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Contact: Doug Wright
(301) 436-6684

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School District Perceptions of
Federal Competitive Education Programs

During the period 1978-80, approximately two-thirds of all school districts applied for one or more grants under Federal competitive education programs. Almost three-fourths of these applicants received at least one grant during those 2 years, according to a recent survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

Federal competitive education programs provide funds for specific purposes through competitive applications. These programs support projects in many areas such as: bilingual education, Follow-Through, metric education, consumer education, and programs for the gifted and talented. (A list of the programs surveyed and a copy of the questionnaire are attached.)

Many of these Federal programs were recently consolidated into block grants to the States. Such consolidation is designed to give States more direct responsibility in providing assistance to local school systems. Therefore, the findings of this survey may be useful to the States as they decide whether to develop similar competitive programs or to use other methods to distribute funds to school districts.

The survey findings show that school districts perceive substantial benefits resulting from these programs. Three-fourths of all districts rate one or more benefits as major. The two most frequently mentioned benefits are that these grants: (1) supplement local funds and (2) provide opportunities to develop new programs. More than 40 percent of the districts indicate each of these benefits as major. School districts rate instructional aspects (curriculum development, professional staff development, and instructional materials) as more useful than research, hiring new staff, and updating facilities.

While school districts see major benefits associated with the programs, they also perceive problems in applying for and administering the grants. Almost all districts (92 percent) report one or more major factors that discourage them from applying for grants. The most commonly cited factors are: confusing application procedures, unavailability of staff, and low odds of receiving awards. Each of these three factors is reported to be major by at least half of all school districts. Relatively few districts consider low levels of funding to be a major problem.

Eighty-two percent of the school districts report one or more major problems in conducting grant-funded programs. The most frequently reported problems are paperwork (53 percent), disruptions in staff and services when the program ends (38 percent), insufficient lead time for planning (34 percent), and cash flow complications due to delays in receipt of funds (30 percent). Except for disruptions when the program ends, the major problems are generally administrative. Other problems such as fragmented curriculum, tensions among staff, and conflict with district policies, are considered major by fewer than one-sixth of the districts.

These problems, however, did not deter two-thirds of the districts from applying for competitive grants during the period 1978-80. Almost half of the districts that applied believe that their success rate was medium or high. Application rates varied by size of district with larger districts more likely to apply and report higher rates of success in receiving awards than smaller ones.

School district applicants for grants funded under Federal competitive education programs during 1978-80, by enrollment size: 50 States and D.C., spring 1981

a. Districts applying for one or more grants

Enrollment size of districts	Total number of districts	Applicants	
		Number	Percent
Total.....	15,834	10,472	66
Less than 2,500....	11,946	7,475	63
2,500-9,999.....	3,171	2,385	75
10,000 or more.....	717	612	85

b. Districts receiving one or more grants

Enrollment size of district	Number of applicants	Successful applicants ^{1/}			
		Total	High success rate	Medium success rate	Low success rate
Total.....	10,472	70	16	29	25
Less than 2,500....	7,475	69	17	27	25
2,500-9,999.....	2,385	72	15	31	26
10,000 or more.....	612	87	14	50	24

^{1/} Entries are percents based on the number of applicants. Percents may not add to totals because of rounding.

Note.--Respondents for an estimated total of 87 districts did not know the district's application or success rate during 1978-80; these districts had less than 2,500 students.

FEDERAL COMPETITIVE EDUCATION GRANTS PROGRAMS

(providing grants to school districts)

1. Follow Through (13.433 or 84.014)
2. Career Education Program (13.554 or 84.074)
3. Teachers Centers (13.416 or 84.006)
4. Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA)--Basic and Transitional Grants (13.525 or 84.056 and 13.532 or 84.059)
5. Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA)--Magnet Schools and University/Business Cooperation (13.589 or 84.102)
6. Early Education for Handicapped Children (13.444 or 84.024)
7. Gifted and Talented Program (13.562 or 84.080)
8. Handicapped Research and Demonstration and/or Model Programs (13.443 or 84.023 and 13.568 or 84.026)
9. Citizens Education for Cultural Understanding--Global Education Program (13.581 or 84.095)
10. Fulbright-Hayes Teacher Exchange--Foreign Curriculum Consultants (13.439 or 84.020)
11. Community Education Program (13.563 or 84.081)
12. Correction Education (Cat. No. not yet assigned)
13. Youth Employment Program (Cat. No. not yet assigned)
14. National Diffusion Network Program (13.553 or 84.073)
15. Teachers Corps (13.489 or 84.045)
16. Alcohol and Drug Abuse Education (13.420 or 84.008)
17. Arts in Education (13.566 or 84.084)
18. Basic Skills Improvement Program (13.599 or 84.105)
19. Consumer Education (13.564 or 84.082)
20. Environmental Education (13.522)
21. Ethnic Heritage Studies Program (13.549 or 84.070)
22. Law-Related Education (13.693 or 84.123)
23. Metric Education Program (13.561 or 84.079)
24. Special Initiatives--Secretary's Discretionary Program (13.598 or 84.122)
25. Women's Educational Equity Act Program (13.565 or 84.083)
26. Bilingual Education (13.403 or 84.003)
 - Basic Projects
 - Demonstration Projects
 - Desegregation Support Program
 - Materials Development Projects
 - Support Services Projects
27. Bilingual Vocational Training (13.558 or 84.077)

Note: Numbers in parentheses, following the program titles, refer to the old and new numbers, respectively, in the Catalogue of Federal Domestic Education Assistance Programs. The new numbers were assigned in 1980 after the establishment of the U.S. Department of Education.

