

The Department's Agency Priority Goals

The Department identified six Agency Priority Goals (APGs) for FY 2014–15 that serve to focus its activities, with a particular emphasis over the next two years. These goals are consistent with the Department's five-year strategic plan, which will be used to monitor and report regularly on progress, reflect the Department's cradle-to-career education strategy, and help concentrate efforts on the importance of teaching and learning at all levels of the education system. Quarterly updates for the APGs are available on performance.gov.

Progress on the Department's FY 2014–15 Agency Priority Goals¹

Agency Priority Goal: Increase college degree attainment in America

Goal for FY 2014–2015: By September 30, 2015, 45.6 percent of adults ages 25–34 will have an associate degree or higher, which will place the nation on track to reach the President's goal of 60 percent degree attainment by 2020.

Supports Strategic Goal 1.

Overview: In 2009, the President set a goal that, by 2020, the United States will have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. Meeting this goal will require millions of additional Americans to earn a postsecondary degree by the end of this decade. The President's focus on the educational attainment among adults ages 25–34 allows the Department to assess progress in preparing the next generation of workers and to benchmark for international comparisons.

The Department's strategy to implement the President's College Value and Affordability Agenda comprises three areas of focus: (1) promoting evidence-based innovation and competition so that colleges offer students a greater range of affordable, high-quality options than they do today, (2) fostering institutional and student accountability in tandem with better consumer awareness, and (3) ensuring that student debt remains affordable. These strategies aim to support college attainment by reducing the cost and amount of time necessary to attain a degree, by measuring college performance and providing consumer information about cost and outcomes, by supporting the use of open educational low-cost textbooks, and by incentivizing state, institutional, and student behavior.

Progress: Starting from a baseline of 44.0 percent in 2012, the Department projected that the annual increase of educational attainment among adults ages 25–34 would grow progressively each year above the four-year historical average of 0.7 percentage points and established performance targets of 44.7 percent for 2014 and 45.6 percent for 2015. The Department is on pace to achieve this APG as 44.8 percent of adults ages 25–34 have an associate's degree or higher, exceeding the 2014 performance target (note that the rate reflects prior year data, in this case from 2013, but is reported in 2014 when data are available). Examples of the Department's activities that support this goal include collaborating with the White House to host College Opportunity Summits that bring together superintendents and college presidents; developing and refining the College Scorecard; and redesigning existing programs to encourage efforts to improve college fit, reduce the need for remediation, increase the availability of open educational resources, and implement evidence-based practices. These activities promote

¹ The performance information reported in this section is current as of Quarter 3 of FY 2014 (April 1–June 30, 2014).

innovation, competition, and accountability in the postsecondary sector, which will boost completion rates and educational attainment.

Opportunities and Challenges: One challenge toward achieving this goal is that the Department's budgetary proposals have not received traction in Congress, and it remains unclear whether recent proposals that reflect the President's agenda will gain support. As such, success will also depend largely on the extent to which states invest in higher education. Specifically, whether and to what extent states and institutions (a) implement policies and programs to increase college access and success, (b) reduce costs and time to completion, (c) support accelerated learning opportunities, including dual enrollment, (d) develop and adopt effective and innovative practices that improve student outcomes, and (e) promote seamless transitions from secondary to postsecondary education and among higher education institutions will influence the Department's success in achieving this APG. Although the Department has some limited leverage to influence states' policies and the practices of postsecondary institutions, the Department will use its available resources, including implementation and impact of programs and technical assistance, and the ability to convene stakeholders to encourage collaboration and best practices.

Agency Priority Goal: Support implementation of college- and career-ready standards and assessments

Goal for FY 2014–2015: By September 30, 2015, at least 50 states/territories will be implementing next-generation assessments, aligned with college- and career-ready standards.

Supports Strategic Goal 2.

Overview: The adoption of internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards is the foundation to improving educational outcomes for all students and a fundamental step toward increasing the number of college graduates in the United States. Moreover, these standards must be coupled with high-quality formative and summative assessments that will measure the extent to which students are mastering them.

Progress: Most states have adopted college- and career-ready standards and are in the process of developing and testing the assessments aligned with those standards. The Race to the Top - Assessment (RTTA) consortia and the consortia developing alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards completed the field testing of their assessments in preparation for operational administration in spring 2015.

Opportunities and Challenges: State capacity to implement college- and career-ready standards and assessments aligned with those standards varies. To address this challenge, the Department is developing and targeting technical assistance activities that will, in part, increase state capacity to leverage limited resources and continue to identify promising practices across multiple states. For example, the Department will build a "bank" of resources that support the implementation of college- and career-ready standards. Included in such a bank will be materials to assist in full and effective implementation of college- and career-ready standards developed or identified by offices across the Department.

