

The Department's Approach to Performance Management

Performance Management Framework

In accordance with the [GPRAM Act of 2010](#) (GPRAMA), the Department's framework for performance management starts with the *Strategic Plan*, including the six FY 2014–15 APGs, which serve as the foundation for establishing long-term priorities and developing performance goals, objectives, and measures by which the Department can gauge achievement of its stated outcomes. The Department monitors progress toward its strategic goals and its APGs using data-driven review and analysis. This focus promotes active management engagement across the Department. Additional information on performance management is available in the [Annual Performance Plans and Annual Performance Reports](#).

Based on data available as of quarter 3 of FY 2015, 14 metrics in the [FY 2014–18 Strategic Plan](#) showed progress toward the established goals.

The [FY 2014–18 Strategic Plan](#) is comprised of six strategic goals and six APGs for FY 2014–15 and aims to align the administration's annual budget requests with the Department's legislative agenda, supported by the considerable experience and resources available from its internal staff. The Department welcomes input from Congress, state and local partners, and other education stakeholders about the *Strategic Plan*. During FY 2015, the Department reached out to Congress by following up with the chairs and ranking members of authorizing, appropriations, and oversight committees requesting consultation and feedback on its proposed FY 2016–17 APGs, as required by OMB Circular A-11 and the GPRAMA. Questions or comments about the APGs or the *Strategic Plan* should be emailed to APP_APRComments@ed.gov.

FY 2014–18 Strategic Plan

AGENCY MISSION		
<p>Mission: To promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access</p>		
FY 2014–18 STRATEGIC PLAN		
Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives	FY 2014–15 APGs
<p>Goal 1: Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education. Increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults.</p>	<p>Objective 1.1: Access and Affordability. Close the opportunity gap by improving the affordability of and access to college and/or workforce training, especially for underrepresented and/or underprepared populations (e.g., low-income and first-generation students, English learners, individuals with disabilities, adults without high school diplomas, etc.).</p> <p>Objective 1.2: Quality. Foster institutional value to ensure that postsecondary education credentials represent effective preparation for students to succeed in the workforce and participate in civic life.</p> <p>Objective 1.3: Completion. Increase degree and certificate completion and job placement in high-need and high-skill areas, particularly among underrepresented and/or underprepared populations.</p> <p>Objective 1.4: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Pathways. Increase STEM pathway opportunities that enable access to and completion of postsecondary programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase college degree attainment in America
<p>Goal 2: Elementary and Secondary Education. Improve the elementary and secondary education system's ability to consistently deliver excellent instruction aligned with rigorous academic standards while providing effective support services to close achievement and opportunity gaps, and ensure all students graduate high school college- and career-ready.</p>	<p>Objective 2.1: Standards and Assessments. Support implementation of internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards, with aligned, valid, and reliable assessments.</p> <p>Objective 2.2: Effective Teachers and Strong Leaders. Improve the preparation, recruitment, retention, development, support, evaluation, recognition, and equitable distribution of effective teachers and leaders.</p> <p>Objective 2.3: School Climate and Community. Increase the success, safety, and health of students, particularly in high-need schools, and deepen family and community engagement.</p> <p>Objective 2.4: Turn Around Schools and Close Achievement Gaps. Accelerate achievement by supporting states and districts in turning around low-performing schools and closing achievement gaps, and developing models of next-generation high schools.</p> <p>Objective 2.5: STEM Teaching and Learning. Increase the number and quality of STEM teachers and increase opportunities for students to access rich STEM learning experiences.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support implementation of college- and career-ready standards and assessments • Improve learning by ensuring that more students have effective teachers and leaders

FY 2014–18 STRATEGIC PLAN		
Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives	FY 2014–15 APGs
<p>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.</p>	<p>Objective 3.1: Access to High-Quality Programs and Services. Increase access to high-quality early learning programs and comprehensive services, especially for children with high needs.</p> <p>Objective 3.2: Effective Workforce. Improve the quality and effectiveness of the early learning workforce so that early childhood educators have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to improve young children's health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes.</p> <p>Objective 3.3: Measuring Progress, Outcomes, and Readiness. Improve the capacity of states and early learning programs to develop and implement comprehensive early learning assessment systems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support comprehensive early learning assessment systems
<p>Goal 4: Equity. Increase educational opportunities for underserved students and reduce discrimination so that all students are well-positioned to succeed.</p>	<p>Objective 4.1: Equitable Educational Opportunities. Increase all students' access to educational opportunities with a focus on closing achievement gaps and remove barriers that students face based on their race, ethnicity, or national origin; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; disability; English language ability; religion; socioeconomic status; or geographical location.</p> <p>Objective 4.2: Civil Rights Compliance. Ensure educational institutions' awareness of and compliance with federal civil rights obligations and enhance the public's knowledge of their civil rights.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure equitable educational opportunities
<p>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, evidence, transparency, innovation, and technology.</p>	<p>Objective 5.1: Data Systems and Transparency. Facilitate the development of interoperable longitudinal data systems for early learning through employment to enable data-driven, transparent decision-making by increasing access to timely, reliable, and high-value data.</p> <p>Objective 5.2: Privacy. Provide all education stakeholders, from early childhood to adult learning, with technical assistance and guidance to help them protect student privacy while effectively managing and using student information.</p> <p>Objective 5.3: Research, Evaluation, and Use of Evidence. Invest in research and evaluation that builds evidence for education improvement; communicate findings effectively; and drive the use of evidence in decision-making by internal and external stakeholders.</p> <p>Objective 5.4: Technology and Innovation. Accelerate the development and broad adoption of new, effective programs, processes, and strategies, including education technology.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable evidence-based decision making
<p>Goal 6: U.S. Department of Education Capacity. Improve the organizational capacities of the Department to implement the Strategic Plan.</p>	<p>Objective 6.1: Effective Workforce. Continue to build a high-performing, skilled, diverse, and engaged workforce within the Department.</p> <p>Objective 6.2: Risk Management. Improve the Department's program efficacy through comprehensive risk management, and grant and contract monitoring.</p> <p>Objective 6.3: Implementation and Support. Build Department capacity and systems to support states' and other grantees' implementation of reforms that result in improved outcomes, and keep the public informed of promising practices and new reform initiatives.</p> <p>Objective 6.4: Productivity and Performance Management. Improve workforce productivity through information technology enhancements, telework expansion efforts, more effective process performance management systems, and state-of-the-art leadership and knowledge management practices.</p>	

