

## Continuous Improvement: The Department Reports on a New Strategic Plan

### Continuity and Change

Since the Department published its first 5-year strategic plan under the *Government Performance and Results Act of 1993*, each successive plan has further refined the goals of improving student achievement, increasing access to higher education and implementing high-quality management standards within the Department.

Departmental performance measures for management over the last 10 years have focused on student assessments with emphases on reading and mathematics, performance standards for schools and districts, teacher preparation, use of scientifically based research in the classroom, access to higher education and improved internal management. Performance measures also have focused on core indicators of continuous improvement, including:

- Increasing percentages of all students who meet or exceed *Proficient* and *Advanced* performance levels in national and state assessments of reading, mathematics and other core subjects.
- Improving proficiency levels of students in high-poverty schools who show continuous improvement comparable to those for the nation as a whole.
- Increasing high school attendance and graduation rates, particularly in high-poverty schools and among students with disabilities and others at risk of school failure.
- Increasing numbers of high school students who successfully complete Advanced Placement courses each year, including students in high-poverty schools.
- Providing access to students pursuing higher education or other successful transitions into employment, further education or the military.
- Improving internal controls and addressing management challenges within the Department of Education.

The current strategic plan continues to report on these key indicators of performance and adds several new measures of performance focused on high school improvement and human capital.

As shown by the *Strategic Plan Comparison* on the following page, these core goals, objectives and measures have been the consistent focus of the Department's strategic planning process. The comparison also shows continuity among goals and objectives between plans.

**STRATEGIC PLAN COMPARISON**

2007–2012 Strategic Plan	2002–2007 Strategic Plan
<b>Mission:</b> Promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access	<b>Mission:</b> Ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation
<b>Goal 1:</b> Improve student achievement, with a focus on bringing all students to grade level in reading and mathematics by 2014	<b>Goal 1: Create a Culture of Achievement</b> <b>Goal 2: Improve Student Achievement</b> <b>Goal 3: Develop Safe and Drug-Free Schools</b> <b>Goal 4: Transform Education into an Evidence-Based Field</b>
Obj. 1: Improve student achievement in reading	2.1: Ensure that all students read on grade level by the third grade
Obj. 2: Improve student achievement in mathematics	2.2: Improve mathematics and science achievement for all students
Obj. 3: Improve teacher quality	2.4: Improve teacher and principal quality
Obj. 4: Promote safe, disciplined and drug-free learning environments	3.1: Ensure that our schools are safe and drug free
Obj. 5: Increase information and options for parents	1.3: Increase information and options for parents
Obj. 6: Increase high school completion rate	2.3: Improve the performance of all high school students
Obj. 7: Transform education into an evidence-based field	1.4: Encourage the use of scientifically based methods within federal education programs
<b>Goal 2:</b> Increase the academic achievement of all high school students	<b>Goal 1: Create a Culture of Achievement</b> <b>Goal 2: Improve Student Achievement</b>
Obj. 1: Increase the proportion of high school students taking a rigorous curriculum	1.3: Increase flexibility and local control
Obj. 2: Promote advanced proficiency in mathematics and science for all students	2.3: Improve the performance of all high school students
Obj. 3: Increase proficiency in critical foreign languages	2.2: Improve mathematics and science achievement for all students
<b>Goal 3:</b> Ensure the accessibility, affordability and accountability of higher education and better prepare students and adults for employment and future learning	<b>Goal 5: Enhance the Quality of and Access to Postsecondary and Adult Education</b>
Obj. 1: Increase success in and completion of quality postsecondary education	5.1: Reduce the gaps in college access and completion among student populations differing by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status and disability while increasing the educational attainment of all
Obj. 2: Deliver student financial aid to students and parents effectively and efficiently	5.2: Strengthen accountability of postsecondary education institutions
Obj. 3: Prepare adult learners and individuals with disabilities for higher education, employment and productive lives	5.4: Strengthen Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions and Tribal Colleges and Universities
Obj. 2: Deliver student financial aid to students and parents effectively and efficiently	5.6: Increase the capacity of U.S. postsecondary education institutions to teach world languages, area studies and international issues
Obj. 3: Prepare adult learners and individuals with disabilities for higher education, employment and productive lives	5.3: Establish effective funding mechanisms for postsecondary education
Obj. 2: Deliver student financial aid to students and parents effectively and efficiently	5.1: Reduce the gaps in college access and completion among student populations differing by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status and disability while increasing the educational attainment of all
Obj. 3: Prepare adult learners and individuals with disabilities for higher education, employment and productive lives	5.5: Enhance literacy and employment skills of American adults
<b>Management Goal: Cross-Goal Strategy on Management</b>	<b>Goal 6: Establish Management Excellence</b>
Obj. 1: Maintain and strengthen financial integrity and management and internal controls	6.1: Develop and maintain financial integrity and management and internal controls
Obj. 2: Improve the strategic management of the Department's human capital	6.3: Manage information technology resources, using e-gov, to improve services for our customers and partners
Obj. 3: Achieve budget and performance integration to link funding decisions to results	6.4: Modernize the Student Financial Assistance programs and reduce their high-risk status
Obj. 2: Improve the strategic management of the Department's human capital	6.2: Improve the strategic management of the Department's human capital strategies
Obj. 3: Achieve budget and performance integration to link funding decisions to results	6.5: Achieve budget and performance integration to link funding decisions to results