The Department will continue to leverage the ESEA flexibility monitoring and renewal process to support full implementation of college- and career-ready standards and aligned, valid, and reliable assessments in states that have received ESEA flexibility. By using the ESEA flexibility

monitoring process, the Department can track state implementation and identify areas where technical assistance is needed. This monitoring approach follows the different kind of relationship the Department has built internally across its offices and externally with states during the ESEA flexibility approval process, including the use of cross-Departmental teams (including staff from the Implementation and Support Unit (ISU), Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the Office of School Turnaround), reducing burden and duplication, and reducing overlap between other Department programs and ESEA flexibility.

Agency Priority Goal: Improve learning by ensuring that more students have effective teachers and leaders

Goal for FY 2014–2015: By September 30, 2015, at least 37 states will have fully implemented teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that consider multiple measures of effectiveness, with student growth as a significant factor.

Supports Strategic Goal 2.

Overview: Teacher and principal evaluation and support systems enable the development and identification of effective educators and provide information to improve the educator workforce. The nation needs to do more 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, recognition, and collaboration opportunities he or she needs to succeed. The Department will help strengthen the profession by focusing on meaningful feedback, support, and incentives at every stage of a career, based on fair evaluation and support systems that look at multiple measures, including, in significant part, student growth.

The Department will support states in the development and adoption of state requirements for comprehensive teacher and principal evaluations and support systems as well as in district development and implementation of comprehensive educator evaluation systems. This additional support is necessary so that teachers and educator evaluators are able, for example, to use and develop learning objectives to measure student growth and to implement new classroom observation tools.

Progress: The performance targets for this APG are based on state implementation timelines provided through original ESEA flexibility requests. These timelines indicated that 37 states expected to implement the systems by September 30, 2015. As of June 30, 2014, 10 states have fully implemented teacher and principal evaluation and support systems.²

Opportunities and Challenges: Providing support to states to do this work well is resource-intensive. Additionally, it is difficult for the Department to maintain the momentum for reform, given districts' and states' current political situations and potential changes in leadership. However, as states continue work to implement teacher and leader evaluation systems, the Department will continue to provide robust technical assistance. In addition to monitoring, the Department has designed a one-year ESEA flexibility extension process for Window 1 and 2 states. States that are on track to meet their original ESEA flexibility commitments relating to evaluation and support systems will be able to use this process to continue their work in 2014–15. The Department will work with states that have requested changes to their timelines

² "Fully implemented" is defined as the school year in which teachers and principals receive effectiveness ratings.

or sequencing of events outside of the extension process to ensure that they, too, can continue their work in the 2014–15 school year and are making continuous improvement in their systems.

Agency Priority Goal: Support comprehensive early learning assessment systems

Goal for FY 2014–2015: By September 30, 2015, at least nine states will be collecting and reporting disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry using a common measure.

Supports Strategic Goal 3.

Overview: Kindergarten entry assessments (KEAs), when properly designed, are included in a state's comprehensive early learning assessment system, improve student achievement and early learning programs' effectiveness, and inform professional development to improve the early learning workforce. KEAs also can inform instruction and support students' educational success by identifying the early learning needs of each child. As such, KEAs provide an opportunity for teachers and families to understand the status of children as they are entering kindergarten and an opportunity to provide policy makers with information needed to support high-quality early learning programs that ensure children enter school prepared for success.

Progress: The Department is on track to achieve this APG. As of June 30, 2014, the Early Learning Challenge Technical Assistance Center (ELC TAC) reported that six states are collecting and reporting disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry using a common measure. Additionally, the Department's Office of Early Learning conducted an analysis of the Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) grantees' annual performance reports and found that four states are in the process of revising their current statewide KEAs, five other states are beginning a phased-in implementation of KEAs, and six others are pilot testing their KEAs. Although there are challenges with the implementation of KEAs, the Department is optimistic about achieving the APG.

Opportunities and Challenges: The Department plans on releasing an annual report about RTT-ELC grantees that includes information on how states are engaging stakeholders in KEA development, providing more professional development to teachers, and evaluating what is and is not working in order to improve the KEA process. The sharing of these lessons learned will advance progress toward this goal. Additionally, the Department will reach out to external organizations that share our interest in advancing quality KEAs to develop strategies that may increase our collective impact.

Because assessment in early learning is new, many states are in the early stages of developing valid and reliable measures for KEAs. Constructing and testing these instruments and implementing them across every school in the state will be challenging and will take time. In addition, new measures and systems require significant investment and state budget cuts could impact deployment. The Department will continue to convene states and share resources that support states in their collecting and reporting of disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry using a common measure.