**SURVEY OF SCHOOL DISTRICT PERCEPTIONS OF
FEDERAL COMPETITIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

This report is authorized by law (20 U.S.C. 1221e-1). While you are not required to respond, your cooperation is needed to make the results of this survey comprehensive, accurate, and timely.

Definition for purposes of this survey:

Federal competitive education grants (programs): Grants awarded directly to school districts by the U.S. Department of Education on the basis of competitive application procedures under 27 programs (list attached). The survey does NOT include grants awarded on a formula basis nor programs administered through the State.

Note: Please answer all questions whether or not your district has ever applied for such grants.

1. To what extent does each of the following factors discourage your district from applying for any, or more, Federal competitive education grants? For each factor, enter a check in the appropriate column.

Factor	Degree of discouragement		
	Little or none	Moderate	Major
a. Insufficient lead time and/or information			
b. Confusing and/or cumbersome application procedures			
c. Staff not available to prepare applications			
d. Low success rate in past applications			
e. Programs do not fit district needs and/or priorities			
f. Low odds of receiving awards			
g. Awards funded at much lower levels than requested			
h. Other (specify)			

2. How important to your district is each of the following actual or perceived benefits attributable to Federal competitive education grants? For each benefit, enter a check in the appropriate column.

Benefit (actual or perceived)	Degree of importance		
	Little or none	Moderate	Major
a. Opportunity to develop new programs			
b. Supplement to local funds			
c. Ability to continue existing, local programs			
d. Stimulus for teacher/staff initiative and professional growth			
e. Promotion of district goals and/or objectives			
f. Other (specify)			

3. How important to your district is each of the following actual or perceived problems associated with conducting programs funded under Federal competitive education grants? For each problem, enter a check in the appropriate column.

Problem (actual or perceived)	Degree of importance		
	Little or none	Moderate	Major
a. Insufficient lead time for planning			
b. Cash flow complications due to lag in receipt of funds			
c. Tensions created among staff			
d. Fragmented curriculum			
e. Conflict with district policies and/or procedures			
f. Disruptions in staff/services when program ends			
g. Paperwork and/or other costs outweigh benefits			
h. Other (specify)			

4. How helpful to your district would each of the following aspects of a Federal competitive education grant be? Assign a rank to each, using "1" to indicate the most helpful and "5" to indicate the least helpful.

Aspect	Rank	Aspect	Rank
a. Curriculum development		d. Research	
b. Professional staff development		e. Hiring new staff	
c. Instructional materials		f. Updating facilities	

5. How successful has your district been in receiving grant awards under these programs during the two-year period of 1978-79 and 1979-80?

Award success rate: High _____ Medium _____ Low _____ No awards _____

Not applicable: Did not apply _____

Name and title of person completing this form: _____

Phone: (_____) _____

School district: _____ State: _____ Date: _____

Percent of districts ¹/ rating various problems and benefits of Federal competitive education programs

Item	Percent of "major" ratings
<u>Factors discouraging applications:</u>	
Confusing and/or cumbersome application procedures.....	62
Staff not available to prepare applications.....	56
Low odds of receiving awards.....	50
Programs do not fit district needs and/or priorities.....	30
Insufficient lead time and/or information.....	27
Low success rate in past applications.....	27
Awards funded at much lower levels than requested.....	15
<u>Benefits of programs:</u>	
Supplement to local funds.....	45
Opportunity to develop new programs.....	41
Ability to continue existing, local programs.....	34
Stimulus for teacher/staff initiative and professional growth.....	32
Promotion of district goals and/or objectives.....	31
<u>Problems with conducting programs:</u>	
Paperwork and/or other costs outweigh benefits.....	53
Disruptions in staff/services when program ends.....	38
Insufficient lead time for planning.....	34
Cash flow complications due to lag in receipt of funds.....	30
Fragmented curriculum.....	14
Tensions created among staff.....	12
Conflict with district policies and/or procedures.....	9

¹ Based on 15,834 districts.

Source: Questions 1, 2, and 3 from survey.

Perceptions of benefits and problems also vary by enrollment. Proportionally more large districts rate the opportunity to develop new programs as a major benefit compared with small districts which are more likely to rate the ability to continue programs as the major benefit. More small districts perceive paperwork and cash flow matters as major problems compared with large districts. Small districts are also more likely to be discouraged from applying for grants because of confusing application procedures and lack of staff.

The survey was requested by the Education Department's School Finance Project which was established in response to a Congressional mandate to study current and alternative ways of providing aid to education. NCES's contractor, Westat, Inc., a research firm in Rockville, Maryland, conducted the survey using the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). In May 1981, questionnaires were mailed to a national probability sample of 576 school districts representative of the 15,834 districts (local education agencies) in the Nation. The response rate was 95 percent. Responding districts answered all questions whether or not they had applied for or received any grants. Therefore, districts' evaluations of the benefits and problems associated with implementing these programs are based in some cases on their own experience and in other cases on their perceptions. A table showing percentages of districts rating problems and benefits as major is attached.

To obtain additional copies of this preliminary report, information about the survey or FRSS, or to be placed on the mailing list to receive the forthcoming final report, contact the FRSS staff, Doug Wright or Jeanette Goor, National Center for Education Statistics (Presidential Building), 400 Maryland Avenue SW., Washington, D.C. 20202.