Management's Discussion and Analysis

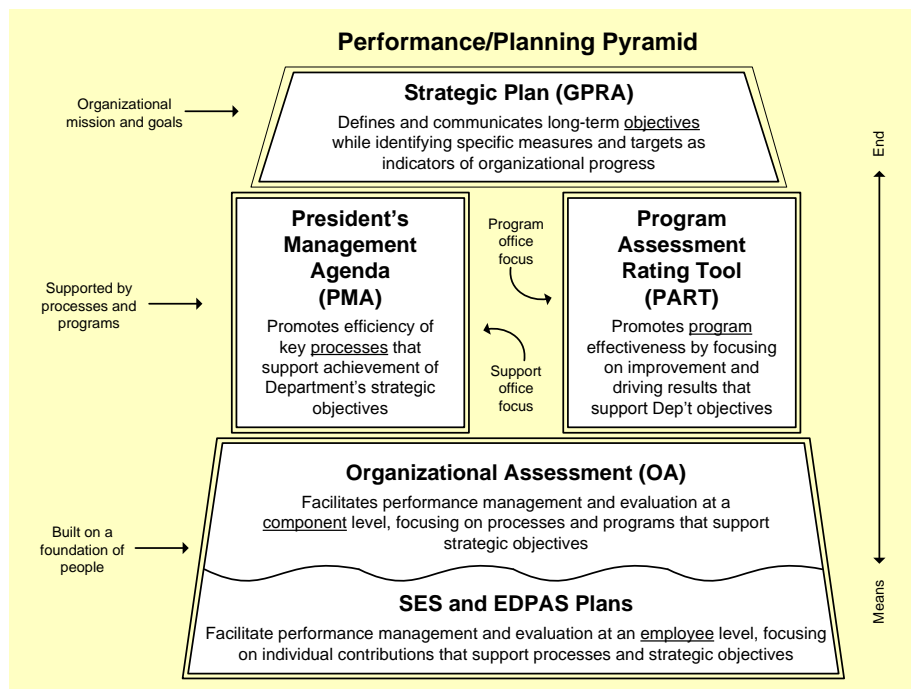
## Strategic Plan

The U.S. Department of Education's *Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2007–12* sets high expectations for America's schools, students and for the Department. It streamlines Department goals and measures while stressing continuity.

- **Goal 1:** Improve student achievement and teacher quality and renew troubled schools so that every student can read and do math at grade level by 2014, as called for by *No Child Left Behind*.
- **Goal 2:** Encourage more rigorous and advanced coursework to improve the academic performance of our middle and high school students.
- **Goal 3:** Work with colleges and universities to improve access, affordability and accountability, to prepare students and adults for employment and future learning.
- **Cross-Goal Strategy on Management:** Strengthen strategic management controls, including human capital, and link funding to results.

**Discontinued Strategic Measures.** A total of 54 measures in the *Strategic Plan 2002–2007* have been replaced by new measures in the *Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2007–12*. Of those measures, 10 measures exceeded the FY 2007 targets, 10 met their targets, 8 did not meet their targets and two have pending results. Remaining measures either had no data reported or programs did not collect data in FY 2007. Eleven measures continue as part of the current strategic plan. A list of discontinued measures is provided on page 113.

The pillars of the strategic plan are the *President's Management Agenda* (see page 35), the Organizational Assessment (see page 16), the Program Assessment Rating Tool (see page 20) and employee performance evaluations, including Senior Executive Service.



## Management Challenges Met Over Time

The Department has met or shown significant progress on all seven management goals set by the Department 10 years ago:

- Auditors will issue an unqualified (clean) opinion on the Departmentwide annual financial statements every year. **MET**
- Open audit recommendations related to financial statement audits will be addressed and closed. **SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS** (see Audit Report on page 175).
- Internal controls will be improved and material weaknesses and system non-conformances will be reduced as described in the Department's annual *Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act* report. **MET**
- The Department's student financial aid programs will be removed from the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) list of "High Risk" Programs. **MET**
- The Department's financial systems will be in substantial compliance with the *Federal Financial Management Improvement Act of 1996* (FFMIA), which requires that financial management systems provide reliable, useful and timely information. **MET**
- Findings in statewide single audits and program review reports will decrease as the number of Cooperative Audit Resolution and Oversight Initiative projects increases with the Department's state partners. **MET**<sup>1</sup>
- Debt management for Federal Student Aid will continue to improve: student loan defaults will decrease and recovery of defaulted student loans will increase. **MET**<sup>2</sup>

The Department has remained consistent in its central goals, continuously improving the quality of performance measures and the validation and verification of received data. Additionally, the Department has streamlined its annual reports and performance plans to increase transparency, better presenting the Department's public benefits of the federal role in education. The Department continues to provide forward-looking national leadership in the promotion of educational excellence.

<sup>1</sup> The last Cooperative Audit Resolution and Oversight Initiative audits were resolved in 2002 and 2006 respectively. The overall number of audit findings was reduced in subsequent statewide audits. As a result of this process, the Department is now focusing on mitigating risk, reducing the potential for improper payments, and seeking to reduce the overall number of audit findings. In 2006, the Department issued an audit findings "library" that provided information on audit findings by Department program to assist principal offices with their monitoring efforts. In 2007, the Department created the Risk Management Service to develop and coordinate a Departmentwide risk management strategy, and to coordinate and support consistent quality management of formula and competitive grants.

<sup>2</sup> Cohort default rates have steadily declined over the last decade from 9.9 percent in 1998 to 5.1 percent in 2007; recoveries have steadily increased from 8 percent in 1999 to 10.8 percent in 2005 (FSA-held portfolio and tracked under GPRA). Since 2005, the Department has tracked Direct Loan and Federal Family Education Loan program recoveries. The Department has steadily met and mostly exceeded the targets and is on track to exceed the targets this year.