Agency Priority Goal: Ensure equitable educational opportunities

Goal for FY 2014–2015: By September 30, 2015, the number of high schools with persistently low graduation rates will decrease by 5 percent annually. The national high school graduation rate will increase to 83 percent, as measured by the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, and disparities in the national high school graduation rate among minority students, students with disabilities, English learners, and students in poverty will decrease.

Supports Strategic Goal 4.

Overview: Equality of opportunity is a core American value. Young people in this country—regardless of wealth, home language, zip code, gender, sexual preference, race or disability—must have the chance to learn and achieve. Through Race to the Top (RTT), the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, ESEA flexibility, and other federal programs, the Department is providing significant resources to improve the nation's lowest-achieving schools dramatically by using intensive turnaround models and identifying the low-achieving schools that are showing strong evidence of successfully turning around. The Department continues to focus on supporting innovation, not just compliance monitoring, and on spurring growth in achievement, not just absolute achievement measures as done in the past.

Increasing the national high school graduation rate and decreasing disparities in the graduation rate is critical to achieving the President's college graduation goal. The nation has made significant progress in increasing graduation rates, but gaps between rates for different student groups continue to persist. This APG aims to reduce that gap.

Progress: The Department announced the Excellent Educators for All initiative, a 50-state strategy to support state efforts to ensure that low income students and students of color have equal access to qualified and effective teachers and leaders. This initiative will include a new technical assistance network, educator equity data profiles, guidance for states on developing educator equity plans, and state submission of new educator equity plans. The Department expects this initiative, as well as the support provided through the programs that contribute to this APG, will result in continued improvement to the high school graduation rate and a reduction in the number of high schools with persistently low graduation rates.

Opportunities and Challenges: One key challenge in achieving this APG is providing differentiated support to states based on their current status and progress in increasing graduation rates. While all states have room for improvement, some states are farther behind than others, particularly for different subgroups of students. Recently, the Department addressed one major barrier, which was the incomparability of graduation rate data across states. All states are now required to use an adjusted cohort graduation rate, and the Department is reporting these data at the state, district, and school levels. However, differences in how states define a regular high school diploma, and other technical features of their calculations, continue to make comparisons challenging. The Department will continue to improve its data release processes to ensure that data on graduation rates are released to the public on a regular schedule and on a timely basis to help states and districts better use data to drive improvement. The Department will also use the upcoming ESEA flexibility renewal process as an opportunity to support states in continuously improving their systems of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support to ensure that they are effectively identifying and supporting schools with low graduation rates for all students and for particular subgroups of students.

Another challenge for this APG is sustaining the reforms in schools after SIG funding ends. Insufficient focus or funding for comprehensive turnaround efforts at the state and local levels compounds this challenge. As such, the Department will develop and disseminate guidance and technical assistance on sustainability strategies to help states and districts continue reforms after federal funding ends. Additionally, the Department will provide states with guidance on how to implement recent legislative changes to the SIG program that extended the length of the grants that the Department can award. The guidance will encourage states to use the additional time for both planning and sustainability activities during the grant period.

Agency Priority Goal: Enable evidence-based decision making

Goal for FY 2014–2015: By September 30, 2015, the percentage of select new (non-continuation) competitive grant dollars that reward evidence will increase by 70 percent.

Supports Strategic Goal 5.

Overview: There is an increasing emphasis from the Department and among stakeholders on the importance of using evidence to support government program funding decisions. In support of this APG, the Department is increasing its internal capacity to make competitive grant awards based on the existing strength of evidence. For example, with the inclusion of a common evidence framework in the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), competitive grant programs may select from four tiers of evidence to use as priorities³ or selection criteria, as appropriate. Additionally, through its mix of grants, contracts, and internal analytic work, the Department aims to support the use of research methods and rigorous study designs that provide evidence that is as robust as possible.

Progress: In FY 2014, five competitions in the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII), the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), and the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) are using evidence through eligibility requirements, competitive preference priorities, and selection criteria. As such, the Department anticipates meeting its performance target for this APG.

Opportunities and Challenges: The Department is exploring ways to support and build the capacity of program offices as they shift to evidence-based funding models. For example, the Department leverages the Regional Educational Laboratories' (RELs) resources about logic models and evaluation design by sharing them with applicants, grantees, and program offices. Although these resources support both internal and external stakeholders, the Department has limited resources to provide direct and targeted technical assistance to applicants and grantees, which vary in their comfort with and understanding of evaluation and use of evidence. To continue building the capacity of the education field to use and generate evidence, it is important that the Department is able to provide appropriate technical assistance to its grantees and applicants. The Department anticipates achieving this year's performance target for this APG based on projections about which competitive grant programs may make new awards during FY 2014.

³ The Department may use a priority as an absolute priority, meaning applicants must propose projects that meet it to be eligible to receive funds, or as a competitive preference priority, meaning applicants may choose to address it and could receive additional points depending on how well the priority is addressed.

