



U.S. Department of Education Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2011–2014

U.S. Department of Education

Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2011–2014

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MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

In President Obama’s first address to Congress, he challenged America to meet an ambitious goal for education: By 2020, we will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. Meeting this goal is vital for securing our long-term economic security, because the country that out-educates us today will out-compete us tomorrow. We must work to ensure that all children and adults in America receive a world-class education that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers for rich and fulfilling lives in a vibrant and prosperous democracy.

We often refer to the President’s goal as the “North Star” for the work of the U.S. Department of Education as described in this fiscal year (FY) 2011–2014 Strategic Plan. A generation ago, we ranked first in the world in the rate of college degree attainment for 25- to 34-year-olds; now we rank 16th, and the global achievement gap is growing.¹ Reaching the President’s goal will require comprehensive education reforms from cradle to career, beginning with children at birth, supporting them through postsecondary education, and helping them succeed as lifelong learners who can adapt to the constant changes in the diverse and technology-driven workplaces of the global economy. Our youngest children must be in early learning environments that prepare them for success in kindergarten and beyond. We must continue to close the achievement gap and ensure that elementary and secondary school students are on track to graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Once students enroll in a postsecondary education institution—whether at a trade or technical school, community college, a liberal arts college, a state university, or a research university—we must provide support and assistance to help them complete their certificates and degrees, with grants, loans, tax credits, and work-study assistance. Doing this will equip them with the knowledge and skills to participate and engage in the nation’s future. Finally, at every level of the education system, we must promote competency in the arts and sciences to promote our competitiveness in a 21st century economy. Our Strategic Plan sets specific objectives for each of these goals and explains what the Department will do to support youth, adults, families, and education professionals in meeting them.

We are bringing a new emphasis to the importance of early learning in the Department, recognizing that the path to college completion and a productive career begins at birth. Our goal is to increase access to improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school ready for college and careers. Specifically, through the Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC), we are helping states to build strong early learning systems that provide increased access to high-quality programs for the children who need it most. We intend to support the development of comprehensive assessment systems that provide teachers, administrators, and families with information on how young children are learning and how early learning programs can be strengthened, especially through family literacy programs. In addition, we will work with states to ensure that early learning professionals have the necessary knowledge and skills to support young children’s health, social-emotional, and educational development. To support states and communities in their work, the Department is working closely with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to dramatically improve coordination among early childhood programs and services and to create a stronger focus on health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes of children from birth through 3rd grade.

In elementary and secondary education, our primary goal is to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college and careers. Today, our dropout rate is unacceptably high: only

¹ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators,” p. 40.

75 percent of high school students earn a diploma with their class.² We need to reduce the dropout rate and make sure that our high schools deliver the world-class education that all of our children deserve. Furthermore, in too many places, a high school diploma does not fully prepare students for success in college. Every year, four out of 10 students going from high school to college take at least one remedial course, making up for content they should have mastered in high school and spending tuition dollars on courses that will not count toward a postsecondary credential.³ To help eliminate the need for such remediation and ensure that all high school graduates are ready for college-level work the first day they arrive on campus, we will support state-led efforts to set standards aligned to readiness for college and careers. We also will promote rigorous and fair accountability for states, districts, and schools based on the collection and use of comprehensive performance data, including student academic growth, that inform educational improvements to drive higher student achievement and improved educational outcomes for all students. All educators—especially principals and teachers—will need new tools and resources, including time for professional collaboration and development, to create positive learning cultures and climates, engage families and communities, and implement rigorous interventions, especially in our lowest-performing schools, and we will support education stakeholders to ensure the development of these tools.

Once students graduate high school prepared for college-level work, they must have the financial support necessary to attend postsecondary education and earn a certificate, degree, or other credential. Even with the Department’s contribution of over \$175 billion in aid to 15 million postsecondary students in fiscal year 2011, far too many students have significant financial worries.⁴ We are committed to strengthening our student aid programs and administering them both efficiently and in a manner that is responsive to customer needs. The *Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010* (HCERA) ended student loan subsidies to banks, saving billions of dollars now used for funding financial aid in Pell Grants for low-income students and reducing borrowers’ payments for more than one million student loan borrowers.

The law also provided \$2 billion in higher education grants to strengthen community colleges and \$2.55 billion to increase the capacity of minority-serving institutions to educate their growing number of students. Beyond a commitment to financial aid and helping to expand access to higher education, the Department will work with postsecondary institutions to introduce a new era of transparency to provide students with accurate and useful information. It will also support programs to increase college completion, workforce preparation, and civic participation with associated improvements in instructional design, productivity, and delivery of services.

The Department has already made significant progress in implementing this cradle-to-career agenda through the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* (the Recovery Act). Not only has the Recovery Act saved or created approximately 300,000 education jobs,⁵ it also helped states balance budgets, helped young people and adults pay for college, and helped drive the change we need in our classrooms to prepare our students for the jobs of the future. The historic Race to the Top program, among other programs originally funded through the Recovery Act, has been a catalyst for education reform across this country, prompting states and school districts to make changes that will improve the way we prepare students in preschool through 12th grade (P-12) for success in a competitive, 21st century economy and workplace. Last year, forty-four states and the District of Columbia changed their laws to put in place conditions for reform and continued progress, including laws relating to teacher and principal evaluation systems and charter schools. And the School Improvement Grants

² U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) State Dropout and Completion Data File,” 2008–09 School Year.

³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Condition of Education*, 2011, p. 225.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, *Federal Student Aid*, previously unpublished, 2011.

⁵ <http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/california-receive-12-billion-support-education-jobs>

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program (SIG) is using approximately \$4 billion to provide the substantial and extended support needed to turn around hundreds of our nation’s persistently lowest-achieving schools.

President Obama has indicated that working together to put an outstanding education within reach of every child is central to America’s ability to out-compete countries around the world. This Strategic Plan is designed to support that vision by establishing a framework for an “all-hands-on-deck” approach in communities across America—involving local leaders, educators, families, and the students themselves—to build the best-educated workforce and citizenry in the world.

Sincerely,

Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education

DEPARTMENT'S MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

NATIONAL OUTCOME GOALS

“By 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.”

– President Barack Obama to a joint session of Congress,
February 2009

This FY 2011–2014 Strategic Plan (this Plan) addresses the key outcome-oriented goals below, focusing on reaching the President's 2020 goal. These goals focus on improving student achievement to increase high school graduation, college completion, and educational attainment—all measures of how the country is performing and how far it has to go. This Plan sets forth a strategy that focuses on improving these “national outcomes” for all groups of students. Because these outcome measures will not change overnight, the Department has also outlined a set of performance measures, closely linked to the Department's own activities, that can serve as indicators of the country's progress. The specific years referenced in the measures vary because they reflect the most recently available data and comparison years that are available and appropriate for each measure.

National Outcome Goals for Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education:

- To increase the number and percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who attain an associate's degree or higher
- To increase the number and percentage of students who complete a bachelor's degree within six years
- To increase the number and percentage of students who complete an associate's degree or certificate within three years
- To increase the number and percentage of adult education students obtaining a high school credential

National Outcome Goals for Elementary and Secondary:

- To increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school
- To increase the percentage of 4th and 8th grade students at or above Proficient on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading, mathematics, and science

National Outcome Goals for Early Learning:

- To increase the number of states improving overall and disaggregated health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, especially those with high needs

National Outcome Goals for Equity:

- To significantly reduce the achievement gap for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, age, gender, disability, language, sex, and socioeconomic status

MOST RECENT DATA FOR NATIONAL OUTCOME GOALS

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION, AND ADULT EDUCATION:

To increase the number and percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds who attain an associate’s degree or higher

Measure	2000	2010
25- to 34-year-olds attaining an associate’s or higher degree ⁶	38%	42%

To increase the number and percentage of students who complete a bachelor’s degree within 6 years

Measure	Entry Cohort	
	1998	2003
Students completing a bachelor’s degree within 6 years from their initial institution ⁷	56%	57%

To increase the number and percentage of students who complete an associate’s degree or certificate within 3 years

Measure	Entry Cohort	
	2001	2006
Students completing an associate’s degree or certificate within 3 years from their initial institution ⁸	30%	29%

To increase the number and percentage of adult education students obtaining a high school credential

Measure	Entry Cohort	
	2006–07	2008–09
Adult education students obtaining a high school credential ⁹	60%	64%

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY:

To increase the percentage of students who graduate from high school within 4 years

Measure	Graduating Class Entry Cohort	
	2006–07	2008–09
Freshmen graduating high school within 4 years ¹⁰	74%	75%

To increase the percentage of 4th and 8th grade public school students at or above Proficient on the NAEP in reading, mathematics, and science¹¹

Measure	2009	2011
4th graders Proficient in reading	32%	32%
8th graders Proficient in reading	30%	32%
4th graders Proficient in mathematics	38%	40%
8th graders Proficient in mathematics	33%	34%
4th graders Proficient in science	32%	12
8th graders Proficient in science	29%	

⁶ U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS).

⁷ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2008–09 IPEDS.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, National Reporting System, various school years.

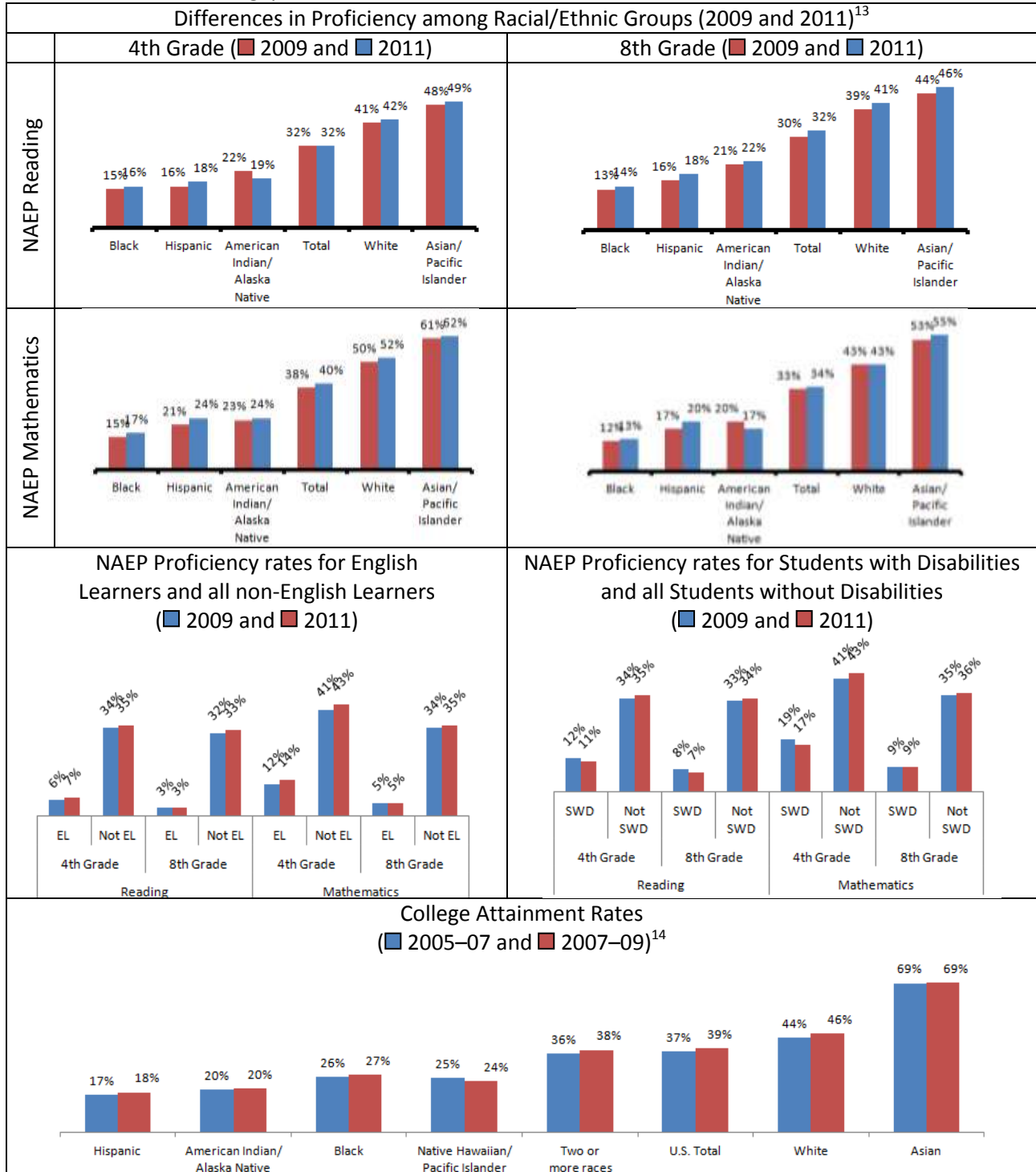
¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “NCES CCD State Dropout and Completion Data File,” various school years.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, NCES, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). **Note:** Data reflect public school students only.

¹² Note: NAEP Science not administered in 2011.

EQUITY:

Eliminate the achievement gap



¹³ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, NAEP. **Note:** Data reflect public school students only.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2005–07 and 2006–08 American Community Survey (ACS) 3-year Public Use Microdata Sample data. **Note:** ACS data used to provide greater accuracy for smaller populations.

LINKING DEPARTMENT PERFORMANCE TO NATIONAL OUTCOMES

This Plan lays out a strategy that ties the day-to-day work of the Department to accomplishing the President’s 2020 Goal. Specifically, this Plan includes:

NATIONAL OUTCOME GOALS

The National Outcome Goals are the improvements in student achievement needed at every level of education to achieve the President’s 2020 goal. Improving these outcomes will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders in the education system.

AGENCY FY 2012–13 PRIORITY GOALS

The Department of Education has identified a limited number of priority goals that will be a particular focus over the next two years. These goals, which will help measure the success of the Department’s cradle-to-career education strategy, reflect the importance of teaching and learning at all levels of the education system. These goals are consistent with the Department’s four-year strategic plan, which will be used to regularly monitor and report progress. To view information on all Department programs, please visit www.ed.gov.

The effective implementation of the Department’s priority and strategic goals will depend, in part, on the effective use of high-quality and timely data, including evaluations and performance measures, throughout the lifecycle of policies and programs. The Department is committed to increasing the number of programs and initiatives that are evaluated using methods that include those consistent with the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards and to incorporating cost-effectiveness measures into evaluations and program improvement systems.

For more information, go to <http://www.Performance.gov>.

Agency Priority Goals
<p>Improve outcomes for all children from birth through third grade. By September 30, 2013, at least nine states will implement a high-quality plan to collect and report disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry.</p>
<p>Improve learning by ensuring that more students have an effective teacher. By September 30, 2013, at least 500 school districts will have comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation and support systems and the majority of states will have statewide requirements for comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation and support systems.</p>
<p>Demonstrate progress in turning around the nation’s lowest-performing schools. By September 30, 2013, 500 of the nation’s persistently lowest-achieving schools will have demonstrated significant improvement and will have served as potential models for future turnaround efforts.</p>
<p>Make informed decisions and improve instruction through the use of data. By September 30, 2013, all states will implement comprehensive statewide longitudinal data systems.</p>
<p>Improve the quality of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education Over the next 10 years, increase the number of well-prepared graduates with STEM degrees by one-third, resulting in an additional 1 million graduates with degrees in STEM subjects.</p>
<p>Prepare all students for college and career. By September 30, 2013, all states will adopt internationally-benchmarked college- and career-ready standards.</p>

Agency Priority Goals

Improve students' ability to afford and complete college.

