

Archived Information

Goal 2. Build a solid foundation for learning for all children.

In its pursuit of educational improvement, the Department of Education (ED) concentrates on two interrelated aims: excellence and equity. As part of this effort, we have identified several areas that must be addressed to build a solid foundation of learning for all children. One essential element is to ensure that students meet high academic standards at key transition points in their educational journey. In addition, we must ensure that students with special needs not only have those needs addressed, but also are held to high academic standards. They, along with other students, must benefit from the emphasis on excellence. In this way, all students will be prepared for productive employment, further education, and full democratic participation. We can achieve this goal by ensuring that the following four objectives are met:

Objective 2.1: All children enter school ready to learn. Research has made clear that children's early experiences have a profound effect on long-term learning. Moreover, children are more likely to be successful in school if they arrive well prepared. A high-quality early childhood education is especially crucial for children with special needs.

Objective 2.2: Every child reads well and independently by the end of the third grade. Besides being an important skill in its own right, reading is the foundation for all later academic learning.

Objective 2.3: Every eighth-grader masters challenging mathematics, including the foundations of algebra and geometry. Mathematics is an essential skill as well as the entree to learning science and technology. Moving to more advanced mathematics before high school is often a key to higher academic achievement, particularly for disadvantaged students.

Objective 2.4: Special populations participate in appropriate services and assessments consistent with high standards. If all children are to attain excellence, students with special needs must receive extra support. Our measure of success must be defined in terms of their academic achievement, as well as the performance of students overall.

To address these key areas, we must pursue strategies such as improved professional development, cooperation with state and local efforts to implement high academic standards and linked assessments, and financial support for innovative approaches to assist children with special needs. The Department of Education seeks to promote these strategies through its reauthorization proposal to strengthen Federal elementary and secondary programs and through its ongoing monitoring, guidance, and leadership.