Cross-Agency Priority Goals

In accordance with the *GPR Modernization Act of 2010*, interim Cross-Agency Priority Goals (CAP Goals) were published on performance.gov in March 2014. The CAP Goals are divided into two categories:

Mission CAP Goals	Management CAP Goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cybersecurity • Climate Change (federal actions) • Insider Threat and Security Clearance • Job-creating Investment • Infrastructure Permitting Modernization • STEM Education • Service Member and Veterans Mental Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Service • IT Delivery • Strategic Sourcing • Shared Services • Benchmarking and Mission-support Operations • Open Data • Lab to Market • People and Culture

Performance.gov is updated on a quarterly basis for each CAP Goal. The website will include information required by law, such as goal leader(s), contributing agencies, organizations, programs, targets, key milestones, and major management challenges, as well as plans to address these challenges. Quarterly Performance Updates for the website on progress will be provided by the goal leader in coordination with the Performance Improvement Council, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), corresponding government-wide management council, and contributing agencies. (A-11, Part 6, 220.5)

Each CAP Goal has a goal leader(s) and deputy goal leader(s) who will manage the processes by which goals are executed. Goal leaders are given flexibility when managing CAP Goals and are encouraged to leverage existing structures as much as practicable (e.g., existing working groups, interagency policy committees, councils). Every CAP Goal will have a governance team chaired by the goal leader, a deputy goal leader, and representatives from agencies contributing to the goal, OMB, and others as determined by the goal leader. Each governance team will develop an action plan explaining how the Federal Government will execute on the goal, including agencies' contributions, areas where cross-agency coordination is needed, and anticipated risks or obstacles. The action plan will be updated as experience is gained and new information is learned. (A-11, Part 6, 220.9)

In addition to the Agency Priority Goals, the Department contributes to CAP Goals as required by the *GPR Modernization Act of 2010*, including:

Customer Service: Deliver world-class customer services to citizens by making it faster and easier for individuals and businesses to complete transactions and have a positive experience with government.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Education: In support of the President's goal that the United States have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020, the federal government will work with education partners to improve the quality of STEM education at all levels to help increase the number of well-prepared graduates with STEM degrees, the number of STEM teachers with corresponding undergraduate degrees, and students' access to quality STEM learning experiences.

Real time information on Cross-Agency Priority Goals is available at performance.gov.

Management Performance

The Department continues to make a substantive commitment and investment in improving its working capacity and infrastructure, to further leverage policy and programmatic aims to reform the nation's educational system. Goal 6 of the *Strategic Plan* (U.S. Department of Education Capacity: Improve the organizational capacities of the Department to implement the *Strategic Plan*) supports those aims by ensuring that the Department's hiring, staffing, training, culture, systems, and procedures enable the Department to deliver programs and resources in ways that are faster, smarter, and better year after year. Thus, the commitment and the investments are both short- and long-range in nature.

Examples of the Department's strategies are seen in the thrust for greater employee engagement, improvements and increases in diversity and inclusion, more rigorous hiring targets and goals, and expansion of its leadership and knowledge management efforts in key, cross-cutting areas, such as Information Technology (IT). These areas of focus also align with the FY 2014 President's Management Agenda. That agenda includes management goals related to customer service, benchmarking and mission support, IT delivery, Open Data, strategic sourcing, lab to market, shared services, and organizational culture.

The Department is making major efforts to bolster its impact in the people and culture element, with an enterprise-wide workgroup on employee engagement, which is also leveraging and piloting several strategic engagement initiatives throughout the Department. Those strategies include formalized supervisor and peer recognition; intensive manager training and development pilots; increased development and usage of telework policies and flexibilities; and employee wellness, lifestyle balance, and volunteerism campaigns.

IT delivery is another area of focus to which the Department has committed a considerable amount of resources. The Chief Information Officer has led a push for greater technology innovation to improve the workload capacity for employees. Efforts to improve security, gain efficiency in storage, improve network service and responsiveness, increase system speed, and increase the footprint of Wi-Fi and other wireless and mobility solutions in the Department's facilities and for those working remotely, have significantly improved the employee computing experience. These efforts have laid a foundation to clarify the Department's ongoing needs and provide a clear vision for how technology can better enable work over the next decade.

Another vital accomplishment and significant progress to date can be seen in the Department's emphasis on Cybersecurity, one of the President's mission CAP goals. During FY 2014, the Department significantly reduced the number of threats and risks, including security breaches. In another effort, the technology group reported increases in electronic signature usage at nearly 150 percent of its target. These advances in cybersecurity have been the result of steady and focused strategies to proactively seek innovation as a major resource in the campaign to improve.