By September 30, 2013, the Department will develop college scorecards designed to improve consumer decision-making and transparency about affordability for students and borrowers by streamlining information on all degree-granting institutions into a single, comparable, and simplified format, while also helping all states and institutions develop college completion plans.

AGENCY STRATEGIC GOALS

To meet the National Outcome Goals, the country needs to modernize education delivery. The six Department Strategic Goals will guide the day-to-day work of the Department's staff.

- 1. Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education.** Increase college access, quality, and completion by improving higher education and lifelong learning opportunities for youth and adults.
- 2. Elementary and Secondary.** Prepare all elementary and secondary students for college and career by improving the education system's ability to consistently deliver excellent classroom instruction with rigorous academic standards while providing effective support services.
- 3. Early Learning.** Improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready.
- 4. Equity.** Ensure and promote effective educational opportunities and safe and healthy learning environments for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.
- 5. Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System.** Enhance the education system's ability to continuously improve through better and more widespread use of data, research and evaluation, transparency, innovation, and technology.
- 6. U.S. Department of Education Capacity.** Improve the organizational capacities of the Department to implement this Strategic Plan.

Note: Per the *GPR Modernization Act*, P.L. 111-352, regarding the requirement to address federal priority goals in the agency's Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan, please refer to www.Performance.gov for information on federal priority goals and the agency's contributions to those goals, where applicable.

DEPARTMENT STRATEGIC GOALS FOR 2011–2014

As mentioned in the previous section, this Plan links the Department’s day-to-day work to the Department’s goals and to the National Outcomes necessary for achieving the President’s 2020 college attainment goal. The day-to-day work is organized into six goals related to the organization of the Department. Priorities are not intended to signify their relative importance; success on each will be necessary to ensure that the Department is maximizing its impact on the education system.

This Plan will help to align the Administration’s yearly budget requests and the Department’s legislative agenda. For example, the Administration will leverage the opportunity to participate in the reauthorization of the *Workforce Investment Act (WIA)* to ensure that adult students and individuals with disabilities are college- and career-ready, and have the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue a successful career pathway. Continuous improvement rests in large part on an ongoing cycle of assessing performance, examining data, modifying instruction, and improving practices. Creating a culture of continuous improvement is at the heart of our efforts to work with and support elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educators and policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels.

Accomplishing all of this Plan’s priorities will require tireless efforts from Department staff working with Congress and the White House, partners at the state and local levels, and all other stakeholders. This includes meeting numerous legislative challenges, such as the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, *WIA*, the *Carl D. Perkins Career & Technical Education Act (CTEA)*, the *Higher Education Act (HEA)*, and others. Additionally, state and federal fiscal constraints may impact the Department’s ability to provide the necessary incentives and resources to increase quality, transparency, and accountability.

Goal 1: Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education. Increase college access, quality, and completion by improving higher education and lifelong learning opportunities for youth and adults.

Sub-goal 1.1: Access. Close the opportunity gap by improving the affordability of and access to college and workforce training, especially for low-income students, first-generation college students, individuals with disabilities, and other chronically underrepresented populations.

Sub-Goal 1.2: Quality. Foster institutional quality, accountability, and transparency to ensure that postsecondary education credentials represent effective preparation for students to excel in a global society and a changing economy.

Sub-Goal 1.3: Completion. Increase degree and certificate completion and job placement in high-need and high-skilled areas (especially STEM), particularly among underrepresented and economically disadvantaged populations.

Goal 2: Elementary and Secondary. Prepare all elementary and secondary students for college and career by improving the education system’s ability to consistently deliver excellent classroom instruction with rigorous academic standards while providing effective support services.

Sub-Goal 2.1: Standards and Assessments. Support state-led efforts to develop and adopt college- and career-ready, internationally benchmarked standards, with aligned, valid, and reliable assessments.

Sub-Goal 2.2: Great Teachers and Great Leaders. Improve the preparation, recruitment, development, support, evaluation, and recognition of effective teachers, principals, and administrators.

Sub-Goal 2.3: School Climate and Community. Increase the success, safety, and health of students, particularly in high-need schools and communities.

Sub-Goal 2.4: Struggling Schools. Support states and districts in turning around the nation’s persistently lowest-achieving schools.

Sub-Goal 2.5: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Increase access to and excellence in STEM for all students and prepare the next generation for careers in STEM-related fields.

Goal 3: Early Learning. Improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade, so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track for graduating from high school college- and career-ready.

Sub-Goal 3.1: Access. Increase access to high-quality early learning programs and comprehensive services, especially for children with high needs.

Sub-Goal 3.2: Workforce. Improve the quality and effectiveness of the early learning workforce so that early childhood educators have the skills and abilities necessary to improve young children’s health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes.

Sub-Goal 3.3: Assessment and Accountability. Improve the capacity of states and early learning programs to develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems.

Goal 4: Equity. Ensure and promote effective educational opportunities and safe and healthy learning environments for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.

Sub-Goal 4.1: Continue to Increase the Infusion of Equity Throughout the Department’s Programs and Activities. Promote and coordinate equity- focused efforts in Departmental programs.

Sub-Goal 4.2: Civil Rights Enforcement. Ensure equal access to education and promote educational excellence throughout the nation through the vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws.

Goal 5: Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System. Enhance the education system’s ability to continuously improve through better and more widespread use of data, research and evaluation, transparency, innovation, and technology.

Sub-Goal 5.1: Data Systems. Facilitate the development of interoperable longitudinal data systems from early learning through the workforce to enable data-driven decision-making by increasing access to timely, reliable, and high-value data.

Sub-Goal 5.2: Research and Evaluation. Support multiple approaches to research and evaluation to support educational improvement and Department decision-making.

Sub-Goal 5.3: Transparency. Present relevant and reliable information that increases demand for educational attainment and improves educational performance, while maintaining student privacy.

Sub-Goal 5.4: Technology and Innovation. Accelerate the development and broad adoption of new, effective programs, processes, and strategies, including education technology.

Goal 6: U.S. Department of Education Capacity. Improve the organizational capacities of the Department to implement this Strategic Plan.

Sub-Goal 6.1: Effective Workforce. Continue to build a high-performing, skilled workforce within the Department.

Sub-Goal 6.2: Programmatic Risk Management. Improve the Department’s program efficacy through comprehensive risk management and grant monitoring.

Sub-Goal 6.3: Implementation and Support. Build Department capacity to support states’ and other grantees’ implementation of reforms that result in improved outcomes for students.

Sub-Goal 6.4: Productivity and Performance Management. Improve workforce productivity through information technology and performance management systems.

GOAL 1: POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION, AND ADULT EDUCATION. INCREASE COLLEGE ACCESS, QUALITY, AND COMPLETION BY IMPROVING HIGHER EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH AND ADULTS.

Dramatically boosting completion rates for bachelor's and associate's degrees is essential for Americans to compete in a global economy. Meeting the President's 2020 Goal will require millions of additional Americans to earn a bachelor's or associate's degree or certificate. To meet his goal, the President has also challenged every American to commit to at least one year of higher education or career training—at a community college, four-year postsecondary institution, vocational-training school or program, or through an apprenticeship.

Over 40 percent of students who enroll as first time, full-time students in four-year colleges fail to graduate within six years from the same institution, and over 70 percent who enroll in two-year colleges fail to graduate within three years from the same institution.¹⁵ In order to achieve the President's goal, institutions of higher education will need to do more than enroll students in college; they will need to ensure that students successfully complete degrees and certificates. In addition, as part of the Department's career and technical education (CTE) transformation strategy, the Department must work to provide support to state- and industry-led efforts to promote career skills for all students. Furthermore, to ensure a sustainable national economy, once they get to college, sufficient numbers of students must then enroll in and graduate with degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)-related fields.

Whether for recent high school graduates or adult learners, the Department must ensure that all students are well prepared for college and career, help more students enroll in postsecondary education, and increase the number who complete programs of study with a degree or certificate.

Prior to entering postsecondary education, prospective students need easily accessible information on cost, career placement and graduation rates, college loan default rates, and other information crucial to understanding the quality of their institutions or programs. Students deserve to know that, whether they enter a college, university, postsecondary career training program, or adult education program, the credential they earn will be affordable and its value will be recognized as an indication that they possess the necessary knowledge and skills for success in the workplace and in life.

Providing federal student aid in a simple, reliable, and efficient manner is the main way that the Department supports college access and completion. In FY 2011, the Department expects to deliver nearly \$175 billion in grants, work-study, and loan assistance to almost 15 million postsecondary students¹⁶ and their families. These students attend approximately 6,300 institutions of postsecondary education accredited by dozens of agencies.¹⁷ In addition, the Department administers \$2 billion annually in grants to strengthen postsecondary institutions and promote college readiness, and an additional \$2 billion in grant funds for CTE, adult education and literacy, and correctional education to help adults build skills and prepare adults for work, citizenship, and lifelong learning.

The Department has already taken significant steps to increase college access, quality, and completion. Through HCERA, Congress ended student loan subsidies to banks, saving billions of dollars that are now used for financial aid through the Pell Grant program and by reducing borrowers' repayments. In two years, enrollment of Pell Grant recipients in postsecondary education increased more than 50 percent, from 6 million to 9.6 million

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2003–04 and 2008–09 IPEDS.

¹⁶ Of the approximately 21 million total postsecondary education students

¹⁷ Of the approximately 7,000 total postsecondary education institutions

students.¹⁸ The law also appropriates \$2.6 billion over the next 10 years for grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and minority-serving institutions, and provides \$750 million over the next five years to states, institutions, and organizations that are creating partnerships to ease the pathway to college for our disadvantaged populations while increasing the quality of a postsecondary education and supporting workforce readiness for success in career. In addition, the Department has simplified the application for federal student aid so it is easier and faster for students to apply for aid.

Building on these accomplishments, the Department will continue to collaborate with stakeholders and provide leadership to accomplish four key sub-goals:

- 1.1. Access.** Close the opportunity gap by improving the affordability of and access to college and workforce training, especially for low-income students, first-generation college students, individuals with disabilities, and other chronically underrepresented populations.
- 1.2. Quality.** Foster institutional quality, accountability, and transparency to ensure that postsecondary education credentials represent effective preparation for students to excel in a global society and a changing economy.
- 1.3. Completion.** Increase degree and certificate completion and job placement in high-need and high-skilled areas (especially science, technology, engineering, mathematics - STEM), particularly among underrepresented and economically disadvantaged populations.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in improving student access, college completion, and academic quality.

Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education Indicators of Success

- Increase in the percentage of individuals completing and filing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form (FAFSA) who come from low-income households
- Increase in the percentage of individuals completing and filing the FAFSA who are non-traditional students (25 years and above with no college degree)
- Increase in the number of states that have published a plan for improving postsecondary access, quality, and completion leading to careers and positive civic engagement
- Increase in the number of undergraduate credentials/degrees

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid, previously unpublished. 2011.

SUB-GOAL 1.1: ACCESS. CLOSE THE OPPORTUNITY GAP BY IMPROVING THE AFFORDABILITY OF AND ACCESS TO COLLEGE AND WORKFORCE TRAINING, ESPECIALLY FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS, FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS, INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES, AND OTHER CHRONICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS.

Postsecondary education access—and success—can only be achieved if students complete high school or its equivalent and if postsecondary education and training are relevant and affordable. Many of the nation’s students are currently ill prepared for the academic rigor required for success at a postsecondary institution. Others lack the financial resources to pay for school. Although the Department delivered nearly \$175 billion in student financial aid in FY 2011, affordability remains a problem. During the past 10 years, published college prices rose more rapidly than the cost of other goods and services.¹⁹ Well over three-quarters of undergraduates from low-income families have unmet financial need for attending public two-year or four-year colleges and universities.²⁰

The Department will take a number of steps to support efforts that complement its work in strengthening student financial aid. The Department will work with all stakeholders throughout the education and career pipelines to improve the academic readiness of students for postsecondary education and employment, support the adoption of internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards so that high school students graduate with the competencies necessary for postsecondary education, and ensure that information on obtaining financial aid and making sound choices is easily available to students.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of federal student aid;
- Provide incentives to states and postsecondary institutions to contain or reduce the cost of providing education while ensuring and/or increasing quality;
- Ensure that all students, as consumers, have useful and accurate information about an institution’s baseline and rates for retention, transfers, graduation, employment outcomes, and student debt so that they can make sound decisions;
- Build capacity to link postsecondary institutions more closely with elementary and secondary schools, businesses, government, and labor to meet workforce needs, especially in STEM; and
- Promote career pathways and help all students gain the skills they need to be successful in careers.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Protect the maximum Pell Grant award of \$5,550 for our nation’s neediest students;
- Simplify the financial aid application process and equip every high school and community with the tools needed for more students to complete the FAFSA;
- Continue to ensure that institutions eligible to receive federal student aid under Title IV of the HEA are fully implementing the Direct Loan program;
- Provide improved federal student aid service and information to students, including support for students for whom financial assistance can make a difference in completing a certificate or degree;

¹⁹ College Board, Advocacy and Policy Center, Trends in Higher Education Series, “Trends in College Pricing 2009,” p. 6, from the College Board, *Annual Survey of Colleges*.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 1995–96, 1999–2000, 2003–04, and 2007–08 National Postsecondary Student Aid Studies (NPSAS:96, NPSAS:2000, NPSAS:04, and NPSAS:08).

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- Promote public service loan forgiveness, work-study, and other campus programs, such as internships, mentorships, and cooperative education, to expose students to careers in public service;
- Encourage the use and evaluation of promising and proven practices to improve student and institutional outcomes for participants in the Department's college access and postsecondary programs;
- Expand career pathway systems for adults in collaboration with federal partners and the private sector;
- Scale the Rigorous Programs of Study, thereby improving career skills for all students, and strengthen accountability provisions in the CTEA;
- Implement regulations that address consumer needs for readily available information about postsecondary programs or institutions, including college price watch lists, and provide and promote additional high-quality data on the Department's *College Navigator* website, *FAFSA on the Web*, and other online resources; and
- Ensure that postsecondary institutions engage in effective collaboration with state vocational rehabilitation and other agencies to increase access to higher education for individuals with disabilities.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

The rising costs of postsecondary education are making it increasingly difficult for students to enter and complete postsecondary education, especially on a full-time basis. The Department will encourage the adoption of strategies to smooth or minimize increases in tuition, books, materials, and related costs to students. However, success will depend, to some degree, on the extent to which states and postsecondary institutions (a) implement policies and programs to increase student retention and persistence to graduation, (b) accelerate college completion, (c) offer dual high school and postsecondary enrollments, (d) develop and use online, open-source materials, (e) better align high school completion and postsecondary entrance requirements, and (f) better align transfer requirements that lead to baccalaureate degrees. In addition, modifications to Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems and other data systems are necessary to better track the nation's progress on improving access to postsecondary education, completion of postsecondary degrees and certificates, and success in the workforce and society. Finally, high-quality technical assistance is needed to address the limited capacity of states and school districts to advance programs in high-need areas, such as STEM.

SUB-GOAL 1.2: QUALITY. FOSTER INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND TRANSPARENCY TO ENSURE THAT POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION CREDENTIALS REPRESENT EFFECTIVE PREPARATION FOR STUDENTS TO EXCEL IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY AND A CHANGING ECONOMY.

