elaborate upon the finance topic. The equitable distribution of programs and services and the productive allocation of resources are included as areas that must be covered by the center's work.

Comments Regarding Family, Community, School Relationships

Comments: Six commenters noted the importance of family, community and school relationships. One recommended supporting a Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning as a second center in the Governance Institute, or, as an alternative, research on strengthening the connections between schools, families, and communities. Two commenters recommended adding parents and families to the topic in the proposed priority focused on examining community-school relationships. In addition, the Board committee recommended adding the word "partnerships" before "collaboration" in (b)(1) to emphasize that families,

communities and schools should work together as closely as possible.

Discussion: The Secretary believes that budget restrictions paired with the legislative mandate that no center be funded at less than \$1.5 million per year preclude the possibility of funding a second center under the Governance Institute. However, the Secretary agrees that the relationship between schools and families and the community is an important factor related to student learning. The Secretary believes that both productive partnerships and productive collaborations among communities, families and schools merit investigation as local strategies to improve elementary and secondary education.

Changes: The priority has been revised to include enhancing productive partnerships and collaborations among communities, families and schools as a topic area that must be addressed by the center.

Comments Regarding the Format of Topics

Comments: Five commenters were concerned about the format of the topics under the priority. Two suggested that the priority appeared to be promoting a particular view of reform. Another suggested that the topics were too process-oriented. Another commenter suggested that all topics should focus on increasing student achievement. The fifth called for a more integrated and synthesized statement.

Discussion: The Secretary does not believe that this priority should promote any particular reform strategy. Rather, alternative reform strategies should be the focus of the research supported under this priority. The Secretary agrees that the focus of the work sponsored under this priority should be on the relationship between alternative approaches and student learning, not on processes *per se*. The Secretary also agrees that the statement of the individual topics within the priority should be as integrated and synthesized as possible.

Changes: The priority has been revised to clarify that the topics are not promoting a particular approach to education reform, are not focusing on processes *per se*, and are aimed at investigating the relationship between alternative approaches and student learning. The priority has been reformatted to be more coherent.

Comments About Adding Topics

Comments: Fifty-two commenters recommended adding topics to the proposed priority. Examples of research areas proposed for inclusion were the general areas of education governance and teacher professionalization, and the topic areas of building organizational capacity, alternative models of schooling, family-community-school relationships, collaboration between schools and postsecondary institutions, and the integration of services for children and youth. Specific research topics recommended included the federal role in education, policies supporting the use of technology, especially for students with special needs, the role of libraries and museums in students' learning, and addressing cultural differences when setting education policies.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that education governance is an important general

area that should be included in the priority. Also, in recognition of the number of comments on professionalization of education personnel, the Secretary has decided to modify the priority to include a focus on licensing of teachers and other education professionals. The Secretary also believes that the general topics recommended are important and should be considered by applicants as candidates for study. The Secretary recognizes that there is merit to many of the specific topics recommended for inclusion. In fact, the Secretary believes that many of these recommendations fall within the scope of the priority's topics and could be the subject of the center's research projects.

Changes: The priority has been revised to include the general topic area of education governance. In addition, section (b)(2) has been amended to read: "State and local policies that support improved learning by all students including aligning elements of the education system to achieve challenging student standards, enhancing licensing systems for teachers and other education professionals, and providing incentives for reform."

Absolute Priority 6: Improving Postsecondary Education

Overview: A total of 22 letters provided comments on Priority 6. Some commenters addressed more than one topic.

Comments on Scope and Relationship of Priority 6 to Priority 7

Comments: Seven commenters were concerned with relationships and distinctions between priorities 6 and 7. Two recommended combining the two priorities, while others recommended various ways of ensuring that the work is coordinated or that the scope of each priority be clarified to prevent overlap. Several commented on the broad range of issues included in Priority 6, while others added issues that should be emphasized.

Discussion: The Secretary agrees that distinctions between priorities 6 and 7 need to be clarified, but does not agree that a single center can address the complex issues in both postsecondary education and adult literacy and learning. The Secretary agrees that it is important for the centers to coordinate work on issues of mutual interest.

Changes: The title of Priority 6 has been changed to: "Improving Postsecondary Education" to distinguish its focus from priority 7. Section (a) is changed to: "Conduct research and development on improving quality, productivity and outcomes of postsecondary education." Applicants will be permitted to select three or more topics for research from among those listed. Non-binding mission guidance will suggest ways of coordinating the work of the two centers.

Comments on Emphasizing a Continuous View of Education

Comments: Three commenters argued for a broader view of postsecondary students and a more continuous view of education, consistent with the theme of lifelong learning. Three advocated inclusion of community colleges in the work on