

Archived Information

Goal 4. Make ED a high-performance organization by focusing on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction.

The Department's fourth goal, "Make ED a high-performance organization by focusing on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction," cuts across all programs and is critical to all goals and objectives described in ED's Strategic Plan. Goal 4 is organized around seven key objectives: customer service, flexibility of programs, research, technology, employee development, financial management, and performance measurement.

This year's Plan and Report reflect a focus on anticipating the needs of external and internal customers, and a commitment to investing in the training and technology available to the Department's employees so that better products and service will be provided to state and local education officials, students, teachers, parents, and other customers of the Department. To achieve our goal of making ED a high-performance organization, we are further clarifying the Department's goals and improving our ability to measure our performance. Each year the Department plans to be able to point to improvements in its delivery of services and in employees' perceptions about work readiness, performance, equity, and workplace services.

Additionally, the Department will continue to build on its successes in using technology to improve the quality and timeliness of its products and services. These services include disseminating information and administering grants and loans. Within the Department, we will use technology to facilitate communication between employees about the quality of their work, the services they provide to customers, and the ways in which they are able to grow and develop professionally. The Internet offers tremendous opportunities for improvements in both our business processes and customer service. We will be taking advantage of these opportunities whenever possible.

Strategies in Goal 4 were developed from various sources: senior staff decisions, feedback from external customers, reviews of effective practices in management literature, reviews of successes achieved by government and industry, results of employee surveys, and reports from the General Accounting Office (GAO) and the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). We report our plans and progress on the following seven objectives:

Objective 4.1: Our customers receive fast, seamless service, and dissemination of high-quality information and products. During 1999, the Department improved its ability to deliver high-quality information services through its toll-free phone numbers and Web site, and by ensuring that customers with disabilities have access to services and information. The Department received three of the Vice President's Hammer Awards for customer service activities, increased its services to Spanish-speaking members of the public, and streamlined its phone services in the student financial aid area.

Objective 4.2: Our partners have the support and flexibility they need without diminishing accountability for results. During 1999, the Department continued to reduce its regulatory and paperwork burden on grantees and other customers without reducing the level of program performance. The implementation of ED-Flex, in which states receive greater freedom from regulations in exchange for instituting statewide standards, is a significant accomplishment. During 2000, the Department will continue to emphasize the concept of flexibility with

accountability in the delivery of services; write regulations and policies in plain English; integrate program review and technical assistance across "stovepipe" programs; and build partnerships, where possible, to achieve critical program results.

Objective 4.3: An up-to-date knowledge base is available from education research to support education reform and equity. During 1999, the Department made substantial progress on directing resources to research on achieving national education priorities. A critical element of educational success is a rigorous knowledge base to support systemic education reform and equity. A targeted research agenda, high-quality research, and useful, customer-oriented findings and products are necessary for a sustained knowledge base. The Department of Education supports research primarily through the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Key strategies include forming partnerships with other agencies to conduct cutting-edge research and focusing research on solving critical problems in educational policy and practice.

Objective 4.4: Our information technology investments are sound and used to improve impact and efficiency. In addition to improving student financial aid administration (see Goal 3), the Department is continuing to expand its Internet presence (for external customers) and its Intranet (for internal users) to improve workflow processes and communications. During 1999, the Department received one of the Vice President's Hammer Awards for our accomplishments in the area of assistive technology. All of ED's information technology (IT) systems had a successful Y2K conversion.

Objective 4.5: The Department's employees are highly skilled and high-performing. During fiscal year 1999, ED's approach to management development training was overhauled, and participating in 40 hours of continuing professional development became mandatory for all the Department's executives and managers. In addition, ED designed a 40-hour course emphasizing performance management for new supervisors and managers. In fiscal years 2000 and 2001, the Department will be identifying skill gaps and potential staffing shortages in critical education program areas. ED is developing a targeted recruitment strategy to attract highly qualified candidates to its staff.

Objective 4.6: Management of our programs and services ensures financial integrity. In fiscal year 1998, our general ledger software proved inadequate for the Department's needs. Creating temporary solutions will mitigate the current system limitations for fiscal year 2000 until a new system is in place. We expect the fiscal year 1999 financial statements to receive an "improved" rating and the fiscal year 2000 financial statements to receive an "unqualified." Replacement of the Department's general ledger software system and improvement of internal controls will help achieve reductions in material weaknesses and reportable conditions. Improvements will continue in the contracts and purchasing processes to support strategic Departmental objectives.

Objective 4.7: All levels of the agency are fully performance-driven. House staff gave ED's fiscal year 1999 Annual Plan the third highest rating among Federal agencies. During fiscal year 1999, we implemented the first phase of a data attestation process for our largest programs. This is part of our commitment to strategic planning processes and data integrity to ensure that the data provided by programs and offices are valid and can be relied on by policy makers, program administrators, and the Congress.