For the United States to remain educationally and economically competitive, our institutions must remain of the highest quality and ensure that the degrees and credentials that students earn are internationally competitive. An important part of our goal must be to ensure the value of a postsecondary credential. Improvements in how data are collected and used in higher education are critical, not only to accurately gauge our progress in achieving a better-educated workforce, but to determine what strategies work best to drive educational attainment. Programs that demonstrate data-driven evidence of success have the best chance of increasing student, institutional, and state outcomes and productivity. The Department must help strengthen data systems for higher education to sustain and improve quality.

Accordingly, the Department will continue to encourage the development and use of statewide longitudinal data systems that include postsecondary and workforce information, as well as to enhance the usefulness of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data so that they will better reflect changing and diverse student populations. We will continue to support teacher preparation initiatives that will further the transformation already underway in how we recruit and prepare teachers in this country to teach all students, including students with high needs. Under this plan, teacher preparation programs will be held to a clear standard of quality that includes, but is not limited to, their record of preparing and placing teachers who deliver results for students. Better and more transparent information, coupled with improving the Department's role in ensuring the quality of postsecondary institutions, will increase the confidence of students, families, institutions, and states in the quality of federally funded programs, as well as a better understanding of the quality of all programs, regardless of funding. The Department can help promote information about successful evidence-based strategies, foster better use of data in postsecondary education, and encourage states and institutions to set and monitor goals to improve performance among students, institutions, and states.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Improve the availability, quality, and use of data, data systems, and research to increase student and institutional performance and teacher preparation;
- Provide incentives for institutions and states to publish and make transparent their efforts to increase the quality of their educational programs, the results of their college completion goals, and the improvement of their pathways to college and career; and
- Strengthen consumer protection and program integrity at institutions eligible for federal student aid under Title IV of HEA.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Improving state accountability by implementing effective performance-based funding systems in current programs and through planned reauthorizations;
- Providing general funding for states to recruit, prepare, place, support, develop, and advance teachers, and promote effective teaching at every stage of the career pipeline;
- Directing states to report on teacher preparation program outcomes, including elementary and secondary school student achievement, employment outcomes, and customer satisfaction;
- Directing states to use outcome indicators in identifying high-quality and low-performing teacher preparation programs;
- Channeling HEA Title IV scholarship aid to top performing teacher preparation programs for top-tier students;

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- Establishing grant priorities that leverage evidence-based high-impact strategies for successful persistence and completion results, and encouraging the Department’s grantees to develop, publish, and share integrated postsecondary education, workforce development, and adult education plans and goals that include such strategies;
- Reviewing the recommendations of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) to improve the effectiveness of the accrediting agency recognition review process and ensure that institutions participating in Title IV programs are providing high-quality postsecondary education and training; and
- Promoting program integrity by developing and implementing appropriate regulations or procedures and strengthening program compliance and risk assessment activities covering institutions participating in Title IV programs.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

More reliable information is needed to determine whether postsecondary institutions that receive Federal grant and loan funds are achieving performance expectations. Additionally, the establishment of performance-based regulations and metrics that will identify the highest to lowest performing postsecondary institutions (e.g., gainful employment, schools of education) is a new approach to increase transparency and improve the evaluation of postsecondary institutions. This will require changes to and the expansion of existing data collection efforts. For example, current college graduation rate formulas do not account for part-time students or transfer students. Given that any changes to these formulas would require significant effort from stakeholders, promoting changes will be challenging for states, institutions, and the Department of Education.

SUB-GOAL 1.3: COMPLETION. INCREASE DEGREE AND CERTIFICATE COMPLETION AND JOB PLACEMENT IN HIGH-NEED AND HIGH-SKILLED AREAS (ESPECIALLY STEM), PARTICULARLY AMONG UNDERREPRESENTED AND ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS.

The success of the American economy, culture, and national security depends on the talent of all Americans. To encourage the development of that talent throughout a lifetime, it is important to focus not only on increasing the number of students earning degrees and credentials through postsecondary education, but also on encouraging every American to complete at least one year of education or workforce training, or its equivalent, beyond high school. One-third of beginning postsecondary students drop out of college within three years without completing a degree or certificate,²¹ and at least 93 million adults function at low literacy levels that inhibit their ability to succeed in college and the workforce.²² Ensuring that all Americans have the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in college, the workforce, and life will require higher standards of educational excellence, leading to dramatically improved high school and college completion outcomes.

Continuing the nation’s tradition of leading advances in high-demand fields (e.g., engineering, healthcare, etc.) is ever more important to our nation’s future. However, there is alarming evidence that we must do more to improve the country’s STEM workforce—as evidenced by the high rate at which college students leave STEM majors and the declining share of degrees awarded that are in STEM fields.

The Department will have the greatest impact by working with stakeholders on postsecondary programs that educate and support those students most in need of help to persist and complete educational programs and that remove barriers to completion. For example, the Department will support and disseminate information on strategies that foster successful transitions, including transitions between secondary and postsecondary education, community colleges and four-year colleges and universities, postsecondary education and employment, and/or postsecondary pathways within or across career fields. Success will require strong communication strategies, along with better research and data analysis about effective persistence and completion strategies in postsecondary settings.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Support programs that focus on first-year success and progression from the first to the second year of college through graduation, especially at community colleges and for low-income students;
- Fund programs and services that meet the educational needs of adult learners (including those with the lowest reading, writing, and math skills, and lowest levels of English literacy), transitioning workers, and career changers, including immigrant professionals and previously incarcerated individuals;
- Work with other agencies to develop a comprehensive and coherent federal STEM strategy;
- Maximize opportunities to identify career pathways for adults interested in education programs, especially in high-need fields (e.g., STEM, teaching);
- Modify current data systems to better identify and track program completion outcomes; and
- Collaborate with other federal agencies to improve the quality of STEM education at all levels to help increase the number of well-prepared graduates with STEM degrees by one-third over the next 10 years, resulting in an additional 1 million graduates with degrees in STEM subjects.

²¹ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2003–04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, First Follow-up (BPS:04/06).

²² U.S. Department of Education, NCES, National Assessment of Adult Literacy Study, “Number of Adults in Each Literacy Level,” 2009. Refers to the population that was less than proficient in literacy.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Fund promising practices and evidence-based programs that provide support to students at risk of not completing their degree or certificate program of study;
- Align education and workforce development systems through the WIA reauthorization, creating multiple pathways for youths and adults, including low-skilled individuals and those with significant disabilities, to re-engage in learning and obtain credentials that result in further education and career success;
- Provide incentive funding for students to graduate in high-demand disciplines such as STEM or teaching;
- Encourage partnerships in high-need fields (e.g., STEM) between community colleges, four-year colleges, universities, and elementary and secondary schools;
- Fund innovative, evidence-based, high-impact practices and implement career pathways and programs of study to increase access to and completion of degrees, certificates, and/or other industry-recognized credentials;
- Support White House initiatives to improve educational quality and student access and completion at minority-serving institutions and for students underrepresented in postsecondary education; and
- Work with institutions receiving support under Titles III and V of the *Higher Education Act* (HEA) to set goals for college completion and implement effective practices to increase college completion.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Reauthorizations of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), the *Workforce Investment Act* (WIA), the *Higher Education Act* (HEA), and the *Career and Technical Education Act* (CTEA) are needed to support the implementation of more rigorous high school standards and postsecondary and adult education reforms to increase student achievement and success in the workforce and in life. Moreover, postsecondary institutions will need to increase their capacity to serve the growing number of Americans who will require education and/or training beyond high school to be successful in the workplace, particularly the tens of millions of Americans who have basic literacy and workforce training needs. In an economy where state funding for higher education is threatened, institutions are increasingly required to serve more students with fewer resources. Reducing the need for postsecondary remediation offers postsecondary institutions and programs a way to redirect resources to focus on persistence and completion. Even so, postsecondary institutions and programs must continue to find ways to be innovative and productive, while serving students more effectively.

In order to track progress on these reforms and to be accountable, certain data elements and reporting features need to be added to many of the state-owned and managed longitudinal data systems and to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), from which comparative data can be drawn. Funding required for technology infrastructure changes intended to add, delete, or revise data elements, ensuring interoperability, and integrating education and employment data, could present challenges.

GOAL 2: ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY. PREPARE ALL ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER BY IMPROVING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM’S ABILITY TO CONSISTENTLY DELIVER EXCELLENT CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION WITH RIGOROUS ACADEMIC STANDARDS WHILE PROVIDING EFFECTIVE SUPPORT SERVICES.

There is a clear national consensus that our elementary and secondary education system should prepare every student for college and a career. However, there is also broad agreement that our education system fails to consistently provide students with the excellent education necessary to achieve that goal. The result is that too many U.S. students are failing to reach their full potential. For example, 4th grade proficiency rates on the 2009 NAEP math exam were unchanged from the previous NAEP assessment for the first time ever, while the 8th grade proficiency rates in recent assessments increased by only small amounts.²³ Even worse, over half a million U.S. teenagers leave school without a diploma each year.²⁴ Dropout rates are much higher for minority students, English Learners, and students with disabilities—over one out of three black and Hispanic students are not graduating on time, and too often they are not completing their high school educations.²⁵ And, two out of three students with disabilities leave high school without diplomas.²⁶

We simply must do a better job of ensuring not only that all students graduate on time, but also that they graduate prepared for college and a career. The Department’s elementary and secondary education reforms focus on the building blocks needed for schools, school districts, and states to more consistently deliver excellent classroom instruction for all students. The foundation of these reforms is a system for improving learning and teaching that aligns internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards, high-quality formative and summative assessments, and engaging and effective instructional content. Ensuring that our students have the critical-thinking skills and other tools to be effective in the 21st century economy means improving teaching and learning in all content areas—from literacy to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics to history, civics and government, geography, foreign languages, the arts, economics and financial literacy, environmental education, health education, and other subjects.

Because nothing is more important to student learning in the classroom than a great teacher supported by a school principal who is a strong leader, the Department will work to ensure that every student has an effective teacher, every school has an effective leader, and every teacher and leader has access to the preparation, ongoing support, feedback from a meaningful evaluation system, recognition, and collaboration opportunities he or she needs to be effective. School environments also must be conducive to teaching and learning and be safe places that provide the necessary instructional time and resources to help all students achieve. Communities—families, extended family members, community-based organizations, and others—must work together to ensure that children know they are the highest priority and receive the support they need to succeed. Moreover, the nation must focus on dramatically improving our persistently lowest-achieving schools.

With the upcoming reauthorization of *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, the Department has a critical opportunity to reinforce and extend the progress already being made to strengthen the quality of elementary and secondary education through Race to the Top and other Recovery Act programs.

²³ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Digest of Education Statistics: 2009, Table 138.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “NCES CCD State Dropout and Completion Data File,” 2008–09 School Year (NCES 2011-312), table 1.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Public School Graduates and Dropouts. Common Core of Data: School Year 2007–08 (NCES 2010-341), tables 2 and 3. Data from “NCES CCD State Dropout and Completion Data File,” School Year 2007–08, Version 1a.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS), OMB #1820-0521: “Children with Disabilities Exiting Special Education, 2006-07.”

The Department will continue to collaborate with states, districts, school leaders, teachers, and families and provide leadership to accomplish the following key Elementary and Secondary sub-goals:

- 2.1. Standards and Assessments:** Support state-led efforts to develop and adopt college- and career-ready, internationally benchmarked standards, with aligned, valid, and reliable assessments.
- 2.2. Great Teachers and Great Leaders:** Improve the preparation, recruitment, development, support, evaluation, and recognition of effective teachers, principals, and administrators.
- 2.3. School Climate and Community:** Increase the success, safety, and health of students, particularly in high-need schools and communities.
- 2.4. Struggling Schools:** Support states and districts in turning around the nation’s persistently lowest-achieving schools.
- 2.5. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics:** Increase access to and excellence in STEM for all students and prepare the next generation for careers in STEM-related fields.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in helping states and school districts prepare students for college and a career.

Elementary and Secondary Indicators of Success

- Increase in the number of states with internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards
- Increase in the number of states collaborating to develop and adopt high-quality assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards
- Increase in the number of states in which postsecondary institutions accept proficiency on state assessment as evidence that students do not need to enroll in remedial courses
- Increase in the number of school districts with comprehensive teacher evaluation and support systems
- Increase in the number of states with statewide requirements for comprehensive teacher evaluation and support systems
- Increase in the number of states with statewide requirements for comprehensive principal evaluation and support systems
- Increase in the percentage of schools implementing initiatives that increase time for learning during or outside the school day
- Identify, as potential models, persistently lowest-achieving schools demonstrating improvement on indicators that schools are required to report through the School Improvement Grant program
- Increase in the percentage of Race to the Top grantees that achieve their targets for their performance measures
- Increase in the percentage of middle/high school math teachers who major in mathematics or mathematics education
- Increase in the percentage of middle/high school science teachers who major in science or science education

SUB-GOAL 2.1: STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS. SUPPORT STATE-LED EFFORTS TO DEVELOP AND ADOPT COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY, INTERNATIONALLY BENCHMARKED STANDARDS, WITH ALIGNED, VALID, AND RELIABLE ASSESSMENTS.

World-class standards are essential for meaningful education reform. Clear, high expectations for what students need to know and be able to do and high-quality assessments that accurately measure student performance against those expectations are essential for the nation to ensure student achievement and prepare a skilled workforce.

Since the 1990s, federal legislation has required states to develop their own standards as well as student assessments that are aligned with those standards. Today, every state has in place a set of elementary and secondary education standards for core subjects as well as an assessment system that measures student progress toward mathematics and reading/language arts standards in grades 3–8 and once in high school. However, existing federal accountability requirements, including a requirement to reach 100 percent proficiency by 2014, effectively create perverse incentives for states to lower rather than raise their academic standards. The result is that few states have standards that are sufficiently challenging to prepare students for the demands of college and today’s workforce. Students, families, and teachers do not have the information they need to determine whether a student is on track to be college- and career-ready by the time he or she graduates from high school, and four of every 10 new college students take remedial courses.²⁷

States have recognized the need to improve the rigor and quality of their standards and assessments. Since 2009, 45 states and the District of Columbia partnered in a state-led effort to develop common college- and career-ready internationally benchmarked standards in English language arts and mathematics. With such standards in place, educators can create the curricular frameworks, curriculum materials, professional development materials, and other supports that they need to effectively implement a coherent system of teaching and learning that meets the needs of all students and that truly prepares our nation’s young people to be college- and career- ready. The standards must be coupled with high-quality formative, interim, and summative assessments that can measure the extent to which students are mastering these standards and provide students, families, and teachers with timely, relevant, and actionable information on student knowledge and skills, including growth in knowledge and skills over time in order to improve teaching and learning.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Require all states to demonstrate that their standards lead to college- and career-readiness and encourage state-led efforts to develop and adopt internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards;
- Support states in the development and implementation of high-quality assessment systems aligned to college- and career-ready standards;
- Support continuing validation, benchmarking, and research on standards and assessments to ensure that they capture what students need to know to be ready for college and career, are evidence based, and appropriately address the needs of all students, including English Learners and students with disabilities;
- Support effective implementation of these standards and assessments to improve teaching and learning in the nation’s classrooms; and

²⁷ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2003–04 and 2007–08 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:04 and NPSAS:08).

