

Archived Information

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

The Education Department's fourth goal, "Make the Department of Education 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 the Education Department'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 Report reflects a focus on anticipating the needs of external and internal customers and a commitment to investing in the training and technology available to the Education Department's employees, so that better products and services will be provided to state and local education officials, students, teachers, parents, and other customers of the Education Department.

The Education Department continues to build on its successes by 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 Education Department, technology is used 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 business processes and customer service. The Education Department is taking advantage of these opportunities whenever possible.

Strategies in Goal 4 were developed from various sources, including 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). The Education Department reports its progress on the following seven objectives:

Objective 4.1: Our customers receive fast, seamless service, and dissemination of high-quality information and products. During 2000, the Education Department improved its ability to deliver high-quality information services through its toll-free phone numbers and website and by ensuring that customers with disabilities have access to services and information.

Objective 4.2: Our partners have the support and flexibility they need without diminishing accountability for results. During 2000, the Education Department continued to reduce its regulatory and paperwork burden on grantees and other customers without reducing the level of program performance. The Education Department continues 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, where possible, build partnerships 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 2000, the Education Department made substantial progress on directing resources to research in 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. 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 Education Department is continuing to expand its Internet presence (for external customers) and its Intranet (for internal users) to improve workflow processes and communications. All of the Education Department's information technology (IT) systems had successful Y2K conversions.

Objective 4.5: The Department of Education's employees are highly skilled and high performing. During fiscal year 2000, the Education Department's approach to management development training was enhanced, and participating in 40 hours of continuing professional development became the accepted norm for all of the Education Department's executives and managers. In addition, the Education Department implemented a 40-hour course emphasizing performance management for new supervisors and managers. The Education Department is identifying skill gaps and potential staffing shortages in critical education program areas and 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. The Education Department's old general ledger software proved inadequate its needs. Replacement of the Education Department's general ledger software system and improvement of internal controls helps 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. The Education Department's strategic plan is playing an increasingly important role in ever level of the department. This reflects a 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 Congress.