- Eliminate incentives created by current law for states to set low standards that do not ensure that students are prepared for success.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Fund consortia of states to develop high-quality, valid, and reliable “next generation” assessment systems in mathematics and English language arts and other academic and career and technical subjects, as appropriate, that require students to demonstrate or apply their knowledge and skills and appropriately address the needs, including accessibility needs, of all students;
- Help fund ongoing costs for states administering higher-quality assessment systems;
- Fund development and effective use of valid and reliable interim and formative assessments aligned with college- and career-ready standards and assessments;
- Provide strong evidence-based guidance that states can use in establishing policies related to standards, assessments, and evaluation systems;
- Fund state and district efforts to transition to new standards and assessments, such as preparation and professional development for teachers and development of new instructional materials; and
- Propose, through the ESEA reauthorization blueprint, that Congress replace the current ESEA accountability framework with an accountability system that rewards, rather than penalizes, states that implement internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards and assessments, while also recognizing success in meeting the standards.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Although 45 states and the District of Columbia are leading the current effort to implement college- and career-ready standards and appear eager to develop and implement new, aligned assessments and higher-quality instructional materials, this transition will take several years and the costs and complexity of developing and administering assessments across the states are significant. Developing appropriate assessment instruments and approaches for very young children poses significant challenges, especially for children from low-income families, children who are English Learners, and children with disabilities. Developing and administering the next generation of assessments and supporting teachers through training related to the new standards will require continuing financial support.

SUB-GOAL 2.2: GREAT TEACHERS AND GREAT LEADERS. IMPROVE THE PREPARATION, RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, SUPPORT, EVALUATION, AND RECOGNITION OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, AND ADMINISTRATORS.

It is well established that teacher effectiveness contributes more to improving student academic outcomes than any other in-school characteristic and that a strong school leader can help teachers succeed as part of a supported instructional team. The Department intends to improve the quality of teaching and learning in America’s schools by supporting efforts to increase the number of districts with comprehensive teacher and principal evaluation and support systems based on student growth in significant part, as well as other measures, that may be used to inform personnel decisions such as professional development, retention, tenure, promotion, and compensation decisions.

In light of the importance of teachers and school leadership for student success, the nation has to do more to ensure that every student has an effective teacher in every classroom, every school has effective leaders, and every teacher and leader has access to the preparation, ongoing support, recognition, and collaboration opportunities he or she needs to succeed. The Department will help strengthen the profession by supporting efforts that focus on actionable feedback, support, and incentives at every stage of a career, based on fair evaluation systems that look at multiple measures, including student growth. The Department will support state and district efforts that provide time for teacher collaboration, on-the-job learning opportunities, and professional advancement. As states transition to new college- and career-ready standards, the Department will support opportunities for teachers to enhance their instructional expertise related to the new standards.

The Department will also focus on ensuring that students in high-poverty and high-minority schools, students with disabilities, and English Learners are taught by highly qualified and effective teachers and have effective leaders. While public schools will hire more than one million teachers from 2012 through 2014,²⁸ approximately three in 10 new teachers leave the profession in their first three years of teaching.²⁹ For this reason, the Department will pay special attention to teacher recruitment, preparation, and induction as critical levers to improve the overall effectiveness of the teaching workforce, especially in high-need schools. When effective teachers and leaders work together in collaborative learning environments, they can make a dramatic difference in closing the achievement gap. This is why the Department will increase efforts to strengthen school leadership, especially in high-need schools, and will place a special emphasis on creating conditions for collective success, especially in low-achieving and high-need schools.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, CCD, “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education”; Private School Universe Survey (PSS); Elementary and Secondary Teacher Model; and New Teacher Hires Model.

²⁹ Note: Based on the number of teachers with one to three years of experience that left teaching after the 2007–08 school year [source: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Teacher Data Files”; Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), “Current and Former Teacher Data Files.”]

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Focus on enhancing teacher and leader effectiveness as a means to improve student outcomes;
- Elevate and strengthen the education profession through support for recruiting, preparing, developing, evaluating, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and leaders;
- Help ensure the equitable distribution of effective teachers and leaders, especially in low-performing, high-poverty, high-minority schools;
- Strengthen pathways into teaching and school leadership positions in high-need schools; and
- Provide a structured program of technical assistance to states to improve teacher and leader quality and effectiveness.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Promote the development of fair evaluation systems for teachers and leaders based on student growth in significant part, as well as other measures, that may be used for professional development, retention, tenure, promotion, and compensation decisions;
- Fund high-quality preparation programs that prepare educators to teach and lead in high-need schools and in shortage areas, such as special education and teaching of English Learners, and require these programs to track and report on the effectiveness of their graduates;
- Fund and support the design and implementation of high-quality, ongoing, job-embedded professional development and improved professional working conditions, including opportunities for collaboration among instructional teams and methodologies linked to improved teacher performance;
- Support states and districts in ensuring that students in high-poverty and high-need schools are taught by effective teachers led by effective principals; and
- Fund and encourage districts and states to rethink and improve how they identify, recruit, hire, develop, retain, reward, and advance effective teachers and leaders.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Because teacher and school leader evaluation systems and compensation decisions are governed by state and local policies, reforms of existing evaluation and compensation systems are unlikely to be successful without revisions in state policies and new partnerships with teacher organizations. Also, some of these reforms will depend, in part, on reauthorization of ESEA and on Congressional appropriations.

SUB-GOAL 2.3: SCHOOL CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY. INCREASE THE SUCCESS, SAFETY, AND HEALTH OF STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY IN HIGH-NEED SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES.

Students can succeed despite being born into the most difficult of circumstances, and a school with dedicated teachers and leaders focused on teaching to high standards can be effective even when other services are lacking. Tackling a challenge as great as the academic achievement gap requires deploying every tool at our disposal and providing students with the support they need to succeed. Preparing students for success is made easier when students come to school well fed, healthy, and ready to learn, with families who are actively engaged in their children’s academic life. It is also made easier by a positive school climate where students feel safe and supported in their classrooms and where adults and students can engage in meaningful ways. Unfortunately, too many schools continue to suffer from troubling rates of school violence and substance abuse, and too many students face poverty-related barriers to learning.

Particularly for students at risk for academic failure, success demands a comprehensive approach to meet a wide range of student needs. Developing these approaches and implementing appropriate interventions requires understanding the extent to which students are safe, healthy, and engaged in school and understanding the views of students, families, and teachers. Equipped with good information on school climate, states and school districts can employ strategies with demonstrated success for improving learning conditions, such as rethinking the length and structure of the school day, providing time for teachers to collaborate to meet academic challenges, and adopting evidence-based programs, such as positive behavior intervention and supports (PBIS), that improve students’ behavior while also reducing substance abuse and school violence.

In high-poverty neighborhoods, the Department will support community-wide approaches that address interrelated barriers to learning and provide comprehensive supports for students and their families that include, as appropriate, the services provided by specialized instructional support personnel. This can be achieved by building a continuum of academic programs and family and community supports, from the cradle through college to career, with strong schools at the center. A successful community-wide model also includes the capacity to use data to evaluate the success of the efforts, a leader and an organization that can engage the community and are accountable for results, and a “place-based” approach that focuses resources in targeted areas. This type of comprehensive approach can improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children in the most distressed communities.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Support community-wide approaches and increase the capacity of community-based and other organizations to increase success for children from the cradle through college to career;
- Encourage opportunities for families to engage actively and meaningfully in their children’s education;
- Build state, district, and school capacity to collect and use school-level climate data and other metrics to tailor approaches that effectively address local needs, facilitating partnerships where appropriate to focus on common metrics across sites; and
- Promote high-quality programs offered through an expanded school day and/or year.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Fund communities to provide comprehensive supports through full-service school models and to comprehensively redesign and expand the school day or year to increase time for academics and enrichment activities, which may include opportunities for experiential learning, as well as time for teachers to collaborate and to develop and enhance their skills;
- Fund states to implement effective interventions based on high-quality data about local needs to improve school engagement, environment, safety, and other conditions for enhanced learning;
- Fund community-wide approaches to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children in our most distressed communities from the cradle through college to career;
- Provide incentives for programs to establish partnerships with families and parent organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, or other federal, state, and local entities; and
- Work as a partner with the Strong Cities, Strong Communities (SC2) and the White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative to foster collaboration between federal agencies and local stakeholders to support comprehensive approaches to community-wide and place-based efforts that achieve results for children.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

In the current economic climate, student and family needs often are growing while school budgets are contracting. Expanding services and supports to meet these needs will be a challenge. There are only a few examples of effective programs, such as the Harlem Children’s Zone, that support community transformation to improve educational, developmental, and health outcomes of children in distressed communities. Cross-agency collaboration helps to connect agency programs, leverage community assets, and improve productivity of existing programs, but without additional resources, the impact of these innovative models will not be felt on a wide scale.

In the area of expanded learning time, the cost for expanding the school day or year can be significant and may be viewed as too difficult in the current budget climate. Finally, advancing these reforms to increase the success, safety, and health of students depends in part on the reauthorization of ESEA and on Congressional appropriations.

SUB-GOAL 2.4: STRUGGLING SCHOOLS. SUPPORT STATES AND DISTRICTS IN TURNING AROUND THE NATION’S PERSISTENTLY LOWEST-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS.

Far too many of the nation’s children attend schools that year after year fail to provide students with a quality education. National attention and support focused on these persistently lowest-achieving schools in each state—the bottom five percent of all schools or approximately 5,000 schools nationwide—can help ensure that all students in these schools are receiving the education they deserve. These schools, which are in urban, rural, and suburban communities, have extremely low achievement rates, have shown no improvement over multiple years, and have unacceptably low graduation rates. For example, at the high school level, there are over 1,600 “dropout factories” where fewer than 60 percent of entering freshmen actually graduate.³⁰

Incremental reforms have failed to turn around the nation’s lowest-achieving schools. Among schools that were in restructuring status in 2004–05, over 80 percent were still in restructuring status in 2006–07.³¹ The paucity of successful school turnarounds is due, in significant measure, to the fact that few states and districts have undertaken the fundamental reforms necessary to improve the persistently lowest-achieving schools. Indeed, *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act*, a 2007 study funded by the Department, found that among low-performing schools in their second year of restructuring, there was limited implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act’s* more aggressive interventions, such as replacement of all or most of the school staff (17 percent), state takeover of the school (3 percent), or reopening the school as a public charter school (1 percent). Instead, the study found that most states implemented other improvement strategies in their most challenging schools.³²

Examples of successes in turnaround suggest that low-achieving schools that dramatically improve student outcomes rely on common strategies, including building a positive culture of high expectations; ensuring strong leadership and staff who have the commitment and skills to increase student achievement; supporting effective instructional teams through focused and intensive professional development; strengthening the instructional program; extending learning time and engaging families and communities; and changing governance to provide flexibility for needed reforms. Through SIG and other Department programs, states and school districts now have significant resources to dramatically improve these schools by implementing intensive intervention models. The Department will work with the SIG grantees to identify schools demonstrating improvement on leading indicators in order that they may help inform school improvement efforts in other persistently low-achieving schools.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Target significant funding toward the persistently lowest-achieving schools in return for commitments to implement an intensive intervention model that the school district and community identify as appropriate for the school;
- Encourage state and local policies that support effective school turnaround efforts; and
- Increase the capacity of states, districts, and partner organizations, including teacher organizations and school management organizations, to turn around these schools.

³⁰ Balfanz, Robert; Bridgeland, John M.; Hornig Fox, Joanna; Moore, Laura. Building a Grad Nation: Progress and Challenge in Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic, 2010–2011 Annual Update.

³¹ Stullich, Stephanie; Abrams, Andrew; Eisner, Elizabeth; Lee, Erica. *Title I Implementation: Update on Recent Evaluation Findings*. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, 2009.

³² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, *State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act*, 2007.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Fund state and district-level efforts to turn around their persistently lowest-achieving schools using rigorous intervention models;
- Fund and encourage states and districts to increase their capacity, including through partnerships with local employers and industry groups, faith-based and community-based organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other state and local entities, to turn around their persistently lowest-achieving schools;
- Fund organizations with a record of implementing successful turnaround strategies, including charter management organizations, in order to support rigorous intervention models in additional low-performing schools in urban and rural areas; and
- Encourage states and school districts to adopt policies and practices to attract, develop, and retain effective teachers and leaders in these schools; promote comprehensive instructional programs based on use of data; extend learning time, parent engagement, and community-oriented supports; and ensure operating flexibility and intensive support.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Because the nation has never before marshaled the resources and the commitment to take on the challenge of turning around a large number of our lowest-performing schools, states, school districts, partner organizations, and school staffs will need to effectively partner in doing this difficult work. The Department will also need to work proactively to garner strong community and family support for these far-reaching changes. In addition, turnover in state and local leadership may impede the sustained support for rigorous interventions required to turn around the lowest-performing schools. Finally, the pace of reforms may be dictated in part by future Congressional appropriations and the extent to which the reauthorization of ESEA requires rigorous interventions in the nation’s lowest-achieving schools.

SUB-GOAL 2.5: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS. INCREASE ACCESS TO AND EXCELLENCE IN STEM FOR ALL STUDENTS AND PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION FOR CAREERS IN STEM-RELATED FIELDS.

Few issues matter more to America’s vitality than continuing this nation’s tradition of leading advances in STEM fields. Yet, the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranked American students ahead of just nine out of 34 developed nations in science literacy and ahead of only five in math literacy.³³ Our students need to do better in order to thrive as informed citizens and consumers and to contribute as workers, employers, and innovators. Over the long term, the nation’s ability to address key challenges, such as launching clean energy and other green industries and spurring advancements in health, medicine, and other areas that can revitalize the American economy, will depend on more students entering—and greater numbers persisting in—STEM fields.

Addressing these challenges means focusing on increasing traditionally underrepresented students’ access to high-quality STEM courses and teachers, improving student knowledge of STEM topics, and preparing students for careers as scientists, engineers, and in other STEM-related fields. The Department will work to restore and sustain America’s lead in the modern knowledge economy by seeking to improve the participation and performance of America’s students in STEM subjects and fields. This effort will include partnering with other federal agencies, as well as company and industry leaders, foundations, nonprofit organizations, science and engineering societies, and education institutions, with the goal of developing more effective STEM teachers and helping students to excel in these high-skilled, high-demand areas.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Increase the capacity of teachers, leaders, and schools by developing and deploying tools, training, and other resources that increase access to and advance STEM teaching, learning, and leading;
- Inspire and motivate all students and adults to focus on STEM activities, disciplines, and careers;
- Recruit more highly effective STEM teachers, especially in the highest-need schools; and
- Build capacity to better link states, districts, and schools with STEM-focused businesses and postsecondary institutions.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Work with other agencies to develop a comprehensive and coherent federal STEM strategy to facilitate coordination of STEM education activities, resources, and/or efforts and provide transparent and coordinated support for these efforts;
- Strengthen the pipeline and reduce barriers to hiring teachers with mathematics and/or science content backgrounds;
- Fund and support coherent models of instructional supports for STEM and encourage third parties, including other federal agencies, to develop robust, content-rich professional development offerings for teachers and schools;
- Support state consortia in developing high-quality science assessments aligned with college- and career-ready standards;

³³ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “Highlights from PISA 2009: Performance of U.S. 15-year-old Students in Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy in an International Context Program.”

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- Fund efforts to increase the capacity of district- and state-level leaders to design and implement strong STEM networks to lead STEM education reforms; and
- Encourage STEM partnerships between postsecondary institutions and elementary and secondary schools.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

To achieve the STEM goals, there needs to be improved coordination between federal agencies. In addition, high quality, STEM-specific technical assistance is needed to address the limited capacity of states and school districts to lead STEM-related programs. Finally, states and districts must adopt more rigorous STEM standards that will prepare students to succeed in these fields when they get to higher education.

GOAL 3: EARLY LEARNING. IMPROVE THE HEALTH, SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE OUTCOMES FOR ALL CHILDREN FROM BIRTH THROUGH 3RD GRADE, SO THAT ALL CHILDREN, PARTICULARLY THOSE WITH HIGH NEEDS, ARE ON TRACK FOR GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY.

The Department’s strategy for sustaining the President’s 2020 college attainment goal depends on improving learning in the earliest years. The years from birth through age eight are the most critical for brain development,^{34,35} and significant evidence from research and evaluation demonstrate that participation in high-quality early learning programs will lead to both short- and long-term positive outcomes for all children, especially those with high needs,³⁶ including increased school readiness and success and improved high school graduation and college attendance and completion.^{37,38}

Developing our nation’s educational pipeline requires increasing both access to and the quality of early learning programs and services. This is particularly important for children with high needs since these children have less access to high-quality early learning programs and often enter kindergarten behind their peers. In 2006–07, only 41 percent of three- to five-year-olds from low-income families were enrolled in center-based early childhood care and education programs, compared to 60 percent from non-poor families.³⁹ Early learning programs must meet the needs of all children, including children with disabilities and English Learners. And, to achieve successful outcomes for young children it is critical to gain the support of families and ensure that family engagement and education activities are of high quality and integrated into early learning programs.

Further, there is tremendous variation in levels of quality across center-based programs. As President Obama has made clear, some programs are excellent, some are mediocre, and some waste the most formative years of a child’s life. These realities mean that the Department must focus resources and efforts on both increasing access to and improving the quality of early learning programs, particularly center- and school-based programs for children with high needs across the birth through 3rd grade continuum.

The challenge of increasing access to high-quality early learning programs is significant. Currently, no coherent system of early care and education exists within states. Rather, early learning programs and services are linked together through a patchwork of federal, state, and local funding mechanisms and vary in terms of program standards and quality. Only by coordinating the patchwork of early learning programs and services, and better integrating them with the elementary and secondary education system, can an integrated early learning system be built that improves health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for children from birth through 3rd grade. A high-quality, coordinated early learning system includes program standards, comprehensive assessment systems, workforce and professional development, family and community engagement, health promotion, and data systems.

³⁴ Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, S. (Eds.). *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001.

³⁵ Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 2001.

³⁶ For the purpose of this document, “high need” is defined as “children and students at risk of educational failure, and [specifically referring] to English Learners and children and students with disabilities as examples of high-need children” (U.S. Department of Education, Supplemental Priorities for Discretionary Grant Programs, 2011.)

³⁷ Heckman, James J. (2006). Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children. *Science*, 312, 1900-1902.

³⁸ Pianta, R., Barnett, S., Burchinal, M., & Thornberg, K. The Effects of Preschool Education: What We Know, How Public Policy Is or Is Not Aligned With the Evidence Base, and What We Need to Know. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 10, 49-88, 2009.

³⁹ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “School Readiness Survey of the National Household Education Survey (NHES), 2007.

In aligning these systems, the Department will focus its efforts on improving outcomes for children with high needs by ensuring that such children have access to high-quality early learning programs with demonstrated success in closing achievement gaps early and reducing grade retention rates in later years.⁴⁰

To enhance the quality of these programs and services and improve outcomes for children from birth through 3rd grade, including children with disabilities and those who are English Learners, the Department will promote initiatives that increase access to high-quality programs, improve the early learning workforce, build the capacity of states and programs to develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems, and ensure program effectiveness and accountability.

- 3.1. Access:** Increase access to high-quality early learning programs and comprehensive services, especially for children with high needs.
- 3.2. Workforce:** Improve the quality and effectiveness of the early learning workforce so that early childhood educators have the skills and abilities necessary to improve young children’s health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes.
- 3.3. Assessment and Accountability:** Improve the capacity of states and early learning programs to develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in improving the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through 3rd grade.

Early Learning Indicators of Success

- Increase in the number of states implementing a high-quality plan to collect and report disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry across a broad range of domains
- Increase in the number of states that have developed and adopted common, statewide Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement Systems that reflect high expectations of program excellence and lead to improved learning outcomes for children
- Increase in the number of states that have statewide coordinated systems of professional development for early childhood educators serving children from birth through 3rd grade
- Increase in the number of states implementing a Comprehensive Assessment System that includes screening and referral processes, formative measures, kindergarten entry assessments, measures of classroom quality and adult-child interactions, measures of child outcomes, and program evaluation

⁴⁰ Frede, E., Jung, K., Barnett, W.S., & Figueras, A. (2009). *The APPLES Blossom: Abbott Preschool Program Longitudinal Effects Study (APPLES), Preliminary Results through 2nd Grade, Interim Report*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.

SUB-GOAL 3.1: ACCESS. INCREASE ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS AND COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES, ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN WITH HIGH NEEDS.

A major obstacle facing families with young children is the lack of access to high-quality early learning programs and services. Children who attend high-quality early learning programs and receive high-quality interventions across all domains of learning do measurably better in school than their peers who do not attend high-quality early learning programs. However, there is a large gap in access to high-quality, center-based early learning programs between children from low-income households and those from middle- and high-income homes, with a disproportionately high gap for children with disabilities and Hispanic children. For example, only 30 percent of three- to five-year-old Hispanic children from low-income families attended a center-based early childcare or education program in 2006–07, compared to 59 percent of white children from low-income families and 65 percent of black children from low-income families.⁴¹ In addition, in the 2009–10 school year, only 14 percent of three-year-olds and 40 percent of four-year-olds attended state-funded preschool, Head Start, or preschool special education programs.⁴² Moreover, state standards continue to vary widely, and only a limited number of state-funded preschool programs meet the 10 benchmarks for high quality, as defined by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).⁴³

The Department can address these barriers to accessing high-quality early learning programs by helping to increase the number of high-quality center-based programs and by promoting the transparency of information around enrollment opportunities and the quality of programs. Many families—especially those in rural and urban communities and those with children with disabilities—often have difficulty identifying and enrolling in a high-quality early learning program. Families commonly do not have the information necessary to distinguish high-quality programs from those that are not. Moreover, the importance of early learning to a child’s development is not widely understood. For example, while most Americans believe that early literacy is important,⁴⁴ there is limited awareness of the severity of the literacy gap that disproportionately affects children from low-income households. The common misperception is that these children will just “catch up” with their peers in the elementary years.⁴⁵ It is likely that they will not. By increasing access to high-quality early learning programs and services for children with high needs, the country can work to close, or even prevent, the achievement gap.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Encourage and create incentives for states and local education agencies (LEAs) to offer high-quality early learning programs, especially for children with high needs;
- Raise awareness about the importance of high-quality early learning programs and services in underrepresented communities; and
- Work with HHS to increase access to high-quality early learning programs for young children and ensure their inclusiveness for children with disabilities and English Learners.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “School Readiness Survey of the National Household Education Survey (NHES), 2007.”

⁴² Barnett, W. S., et al. (2010). *The State of Preschool: 2010 State Preschool Yearbook*. The National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University.

⁴³ Barnett, W. S., et al. (2011). *The State of Preschool: 2010 State Preschool Yearbook*. The National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers University.

⁴⁴ Pearson Foundation: Always Learning, Annual Polls and Reports, “Early Childhood Education Perception Poll Summary of Results 2009,” p 1.

⁴⁵ Pearson Foundation: Always Learning, Annual Polls and Reports, “Early Childhood Education Perception Poll Summary of Results 2009,” p 1.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Increase the number and percentage of children with high needs who have access to early learning programs and comprehensive services, especially those from low-income families in each age group of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in high-quality early learning programs through the RTT-ELC competition;
- Support *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) programs to increase access to high-quality, inclusive early learning programs for children with disabilities;
- Support statewide coordination of local, state, and federal funding for early learning programs to increase the number of children with high needs from birth through kindergarten entry in high-quality programs;
- Fund access to high-quality inclusive early learning programs by encouraging state and LEA expansion and enhancement of early learning programs through Title I and Department competitive grant programs; and
- Launch, in communities with underrepresented early learning populations, a national communications campaign to promote participation in high-quality early learning programs and identify successful models.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Expanding access to high-quality programs and communicating broadly to families and other stakeholders requires significant resources and coordination. Because of limited resources in this economic climate, new efforts to encourage the expansion of state- and locally funded early learning opportunities may be difficult for states and districts to implement. Additional federal investments to increase access to high-quality programs may be difficult to obtain in the current climate of budget constraints.

SUB-GOAL 3.2: WORKFORCE. IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY LEARNING WORKFORCE SO THAT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS HAVE THE SKILLS AND ABILITIES NECESSARY TO IMPROVE YOUNG CHILDREN’S HEALTH, SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL, AND COGNITIVE OUTCOMES.

Creating high-quality early learning programs depends in large part on having a high-quality workforce. Unfortunately, far too often, early learning professionals are not sufficiently prepared, supported, or compensated. Qualifications and education level required for the workforce vary greatly by state and program. Only 27 states with publicly funded preschool programs require a bachelor’s degree for preschool teachers, and just 16 states require assistant teachers to have a Child Development Associate certificate (CDA).⁴⁶ In many preschool settings, the only educational requirement to enter the field is a high school diploma and a few hours of professional development. And, the professional development that does exist may be hampered by a lack of common professional competencies. The result is that most of the early learning workforce are not adequately trained on the full range of developmentally appropriate, evidence-based practices that improve the health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes of all young children.

The federal government can address these workforce challenges by supporting more robust teacher preparation and professional development efforts and promoting common, statewide workforce knowledge and competency frameworks designed to support children’s learning and development and improve outcomes. Developing and advancing common statewide workforce knowledge and competency frameworks will help states build unified professional development systems and concentrate their training efforts around what matters most. Building statewide early learning workforce data systems that include information on education, credentials, and professional development experiences could help states and districts more effectively tailor early learning professional development. The Department can play an important role in encouraging states and school districts to focus components of K–3 professional development on evidence-based, developmentally appropriate approaches not always emphasized in teacher preparation programs and in providing joint professional development opportunities for K–3 and preschool teachers, including professionals from community-based early learning programs. Strategies like these improve the quality and effectiveness of the workforce and thus will have a significant impact on the outcomes for young children.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Improve the preparation of the early learning workforce by supporting the development of common workforce knowledge and competency frameworks;
- Promote the use of federal funds for improving early learning professional development; and
- Coordinate with adult education programs to create early learning career pathways.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Promote the development and implementation of statewide early learning workforce systems through the RTT-ELC competition;
- With the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), develop a coordinated, evidence-based plan for current and future technical assistance and professional development investments;
- Support the development of common statewide workforce knowledge and competency frameworks for early childhood educators through collaboration with postsecondary institutions and accreditation agencies;

⁴⁶ Barnett, W. S., et al. op. cit.

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- Promote the effective use of federal funds for joint professional development for preschool and K–3 teachers and administrators by clarifying, expanding, and promoting the use of Title I and other funds for that purpose;
- With HHS, develop a coordinated research agenda to better understand the status and needs of the early learning workforce and to identify the most effective pre-service and professional development approaches for improving practices; and
- Fund high-quality professional development for elementary teachers and leaders with demonstrated effectiveness in improving student outcomes and building their knowledge base about child development, standards, instruction, and assessment strategies appropriate for young children from preschool through 3rd grade.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

While the Department can identify flexibilities in existing formula programs that permit early learning professional development in some contexts, many of the strategies would require additional authorization and appropriations to implement. Additionally, significant coordination with HHS, state and local authorities, service providers, postsecondary institutions, and other professional development providers will be required.

SUB-GOAL 3.3: ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY. IMPROVE THE CAPACITY OF STATES AND EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT COMPREHENSIVE EARLY LEARNING ASSESMENT SYSTEMS.

Early childhood professionals, like all other education professionals, need evidence of positive learning outcomes in order to plan and implement appropriate instructional strategies. They can benefit from comprehensive early learning assessment systems that collect information about the process and context of young children’s learning and development. The major components of a comprehensive assessment system include a coordinated screening and referral system, ongoing formative assessments, kindergarten entry assessments, measures of environmental quality and adult-child interactions, descriptive data on program resources, and a system of continuous program evaluation. The Department will work with HHS to promote the development of these systems and ensure that they include the appropriate screening, diagnostic, formative, and observational measures, as well as relevant descriptive data.

Any discussion of the effectiveness of an early learning program must include some indication of how children are progressing across multiple domains of learning, as reflected in the state’s early learning standards. High-quality information on program effectiveness must, in turn, be based on multiple assessments that are both valid and reliable for their specified purpose and for the population with which they will be used. Twenty-three states have begun to develop and implement Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRISs)—a systemic approach to assessing, improving, and communicating the level of quality in early learning programs. Many of the remaining states are in the process of designing and piloting their own QRIS.⁴⁷ However, the quality of states’ QRISs systems vary widely, and the remaining states lack robust tools for monitoring quality and providing feedback to teachers and families. The Department will work with HHS and states to develop and adopt benchmarks for statewide tiered quality rating and improvement systems that, among other things, are based on a set of program standards, define levels of quality, monitor program outcomes through continuous feedback with data (including child outcome data), and link to state professional development systems. These systems will give administrators the information they need to make informed programmatic decisions and will inform families and the public about the quality of early learning programs.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Encourage states’ use of quality rating and improvement systems across all early learning programs that continuously monitor program effectiveness for accountability; and
- Promote the development and implementation of comprehensive early learning assessment systems whose data are used to improve quality and support program improvement.

⁴⁷ Kauerz, K. & Thorman, A. (March 2011), QRIS and P-3: Creating Synergy Across Systems to Close Achievement Gaps and Improve Opportunities for Young Children, Build Initiative

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Promote statewide development and use of program quality standards that are the basis of statewide tiered quality rating and improvement systems that evaluate program effectiveness through the RTT-ELC competition;
- Fund consortia of states to develop or improve comprehensive early learning assessment systems that reflect the domains of early learning and will assist early learning professionals in monitoring the learning and development of children prior to 3rd grade;
- Develop a joint policy statement on appropriate comprehensive early learning assessment systems from birth through 3rd grade; and
- Develop and fund coordinated research and technical assistance plans and programs that include a focus on identifying and scaling up evidenced-based comprehensive early learning assessment approaches and systems.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

One of the difficulties with promoting statewide comprehensive assessment systems is ensuring the appropriate design and use of assessments. The comprehensive assessment systems envisioned here would focus instead on the full range of assessment strategies that are both meaningful and consistent with developmentally appropriate practices, but this approach will take additional resources and efforts. The patchwork of early learning programs and services also makes it difficult to implement assessments in a uniform way, and agreeing upon a framework for comprehensive assessment systems will require significant collaboration with HHS and states. Furthermore, the Department's role in advancing many of these reforms depends in part on new authorizations and appropriations from Congress.

GOAL 4: EQUITY. ENSURE AND PROMOTE EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND SAFE AND HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR ALL STUDENTS REGARDLESS OF RACE, ETHNICITY, NATIONAL ORIGIN, AGE, SEX, SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY, DISABILITY, LANGUAGE, AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS.

All students—regardless of circumstance—deserve a world-class education. To ensure that America regains its status as the best-educated, most competitive workforce in the world with the highest proportion of college graduates of any country, we must close the pervasive achievement and attainment gaps that exist throughout the nation. Yet, far too often, the quality of a child’s education and learning environment, and opportunities to succeed are determined by his or her race, ethnicity, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language, socioeconomic status, and/or ZIP code. For example, data collected by the Department shows:

- In 2006–07, only 41 percent of three- to five-year-olds from low-income families were enrolled in center-based early childhood care and education programs, compared to 60 percent from non-poor families.⁴⁸
- Sixty-seven percent of black high school students enrolled in schools surveyed by the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) have access to calculus, a STEM class that contributes to college and career readiness, compared to 80 percent of white high school students.⁴⁹
- English Learners enrolled in schools surveyed by the CRDC represent six percent of high school enrollment, but only one percent of the calculus enrollment.⁵⁰
- Twelve percent of our high schools, or 1,600 high schools, produce half of the country’s dropouts; those same schools produce two-thirds of dropouts among black and Hispanic students.⁵¹
- Two out of three students with disabilities leave high school without degrees.⁵²
- These inequalities extend to higher education, where the gaps in college participation between White students and Hispanic and black students are growing wider.⁵³
- In 2007, the postsecondary completion rate (i.e., receipt of postsecondary diploma, certificate, or license) for students with disabilities was 29 percent.⁵⁴ By contrast, by 2009, approximately 57 percent of all full-time, first-time students that began seeking a bachelor’s degree in 2003 had completed their degree or equivalent.⁵⁵
- In 2008-2009, women earned less than one in five bachelor's degrees in engineering, and less than one in eight bachelor's degrees in computer science.⁵⁶

Moreover, too many students feel unsafe or unwelcome at school because they are (or are perceived as) different from other students. All students should have an equal opportunity to learn and excel in a safe and

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “School Readiness Survey of the National Household Education Survey (NHES),” 2007.

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection, School Year 2009–10.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, “Locating the Dropout Crisis,” Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk 2004, p. 5.

⁵² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS), OMB # 1820-0521: “Children with Disabilities Exiting Special Education, 2006-07.”

⁵³ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “The Condition of Education 2011, Student Effort and Educational Progress,” Indicator 21, Immediate Transition to College, Figure 21-2.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Education, NCSER, “National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, Wave 4 Parent/Youth Survey Data,” 2007 (NLTS-2 2007), Table 240, Postsecondary Education at Any Institution.

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, “The Condition of Education 2011, Student Effort and Educational Progress,” Indicator 23, Postsecondary Graduation Rates, Figure 23-1.

⁵⁶ U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2008–09 IPEDS.

supportive environment. Because inequities at all levels of education still exist, educational equity is the civil rights issue of our generation.

The Department will systematically track the progress made within key priorities and initiatives across the agency toward fostering greater educational equity among students. Many of these activities are well under way. For example, the Department is working to provide a greater focus on equity throughout its comprehensive reform initiatives, incorporating the concept of shared responsibility and accountability to meet the needs of students, families, and educators. Equity is addressed in priorities that include awarding competitive grants; reauthorizing statutes designed to increase equity, including ESEA; improving the affordability of postsecondary education; ensuring a safe learning environment where students are free from bullying and harassment; ensuring the equitable distribution of effective teachers and resources in low-performing, high-poverty, and high-minority schools; increasing traditionally underrepresented students’ access to college- and career-ready curricula such as STEM classes, advanced placement, and other high-level courses; and increasing access to high-quality early learning programs for high-needs children.

In addition, the Department has committed to making more effective use of its Office for Civil Rights (OCR) by reinvigorating its law enforcement responsibilities, including complaint investigation and resolution, proactive compliance reviews and technical assistance activities, and policy guidance. OCR’s activities support progress on the Department’s work to ensure that the nation’s struggling schools are transformed, and that all students are free from bullying or harassment and have equitable access to great teachers and leaders, resources, college- and career-ready coursework, and the promise of a high-quality education.

The Department will continue its equity-focused initiatives as follows:

- 4.1. Continue to Increase the Infusion of Equity Throughout the Department’s Programs and Activities.**
Promote and coordinate equity-focused efforts in Departmental programs.
- 4.2. Civil Rights Enforcement.** Ensure equal access to education and promote educational excellence throughout the nation through the vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in ensuring access to effective educational opportunities for all students. The Department’s work related to equity is pervasive and, as a result, measures related to equity are in both this section and in every other section.

Equity Indicators of Success	
Indicator	Also Referenced in Goal Related to:
Increase in the combined annual number of significant proactive and outreach activities related to civil rights enforcement (new policy documents, compliance reviews, and technical assistance activities)	Equity
Establish Departmental priorities to address equity-related issues in the Department’s grants and awards	Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System
Increase in the availability of data related to student access to resources and opportunities to succeed, such as disaggregated student access to college- and career-ready math and science courses; disparate discipline rates, school-based arrests, and referrals to law enforcement; and school-level expenditures	U.S. Department of Education Capacity

Equity Indicators of Success	
Indicator	Also Referenced in Goal Related to:
Increase in the percentage of state report cards that include school climate, college enrollment, and teacher and school leader measures, in addition to student achievement	Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System
Increase in the percentage of individuals completing and filing the FAFSA who come from low-income households and/or non-traditional students.	Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education
Identify, as potential models, persistently lowest-achieving schools demonstrating improvement on indicators that schools are required to report through the School Improvement Grants program	Elementary and Secondary
Increase in the number of states implementing a high-quality plan to improve child outcomes at kindergarten entry	Early Learning

SUB-GOAL 4.1: CONTINUE TO INCREASE THE INFUSION OF EQUITY THROUGHOUT THE DEPARTMENT’S PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES. PROMOTE AND COORDINATE EQUITY-FOCUSED EFFORTS IN DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAMS.

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse, in terms of both its workforce and its students. By 2030, a majority of the nation’s school-age population is estimated to be of color, while in 2050, the nation’s population as a whole will be majority minority.⁵⁷ This demographic change gives increased urgency to closing the achievement gap and drives the Department’s efforts to ensure educational equity.⁵⁸

The Department’s work can make significant advancement in closing opportunity and achievement gaps by:

- Increasing access to high-quality early learning programs at the earliest stages of life;
- Working to ensure students are safe in school, free from bullying and harassment, and not subject to disparate discipline;
- Preparing students to leave high school ready to enter college or a career; and
- Increasing the means by which students from chronically underrepresented populations can attend college and workforce training and complete programs of study with a degree or certificate and job placement.

Leveraging its most powerful assets for addressing the serious disparities that undermine equal access to a quality education, the Department will work with Congress to ensure that new or updated legislation furthers educational equity and will seek to enhance its ability to set priorities for federal Departmental funding.

The Department’s strategy for reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) is to strengthen an important part of the cradle-to-career pipeline that aims to bring significantly more, better-prepared students to the doors of higher education, ready to excel. It seeks to promote a culture of college readiness and success by ensuring that students experience a challenging high school curriculum drawn from high academic standards and increased access to college-level, dual credit, and other accelerated courses in high-need schools. Further, it seeks to ensure that teachers and leaders are better prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners by encouraging more districts and schools to implement high-quality, state- and locally determined curricula and instructional supports that incorporate the principles of universal design for learning to meet all students’ needs.

At the postsecondary level, the *Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010* provided for, and offset the cost of, increases in the amount of the maximum Pell Grant award to account for the costs of inflation over the next decade. It also provides funding to support Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other minority-Serving Institutions.

Equity is also infused in the priorities for funding the Department’s discretionary grants, including:

- Promoting STEM education for traditionally underrepresented groups;
- Improving the effectiveness of teachers and principals and ensuring their distribution in low-achieving, high-poverty, and high-minority schools;

⁵⁷ Source: <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb08-123.html>, accessed September 23, 2011.

⁵⁸ See *supra* p. 6. NAEP data on the difference in 4th and 8th grade 2007–2009 reading and math proficiency between White students and other racial/ethnic groups, English Learner and non-English Learners, students with disabilities and all students without disabilities, as well as the 2005–07 and 2006–08 difference in college attainment between White students and other racial/ethnic groups.

- Supporting college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that appropriately address the needs of all students, including English Learners and students with disabilities;
- Improving access to early learning, student performance in all grade levels, high school graduation rates, and college enrollment rates for high-need students and students in high-poverty schools, students with disabilities, and English Learners;
- Increasing the number and proportion of high-needs students who are academically prepared for, enroll in, and complete postsecondary education or training; and
- Encouraging diversity initiatives to promote cross-racial understanding, break down racial stereotypes, and prepare students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Encourage a focus on equity and high-need students in the Department’s competitive and formula grant programs;
- Close the “comparability loophole” in ESEA so that state and local funding levels for high-poverty schools are comparable to what low-poverty schools receive;
- Collaborate with federal, state, and local government agencies as well as parents and community organizations to maximize impact on underserved populations;
- Increase access to and the quality of early learning programs and services, particularly for high-poverty and underserved populations, including children with disabilities and English Learners;
- Support and enhance the pipeline of effective teachers and leaders, and ensure their equitable distribution in low performing, high-poverty, and high-minority schools;
- Promote the development of comprehensive teacher and leader evaluation systems based in part on student achievement and growth;
- Increase access to and the affordability of postsecondary institutions, particularly for underserved populations;
- Support White House Initiatives to improve educational quality and student access and completion at minority-serving institutions;
- Systemically track the progress made within key priorities and initiatives across the agency toward fostering greater educational equity among students;
- Ensure that postsecondary institutions are working to provide the best opportunity for students to be prepared for and have pathways into careers and that affordability is increased;
- Aid programs at postsecondary institutions that support the advancement of adult learners; and
- Fund programs and services that meet the educational needs of transitioning workers and career changers, including immigrants and previously incarcerated individuals.

Specific examples of these actions will include:

- Include priorities related to equity, need, and diversity in various Department competitive grant programs;
- Evaluate the success of grantees and systems based on their impact on improving outcomes for all groups of students;
- Promote continued disaggregation of data and accountability for student subgroup performance in K–12 schools;
- Promote statewide and district-wide resource comparability through the collection and analysis of information on state and local resource disparities and provide guidance;
- Use available options to foster equitable distribution of resources and effective teachers and leaders;

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- Monitor and ensure equity and access of girls and women to critical programs and career pathways through the Civil Rights Data Collection and other data disaggregated by sex that is already required by other specific education- and workforce-related programs;
- Use incentive based models, such as Race to the Top—Early Learning Challenge, in collaboration with HHS to increase access to high-quality early learning programs for young children and ensure their inclusiveness for children with disabilities, English Learners, and other underrepresented communities;
- Use strategically targeted funding to the lowest-performing schools to successfully implement turnaround models that local school districts deem appropriate;
- Ensure appropriate assessments for English Learners and students with disabilities that correspond to rigorous college- and career-ready standards in academic content areas;
- Support *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) programs to increase access to high-quality, inclusive programs and services for students with disabilities;
- Provide funding support to state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) to attract and retain highly qualified teachers;
- Provide funding support to programs that increase the capacity for teachers' professional development;
- Ensure that Pell Grants remain intact for the students who are most in need; and
- Provide improved federal student aid service, information, and supports to students and parents in underserved communities.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Equity-focused efforts could be held back because of differences in availability of funding at the state and local level, preexisting contractual obligations, the fact that state and local resources are often not targeted at the highest-need students, and the lack of necessary capacity among schools and districts to close achievement gaps. Inefficiency in the disparate alignment of federal, state, and local management and spending structures is a current and potentially ongoing obstacle. In addition, advancing educational reform depends, in part, on the reauthorization of the ESEA and other important equity-focused statutes—e.g., Perkins, IDEA, and HEA.

SUB-GOAL 4.2: CIVIL RIGHTS ENFORCEMENT. ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND PROMOTE EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE THROUGHOUT THE NATION THROUGH THE VIGOROUS ENFORCEMENT OF CIVIL RIGHTS LAWS.

To transform levels of achievement in an increasingly diverse nation, students must be free from discrimination and have equal access to a high-quality education. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is charged with the vitally important task of ensuring that recipients of federal funds comply with the federal civil rights laws and that beneficiaries, including students participating in education programs offered by federally funded schools and colleges, are free from discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender-based harassment and sex-stereotyping), disability, or age. This mandate embodies the nation’s commitment to equity and is central to its long-term prosperity.

The Department has revitalized its use of civil rights enforcement to advance educational equity and aligned its compliance and enforcement activities for maximum impact. Through complementary activities that include proactive technical assistance, targeted compliance reviews, strong systemic remedies, aggressive monitoring of resolution agreements, policy guidance, intra-agency sharing of best practices, and inter-agency work groups, the Department is using an integrated approach to civil rights enforcement to address priority issues including:

- Equal access to rigorous courses and curricula;
- Equal access to resources;
- Equal access to a free and appropriate public education;
- Racial disparities in school discipline;
- Equal opportunity for English Learners;
- Sexual, racial, and disability harassment to improve school climates;
- Sexual violence;
- Equal athletic opportunity;
- Equal access to new technologies for students with disabilities; and
- Disproportionate numbers of minority students in special education.

These issues amplify and complement those found in approximately 7,000 discrimination complaints filed with the Department annually. During investigations, the Department uses its legal authority to investigate policies and procedures that may be discriminatory. When discrimination is found, the Department works collaboratively with recipients to craft strong, systemic resolution agreements and actively monitors the agreements to ensure that their terms are fully implemented.

The Department’s proactive civil rights activities and policy guidance make the law clear and identify tangible enforcement standards so students, parents, and others can understand their rights and recipients can proactively comply with civil rights laws. The Department’s Civil Rights Data Collection has been expanded and made more accessible to strengthen transparency and accountability. The data can be used not only by the Department, but by school districts to make improvements and by parents to make informed choices about their children’s education. As another means to increase transparency, the Department posts selected OCR compliance review resolution letters and agreements, along with letters and agreements from selected complaints, on the Department’s website. Sharing this information widely not only increases the Department’s ability to effect systemic change in educational opportunity, but it also advances the Secretary of Education’s vision of the Department as not just a compliance-driven organization, but one that supports schools and colleges to do the right thing for students.

How will we get there? (Actions/Mean)

The Department will:

- Increase students' and their families' awareness of their rights and strengthen their capacity to resolve civil rights and equity issues in their communities;
- Increase understanding among schools, colleges, and universities of their obligations under the civil rights laws and strengthen their capacity for voluntary compliance;
- Protect individual complainants' civil rights and ensure due process;
- Identify and eliminate systemic violations of the civil rights laws;
- Focus technical assistance, data collection, and enforcement activities on critical issues including: school culture, by working to ensure students are free from harassment and sexual violence; issues of access, by ensuring equitable distribution of resources; ensuring English Learners get the services they need; ensuring schools, including charter schools, do not engage in discriminatory recruitment practices or segregate students; and working to remedy disparate discipline rates; and
- Collect and make available civil rights data.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Implement strategic outreach campaigns around high-priority civil rights issues to educate students and their families about their civil rights;
- Build a strong proactive docket of compliance reviews and directed inquiries targeting the highest need areas of civil rights enforcement for systemic change;
- Implement strategic and proactive technical assistance activities around high-priority civil rights issues to assist affected schools, colleges, and universities;
- Update and disseminate policy guidance;
- Continuously improve the complaint resolution process;
- Continue to improve the quality and accessibility of the Civil Rights Data Collection;
- Use the Equity and Excellence Commission to recommend ways school finance can be improved to increase equity and achievement; and
- Share promising practices implemented by school districts across the country.

What would hold us back? What is beyond our control? (External risk factors)

Because of limited resources in this austere economic climate, efforts to target programs for poor and minority students might not be widely supported. With an ongoing and significant rise in complaint workload, the majority of staff will be needed for case processing and investigations. As a result, the ability to perform labor-intensive proactive activities—i.e., compliance reviews, technical assistance and outreach, and issuing important policy guidance, which help produce the most systemic change for students—could be compromised.

GOAL 5: CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEM. ENHANCE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM’S ABILITY TO CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE THROUGH BETTER AND MORE WIDESPREAD USE OF DATA, RESEARCH AND EVALUATION, TRANSPARENCY, INNOVATION, AND TECHNOLOGY.

Achieving the President’s 2020 college attainment goal will require better and stronger systems, powered by information and innovation. Through this Strategic Plan, the Department aims to foster a culture of continuous systems improvement at the national, state, and local levels. To achieve this goal, the Department will support robust and comprehensive data systems, a strategic use of research and evaluation, transparency in sharing results, increased flexibility and innovation, and effective and systemic use of technology.

The main priority for improving systemic capacity is to provide educators with access to data and the skills to better understand and use the data. With relevant and actionable data, policymakers will be able to appraise how states, districts, schools, and students are currently performing, measure progress, pinpoint gaps, improve practice, and make sound decisions. States are working collaboratively and progressing steadily to develop systems that will yield the valid, reliable data that are essential to achieving these purposes. However, most states, and the nation as a whole, have more work to do. The Department will continue helping states develop effective statewide longitudinal data systems, design voluntary common data standards, and develop the capacity of institutions and staff to utilize data to improve teaching and learning. These activities will help to generate an accurate picture of student performance and other critical elements, from early learning programs through postsecondary institutions and the workforce, while ensuring the privacy of individuals and the security of their data.

Similarly, at the national, state, and local levels, the field of education will greatly benefit from research and evaluation that is planned, conducted, and shared with the primary goals of informing policy and improving practice. The Department aims to support research that will make a difference by giving states, districts, and schools the information they need to identify and adopt effective practices, focus scarce resources on investments most likely to have the greatest impact, and become more dynamic learning organizations. The Department will encourage stakeholders at all levels to work together to identify research priorities and design strategic plans to guide their investments in research and evaluation, test innovative ideas, evaluate and replicate promising approaches, and scale up those programs that have the strongest evidence of effectiveness.

Committing to continuous improvement of the nation’s schools and students also requires transparency in providing timely and accurate information to the education community and the public. School reform will be successful when all partners and parties with a stake in the success of our education system work together and use information to identify strengths and weaknesses, hold each other accountable, demand the changes that are needed, select the best approaches, and carry out improvements.

The goals and actions in this Strategic Plan sharpen the focus on generating bold and creative solutions and aim to support innovation in partnership with other federal partners and private organizations with related missions. The Department is placing a clear priority on stimulating innovations in education and on providing the funds needed to accelerate their design and adoption. At the same time, the Department’s vision for 21st-century learning calls for making effective use of technology and for providing states, districts, and schools with the tools and resources they need to incorporate cutting-edge methods for strengthening curriculum quality and delivery, improving student access and engagement, developing comprehensive formative and summative assessment systems, and enhancing data management systems.

- 5.1. Data Systems:** Facilitate the development of interoperable longitudinal data systems from early learning through the workforce to enable data-driven decision-making by increasing access to timely, reliable, and high-value data.
- 5.2. Research and Evaluation:** Support multiple approaches to research and evaluation to support educational improvement and Department decision-making.
- 5.3. Transparency:** Present relevant and reliable information that increases demand for educational attainment and improves educational performance while maintaining student privacy.
- 5.4. Technology and Innovation:** Accelerate the development and broad adoption of new, effective programs, processes, and strategies, including education technology.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure its success in enhancing the education system’s ability to continuously improve through better and more widespread data, research and evaluation, transparency, innovation, and technology.

Continuous Improvement of the U.S. Education System’s Indicators of Success

- Increase in the number of states implementing comprehensive statewide longitudinal data systems that link student achievement with teacher data and link elementary and secondary with higher education data and, to the extent possible, with preschool and workforce data
- Increase in the number of high-value datasets that are published through the data.gov or ED.gov websites
- Increase in the percentage of state report cards that include school climate, college enrollment, and teacher and school leader measures, in addition to student achievement
- Increase the number of Department programs that make awards based on the strength of the evidence (strong or moderate) provided in grant applications
- Increase in the number of Department programs, practices, or strategies that are adopted as a result of Scale Up, validation, or development grants
- Increase in the percentage of teachers, administrators, and parents who believe that the effective implementation of technology within instruction is important to student success
- Establish Departmental priorities to address equity-related issues in the Department’s grants and awards

SUB-GOAL 5.1: DATA SYSTEMS. FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTEROPERABLE LONGITUDINAL DATA SYSTEMS FROM EARLY LEARNING THROUGH THE WORKFORCE TO ENABLE DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING BY INCREASING ACCESS TO TIMELY, RELIABLE, AND HIGH-VALUE DATA.

To bring about a culture of continuous improvement, teachers, leaders, and other stakeholders in the education community need timely access to high-value data that will enable them to see and understand the factors that impact student achievement and child development. However, for many, the infrastructure for this kind of data-driven decision-making is not readily accessible. While states are making significant progress in developing data systems, too often data are maintained only in a data system particular to one sector of the education community or are not shared in a timely manner with the people for whom they would be meaningful and actionable. Time lags, data gaps, and troubles accessing the information make it difficult for schools and districts to identify best practices, measure growth in student performance, and improve teaching and learning. When data are available and widely shared, in many cases they are still not used to drive instructional practices or decision-making. For these reasons, the Department will continue to assist states in developing longitudinal data systems capable of sharing key data elements across the education continuum from early learning to the workforce. Through these systems, for example, secondary schools can know how many of their students are enrolled in a postsecondary program, how many require remediation before actual courses for credit could be taken, and how many students persist in postsecondary coursework and obtain a postsecondary degree or credential.

Data are only valuable if they are usable and used. Thus, the Department will also provide support to the education community, including teachers and administrators, on how to understand data and appropriately use data to inform policies, instructional practices, and leadership decision-making. Currently, there is a lack of information on best practices for the use of data to improve instructional systems. While there is some capacity for using longitudinal data to improve outcomes for children and students, this capacity needs to be expanded. Further, the Department will continue to use the information collection clearance process to gather and respond to comments from the public in advance of beginning any new data collection, and to revise and refine existing data collections to reduce and remove redundant items.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Facilitate the development of the infrastructure necessary to collect and disseminate high-value education information for the improvement of child and student outcomes, especially data disaggregated by student subgroups;
- Support policies that encourage interoperability between data systems, both within education and across sectors, while also upholding the privacy, confidentiality, and security of personally identifiable information; and
- Encourage the use of data by promoting access to high-value, timely, and accurate data and by improving the quality of data.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Support and fund the development of statewide longitudinal data systems;
- Collaborate with states, districts, and other education data stakeholders to develop, for voluntary adoption, common data standards that will include common data definitions and technical specifications;
- Fund the development and initial adoption of high-quality end-user applications for states and districts;
- Promote and fund high-quality teacher preparation and professional development programs that build teacher and principal capacity to use data as a tool for instructional improvement;

- Identify and disseminate school, district, and state best practices regarding data use; and
- Identify and publish Common Data Standards for essential data elements in state data systems.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Efforts to ensure the development of robust, integrated data systems will be constrained by the amount of time, financial resources, and support available to states to carry out this work. State and local funding for data systems may be reduced due to the fiscal crisis. Moreover, wide variations in state and district data systems present unique challenges for each state. Some district data systems, for example, far surpass their own state’s data system. This inequity could create hurdles for states to gain “buy in” from their more advanced districts. Efforts to ensure data systems lead to data-driven decision-making may also encounter unforeseen obstacles necessary to address privacy concerns.

SUB-GOAL 5.2: RESEARCH AND EVALUATION. SUPPORT MULTIPLE APPROACHES TO RESEARCH AND EVALUATION TO SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT AND DEPARTMENT DECISION-MAKING.

Over the past decade, education researchers and evaluators have significantly raised the bar in increasing the scientific rigor of their work. Rigor has increased in no small part because the Department has demanded stronger methodologies and a greater capacity to make causal inferences and has trained researchers across the nation in these rigorous standards.

While the Department will continue to focus on increasing the availability of rigorous research, now is the time to focus further on increasing the usability and relevance of Department-supported research and evaluation activities by making sure that they address the questions that matter most to practitioners and policymakers and guide improvement in the Department’s programs and policies. One key approach in accomplishing this goal is the institution of a Department-wide evaluation planning process. Annually, the evaluation planning process will work with stakeholders throughout the Department to identify priority research, evaluation, and analysis needs and to implement data analyses, technical assistance, analyses, and research and/or evaluations of programs, policies, and practices, as appropriate, to address these needs. This process will also help ensure that the Department supports a mix of evaluation activities that address both the short- and long-term knowledge-building needs in the field. It will also be aligned with and designed to inform the Department’s budget requests to Congress and its spending plans.

In addition to this internally focused process, the Department will continue to engage practitioners and policymakers external to the Department in its research and evaluation planning to ensure that the focus is on the right problems of practice. Furthermore, the Department will also work to ensure that it provides the education community the information that it needs to know about how interventions and programs interact with local conditions in schools and districts, and how to build capacity and learning among organizations.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- In its research and evaluation agenda, continue to emphasize the importance of focusing not only on what works (and what does not), but also on questions of “why,” “for whom,” and “under what conditions;”
- Continue efforts to improve data analyses, evaluation, and research capacity at the state and local levels, including through supporting longitudinal and other data systems;
- Support research on problems of practice guided by strong theories of action; study how schools, districts, states, and institutions improve; and create incentives for knowledge building and long-term sustained research programs;
- Develop knowledge management tools and systems that foster abilities to better understand, apply, and replicate findings from research and evaluation studies;
- Develop strategies to make research more meaningful and accessible for teachers, principals, and administrators, as well as for parents, families, school board members, and community members;
- Increase the involvement of educators, policymakers, and project directors in evaluation efforts; and
- Increase the use of evidence to inform policy development and program implementation, including the use of performance measures, data analysis, research, and evaluation for program and policy design and improvement.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Increase the use of high-quality and timely data, including evaluations and performance measures, for continuous improvement among the Department’s largest discretionary programs (accounting for 80 percent of discretionary funding);
- Increase the number of the Department’s programs and initiatives that are evaluated using methods that include those consistent with the What Works Clearinghouse Standards for evidence and effectiveness;
- Support states, districts, institutions of higher education, and other entities in testing out and rigorously evaluating new approaches to improving student outcomes through programs like the Investing in Innovation (i3) program and others;
- Rely on the Department-wide evaluation planning process and the resulting evaluation agenda to support systematic knowledge building over time;
- Provide technical assistance, including through the regional educational laboratories, on helping states and districts effectively use data for continuous improvement, including data produced by states’ longitudinal data systems for continuous improvement;
- Develop new research priorities, research programs, and requests for applications that further connect research to policy and practice; and
- Improve the Department’s knowledge management functions, including expanding the content of and the user interfaces for the What Works Clearinghouse and Doing What Works websites.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

The implementation of these strategies depends in part on the availability of additional resources for evaluation and research, which are typically more difficult to obtain than resources for services and program implementation. In addition, many of the activities supporting this goal will be carried out by contractors and grantees, and thus are, in part, dependent on the capacity and quality of research expertise that exists outside the Department. The supply of education researchers with the capability to carry out high-quality research and evaluation is somewhat limited, and increasing capacity takes time. Additionally, there are the perceived and real challenges states and districts face in implementing programs in ways that can support the strongest possible studies and evaluations of those programs.

SUB-GOAL 5.3: TRANSPARENCY. PRESENT RELEVANT AND RELIABLE INFORMATION THAT INCREASES DEMAND FOR EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND IMPROVES EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE WHILE MAINTAINING STUDENT PRIVACY.

Reaching the President’s 2020 college attainment goal requires, among other things, that the education community has better access to more relevant, timely, and accurate information about the performance of our nation’s schools and students. Public information helps families and students make informed educational choices. As President Obama stated, “[It] is our responsibility as lawmakers and educators to make this system work. But it is the responsibility of every citizen to participate in it.”⁵⁹ Effective participation depends in large part on access to information that empowers students, families, and community members to demand excellence for their children. Not only can better information foster better decisions, it can also trigger consumer demand for improvement. However, currently families are often ill equipped to compare the performance of their children and schools to a high standard of excellence because many education agencies lack accessible portals with meaningful information, even where that information is readily publishable.

Better access to timely, relevant, and reliable information would also help administrators and policymakers determine how best to improve our educational institutions. For example, teachers can more accurately gauge the rigor of their own classrooms against state or national benchmarks, and college administrators can compare their retention rates to those of their peer institutions. This information will drive the educational system to be more efficient and effective. The Department can help increase transparency while protecting privacy by looking inward at its own policies and practices, making changes aligned with these goals, and encouraging other educational institutions to do the same.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Fund and promote states’, districts’, and postsecondary institutions’ appropriate access to and dissemination of specific and relevant education information;
- Enhance Department policies and processes for transparency, including publication of school, district, and state data and information on Department programs, while protecting private, personally identifiable information; and
- Provide more robust and proactive technical assistance and guidance to states, districts, and educational entities on how to ensure that privacy is protected.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Improve the information provided on national, state, and district report cards on key issues such as student achievement, teacher quality, and school climate;
- Increase technical assistance to states, postsecondary institutions, and local school districts on putting data to use and on making outcome and process data available while protecting personally identifiable information;
- Improve online access to high-value Department data and make more high-value datasets available over time;

⁵⁹ Obama, Barack. “Address to Congress,” February 2009, speech.

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- Review the Department’s policies and practices for publishing information regarding its grant programs and implement changes, where appropriate, based on information gained from the review; and
- Appoint a Chief Privacy Officer to coordinate the Department’s efforts to safeguard privacy in use of data and augment technical assistance to states and institutions on best practices in ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and data security.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

One ongoing challenge is to protect privacy while increasing accessibility to relevant information. The Department will continue to vigilantly safeguard all personally identifiable information while also helping education agencies make useful information available. Another risk lies in finding the right balance of information; too much information could make it nearly impossible to find meaning within data. To avoid this problem, the Department must work with stakeholders to prioritize information and to determine what is mostly likely to help families make choices for their children, help teachers improve student learning, and enable decision makers to improve education institutions.

SUB-GOAL 5.4: TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION. ACCELERATE THE DEVELOPMENT AND BROAD ADOPTION OF NEW, EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS, PROCESSES, AND STRATEGIES, INCLUDING EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY.

To achieve the President’s 2020 college attainment goal, the nation’s education system will need to graduate many more college-ready students from high school, ensure they have access to postsecondary education, and support them as they complete their degrees—all without significant increases in resources. When other sectors of the economy need to become better, faster, or more productive, they rely on technology and other forms of innovation. The education sector is no different, and the need for innovation—and its benefits—spans grade levels, curricular areas, and student needs.

The Department will continue to focus on ways that technology can improve all students’ opportunities to learn, including by providing engaging and powerful learning experiences, as well as digital content, resources, and assessments. Technology-based learning and assessment systems will be pivotal in improving student learning and generating data that can be used to continuously improve the education system at all levels. Technology will also help districts and schools support every teacher in becoming more effective and better connected to the tools, resources, and expertise needed throughout the day. Innovative technology must be matched by innovative educational practices to maximize its potential to improve learning and instruction for all students, and it must be accessible to all students, including students with disabilities. Leadership is essential to ensure that innovative applications are disseminated and brought to scale.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Articulate a vision to states, districts, and schools of learning powered by technology;
- Use technology to connect educators to data, resources, experts, and peers;
- Support research and development of educational technology and other innovations;
- Support the development of educational technology with enhanced accessibility for students with disabilities;
- Fund and scale the development and adoption of technology and other innovative tools, environments, and resources that empower learning, improve assessments, and make educational professionals more effective; and
- Build the Department’s internal capacity to accelerate the adoption of technology and other innovations as a model of an organization focused on continuous improvement.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Fund and evaluate innovative programs through all funding streams to help move new solutions from development to validation to widespread use;
- Fund research and development, in partnership with other federal agencies, that advances technology and other innovations to support teaching, learning, and administration;
- Develop a common evidence framework that aligns federal funding with the demonstrated effectiveness and possible scalability of solutions, creating an “innovation pipeline”;
- Facilitate the creation of an organization to support the development of transformative technologies in the education sector;
- Collaborate with other federal agencies and the private sector to ensure that students and educators have adequate broadband access to the Internet and adequate wireless connectivity;
- Fund the development of technology-based content and resources, as well as promote online learning communities that create opportunities for educators to collaborate and for educators and students to access digital content;

- Facilitate the implementation of the National Education Technology Plan; and
- Fund technology and other innovations that address the particular needs of rural areas.

What could hold us back? What is beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Education funding is being cut across the country, putting investment in new programs, strategies, or processes at risk. In this time of decreasing budgets, technology and other innovations might be seen as luxuries rather than as mission critical. Because the private sector currently does not find investment in education innovation as attractive as investment in innovation in other sectors, there is limited private funding to help bridge the gaps. Technology-based education innovations are also at risk because of lack of broadband and lack of capacity in the field to implement the innovations.

GOAL 6: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CAPACITY. IMPROVE THE ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT TO IMPLEMENT THIS STRATEGIC PLAN.

To successfully implement this Strategic Plan, the Department must retool its organizational capabilities and areas of expertise. In particular, transforming the Department means developing a new approach to grants management that better supports grantees in achieving their educational goals while also continuing to hold grantees accountable for meeting financial requirements and legal obligations. To do so, the Department will continue to build the skills and knowledge of its workforce, rethink how it monitors and intervenes with high-risk grantees, enhance workforce productivity through information technology and performance management, and transform the way the Department interacts with states, districts, institutions of higher education, and other grantees across the country. The transformation will result in improved performance results, increased stakeholder collaboration, and higher employee satisfaction.

- 6.1. Effective Workforce:** Continue to build a high-performing, skilled workforce within the Department.
- 6.2. Programmatic Risk Management:** Improve the Department’s program efficacy through comprehensive risk management and grant monitoring.
- 6.3. Implementation and Support:** Build Department capacity to support states’ and other grantees’ implementation of reforms that result in improved outcomes for students.
- 6.4. Productivity and Performance Management:** Improve workforce productivity through information technology and performance management systems.

How will we measure success?

The Department will use the following indicators to measure the Department’s success in building the organizational capacities needed to implement this Strategic Plan.

U.S. Department of Education Capacity Indicators of Success

- Increase in the Department’s rank in the report on the Best Places to Work (BPTW) in the federal government
- Increase in the percentage of positive responses that the Department receives on the Talent Management measure in the Federal Viewpoint Survey
- Increase in the percentage of positive responses that the Department receives on the Performance Culture measure in the Federal Viewpoint Survey
- Increase in the percentage of Department programs that use a risk index and corresponding solutions for identifying and mitigating grantee risk
- Increase in the percentage of states and other grantees reporting satisfaction with support provided by the Department
- Increase in the availability of data related to student access to resources and opportunities to succeed, such as disaggregated student access to college- and career-ready mathematics and science courses; disparate discipline rates, school-based arrests, and referrals to law enforcement; and school-level expenditures

SUB-GOAL 6.1: EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE. CONTINUE TO BUILD A HIGH-PERFORMING, SKILLED WORKFORCE WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT.

Outstanding leaders and engaged employees are key drivers of organizational performance and results. Therefore, the Department’s success in implementing this Strategic Plan will rely heavily on the knowledge, skills, and expertise of the Department’s employees. Yet, based on its own employees’ views, the Department must improve its workforce capacity and leadership skills. These views are illustrated by the Department ranking 29th out of 33 large federal agencies on the 2011 *Best Places to Work (BPTW) in the Federal Government* report, a survey of federal government employees.⁶⁰ Changes in the Department’s BPTW rank are an indicator of effectiveness of the Department’s leadership and the level to which staff feel engaged, both essential components of a highly effective organization.

To improve employee engagement and build a higher-performing organization, the Department will implement programs and processes that encourage collaboration, professional development, and an improved performance culture. It will also invest in the leadership and management corps so that a cadre of experienced leaders can continue to coach other employees and drive innovation. The Department will also focus on ways to build skills and knowledge, improve communication, and enhance the hiring and promotion of high-performing employees. Finally, the Department will increase the diversity of its workforce, specifically by meeting the President’s directive to improve the hiring of people with disabilities.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Better engage employees and promote creativity, innovation, and collaboration;
- Improve knowledge sharing and learning opportunities, including sharing of best practices;
- Develop an enhanced strategy for promoting within the Department and hiring outside the Department, including the hiring of individuals with disabilities, consistent with Presidential Executive Order 13548;
- Enhance the performance management system; and
- Invest in developing and supporting Department managers and leaders.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Develop programs and processes for sharing information and increasing collaboration across offices;
- Align this Plan closely to the Department’s Organizational Performance Review and staff performance evaluations;
- Leverage technology to boost collaboration across offices;
- Design an incentive and recognition process that honors and encourages capable management;
- Strengthen management through supervisor seminars, management symposia, and executive coaching;
- Streamline the hiring process to attract and hire employees with the necessary skills and knowledge; and
- Build a robust “on-boarding” program for newly hired employees at all levels.

⁶⁰ Partnership for Public Service and American University, *The Best Places to Work in the Federal Government 2010 Rankings*, p. 4.

What Could Hold Us Back? (External Risk Factors)

To be successful, these human capital initiatives will require support from the Department’s supervisors, managers, and senior leaders. It will also require updates to internal policies and a strong, productive collaboration with the employees’ union. In addition, the Department will need a stronger, sustained commitment to meaningful professional development and succession planning programs, and implementation of new technology to support improved collaboration among staff.

SUB-GOAL 6.2: PROGRAMMATIC RISK MANAGEMENT. IMPROVE THE DEPARTMENT’S PROGRAM EFFICACY THROUGH COMPREHENSIVE RISK MANAGEMENT AND GRANT MONITORING.

To support the President’s 2020 college attainment goal, the Department is striving to enhance the impact of grants by improving flexibility for grantees and by enhancing the technical assistance and support provided by the Department. As part of these reforms, the Department must also enhance its approach to measuring, identifying, and mitigating fiscal and programmatic risk.⁶¹

Risk mitigation plays a critical role in enhancing the capacity of grantees to implement needed reforms. It helps assess the ability of applicants to fulfill grant requirements, and it supports effective monitoring by identifying performance challenges that can be addressed through measures such as enhanced technical assistance.

How will we get there? (Actions/Mean)

- Ensure sufficient and appropriate staffing at each step (pre-award, performance period, post-award) of each grant program to maximize risk mitigation;
- Refine management processes and structures that address financial and programmatic risk, and establish the appropriate balance of centralized and decentralized capabilities and staffing; and
- Expand definitions of effective risk management to include grantee performance on outcomes-based measures set out in grant applications.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Determine more effectively where risk exists (e.g., in which programs, in which individual grants, and at which levels—grantees versus sub-grantees) prior to making awards;
- Disseminate the lessons learned from recent high-stakes competitive grant programs to Department staff via trainings, updated administrative guidance, and revised statutory requirements;
- Use fiscal, programmatic performance, and student outcomes data to inform high-stakes decisions, and respond appropriately when risk is identified; and
- Ensure that audit information, monitoring findings, and other non-fiscal findings/data related to grantee financial and programmatic health are widely available and easily accessible within the Department.

What could hold us back? What’s beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Risk is inherent in the grants management process; therefore, no amount of improvement will completely eliminate risk. Risk is greater in areas of innovation, where there are fewer precedents, proven strategies, or track records upon which to draw in the assessment and management of risk. Data limitations also can impede the Department’s efforts in managing risk.

⁶¹ Risk is a measure of the potential inability to achieve overall program objectives within defined requirements related to cost, schedule, legislative authority, and grant management practice. It has two major components: 1) the probability or likelihood of failing to achieve a particular outcome, and 2) the consequences or impacts of failing to achieve that outcome. Risk can be mitigated through a structured process that involves the identification, assessment, and development of methods to reduce or eliminate the impact of any failures.

SUB-GOAL 6.3: IMPLEMENTATION AND SUPPORT. BUILD DEPARTMENT CAPACITY TO SUPPORT STATES' AND OTHER GRANTEE'S IMPLEMENTATION OF REFORMS THAT RESULT IN IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS.

The Department has an unprecedented opportunity and responsibility to demonstrate how the investment of federal funds in education leads to improved outcomes for students. This is a unique moment in time to improve student achievement. There are ongoing, positive implications from the investment of \$100 billion in Recovery Act and other reform-oriented funds, focused on four key reform areas. Nationally, there is recognition of the urgency of improving education and its importance for international competitiveness. In addition, there is a Presidential call to action for the United States to once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

The country has responded powerfully to the President's call to action; there is a national focus on raising the bar and closing achievement gaps. For example, 41 states applied for Race to the Top grants in Phase 1 and 36 states applied in Phase 2 of the competition; 1,698 applications were received for the i3 grant competition, and all states submitted applications for State Fiscal Stabilization Funds and School Improvement Grant funds.

To build on this momentum and improve student outcomes, states need strong support to effectively implement the programmatic reforms highlighted in their applications. The Department has an important role to play in providing this support and technical assistance. To do so, the Department is moving from being an organization more narrowly focused on compliance monitoring to an organization more adept at both supporting states in achieving their goals and at holding them accountable for meeting their financial and legal obligations under grants. The Race to the Top grantees provide an opportunity for the Department to pilot this work with a set of reform-focused states and to use lessons learned to expand this approach to all states.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Support states' efforts to achieve significant improvements in student outcomes;
- Facilitate the building of sustainable learning communities and systems within and across states and districts;
- Identify, codify, and share effective (and ineffective) practices to accelerate learning;
- Help scale effective systemic approaches and practices within and across states and nationwide;
- Shift from a more narrow focus on compliance monitoring to a mix of grantee support and monitoring;
- Help redefine relationships between the Department and states, between states and their LEAs, across states, and across similar districts; and
- Encourage transparency and ensure appropriate, effective, and efficient use of funds.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Develop new approaches to interacting with states that make it easier for states to obtain the information and support that they need to implement their comprehensive reform agendas and improve results for all students;
- Provide access to experts who can provide the technical assistance and hands-on support that states identify as necessary to build capacity at the state and district levels;
- Facilitate the gathering, sharing, and use of knowledge to support continuous improvement within and across states; and
- Support states in effectively managing federal funds by streamlining and coordinating administrative requirements and refining approaches to monitoring and risk management.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Implementing unprecedented reform efforts will require states to develop new capacities that support effective teaching, school turnarounds, college- and career-ready standards, and effective use of data. In addition, states must develop new capacities to communicate and collaborate with each other to share effective practices. As with many other efforts, the development of these systems is in jeopardy given the current budget environment impacting states and districts.

SUB-GOAL 6.4: PRODUCTIVITY AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT. IMPROVE WORKFORCE PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS.

Similar to states and districts, the Department must continue to focus on ways to increase productivity, especially in this time of limited resources. The Department is focusing on enhancing performance management by focusing and aligning priorities and goals at every level. The Department is also launching quarterly operational reviews to ensure progress toward achieving the goals in this plan and is updating these goals to ensure alignment with government-wide goals. To translate these broader aspirations to specific organizational goals, the Organizational Performance Review has been created as a tool for setting goals at the office level and assessing the building of critical organizational capacities. These goals are being cascaded down to the individual employee level through Senior Executive Service plans and through the Department's individual performance management system. To support the tracking and reporting of progress against all these goals, the Department is also creating a set of information dashboards and data analysis tools.

In addition to better-focused and aligned goals, better use of information technology is essential to improving productivity. The Department is focused on improving technology in areas critical to productivity, including collaboration, transparency, and document management. To improve employee collaboration, for example, the Department launched *engagED*, which is an internal tool that allows employees to suggest innovations, collaborate to develop those ideas, and elevate them to leaders for decisions and implementation. Similarly, key programs have launched the use of Collaboration Engine, which is an online knowledge management and collaboration tool that helps develop and support communities of practice among state and district grantees. In the area of transparency, the Department launched data.ed.gov, which provides unprecedented online information regarding applicants, proposals, and grantees that can be accessed to share innovative and successful approaches to common challenges faced in education. Finally, in the area of document management the Department is adopting systems such as Grant Electronic Monitoring System (GEMS) and the Grantee Records and Assistance Database System (GRADS 360°) to automate the processing, review, and storage of grant applications and supporting documents in a way that substantially enhances productivity.

How will we get there? (Actions/Means)

The Department will:

- Undergo a process of continuous improvement to ensure alignment of priorities from the government-wide level to the individual employee level; and
- Continue developing and scaling up innovative technologies that improve productivity.

Specific examples of these actions include:

- Update the Strategic Plan to reflect newly developed government-wide goals;
- Provide quarterly reports on progress;
- Align office-level and individual goals to the Department's goals;
- Streamline and refocus programmatic performance measures to increase relevance and decrease the burden on grantees;
- Develop dashboard and data analysis tools to track and manage performance on goals;
- Promote internal tools, like *engagED*, to encourage the sharing of ideas across the Department;
- Adopt new document management systems to automate processing, review, and storage of grant applications and supporting documents;
- Develop an inventory of Departmental datasets and distribution mechanisms to improve transparency and public accessibility;

- Scale up the use of Collaboration Engine to include more grantees and programs; and
- Develop tools to better analyze customer satisfaction for services provided, both internal to the Department and to grantees and other stakeholders, leveraging the results to drive continuous improvement among programs and services.

What could hold us back? What's beyond our control? (External Risk Factors)

Maximizing the impact of the Department's human capital and funding resources is limited by several factors, including the lack of timely data for analysis. Additionally, the use of technology to improve productivity is limited in part by both the Department's and its grantees' varying levels of preparation to use technology effectively. These limitations can create challenges for the pace at which new innovations, both technological and others, can be developed and deployed.



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