U.S. Department of Education Management and Communications Priority Themes

The mission of the Department is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. To fulfill this mission, the Department's *Strategic Plan* revolves around the following themes:

- Early Learning;
- K–12 Education Reform;
- Access, Affordability, and Completion of Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education; and
- Equity.

The following examples highlight the Department's focus for 2015.

Early Learning

This year the Department published [A Matter of Equity: Preschool in America](#), a report on the status of preschool in the United States and recent progress to expand preschool for low-income children throughout the states. The Department recognizes that without a focus on children's preschool experiences, the country runs the risk of limiting opportunity for an entire generation of children by having education gaps between low-income and other children before they enter kindergarten. Recently, the federal government has increased its investment in providing high-quality early education. The Department's involvement in this investment has included the following.

Race to the Top - Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Grant Program: This program is jointly administered by the Department and the Department of Health and Human Services. It provides 20 states with funding to improve early childhood workforce preparation and training; strengthen health services and family engagement; link early childhood and K–12 data systems to learn more about how children's early learning experiences influence their school success; and ensure that parents have information about high-quality early learning programs in their communities.

Preschool Development Grants: This four-year federal and state partnership provides 18 states with funding to expand the number of children enrolled in high-quality preschool programs in high-need communities. The Department estimates that the programs funded by these grants will enroll 177,000 additional children, who otherwise would not have had the opportunity for a high-quality preschool education.

K–12 Education Reform

The Department supported K–12 reform through its grant programs and highlighted the lessons learned from grant and other programs publicly through blogs and a series of videos. Additionally, the Department has created a policy initiative through outreach to the education community.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility: Since 2012, the Department has partnered with state and district leaders to provide relief from some provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* in exchange for taking bold actions to improve student outcomes and ensure equity for all students. Under current law, schools were given many ways to fail but

very few opportunities to succeed. The law forced schools and districts into one-size-fits-all solutions, regardless of the individual needs and circumstances in those communities.

Under ESEA flexibility, states continue to focus resources on comprehensive, rigorous interventions in their lowest-performing schools to help support the neediest students meet high expectations alongside their peers. States also have focused on improving teacher and principal effectiveness across the country with evaluation and support systems that are used for continual improvement of instruction and provide clear, timely, and useful feedback, including feedback that identifies needs and guides professional development. These systems also can be used to recognize and reward highly effective educators, as well as to inform important conversations about ensuring equitable access to effective educators for students from low-income families and students of color.

State Plans to Ensure Equitable Access: Equal educational opportunity means ensuring that all schools have the resources they need to provide meaningful opportunities for all students to succeed, regardless of geography, family income, or race. Too often, students from low-income families and students of color are more likely than their peers to attend a school staffed by inexperienced educators or educators rated as ineffective. These inequities are unacceptable.

Helping all students reach their full potential is, quite simply, the life work of America's great teachers and principals. Far too frequently, these educators know the enormous challenges that students growing up in poverty can face. To help ensure that all students are positioned for success, all students must have equitable access to a safe and healthy place to learn, high-quality instructional materials and support, rigorous expectations and coursework, and—most critically—excellent educators to guide learning.

To help combat existing inequities, in July 2014, the Department announced a comprehensive [Excellent Educators for All Initiative](#) to help states and districts support great educators for all students, including the students who need them most. Under this initiative, the Department provided states with technical assistance through the Equitable Access Support Network (EASN) and required each state to submit a State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators (State Plan) on June 1, 2015. As of September 30, 2015, the Department has approved 16 State Plans, which include a range of strategies to ensure equitable access to excellent educators including: supporting, strengthening, and modifying teacher preparation programs; investing in school leadership; providing financial incentives; and implementing strategies that are focused on predicting, reducing, and eliminating critical shortages in the teaching force.

Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education

The Department has made great strides in providing the public with information and transparency around quality postsecondary education. The Department has made progress in several arenas, including:

- dealing with the cost of a degree and the debt assumed to get that degree;
- emphasizing outcomes when assessing postsecondary education; and
- helping to drive innovation in the higher education sector.

The Department has supported the President's America's College Promise plan that would enable 9 million students to attend one of 1,300 community colleges tuition free. This program would make two years of college as universal as high school and would benefit both students and the nation's economy. Since 2008, total annual financial aid to students has increased by

over \$50 billion, all part of a total of about \$150 billion in grants and loans each year for postsecondary education. The Department is working to rein in ineffective providers that have left students with burdensome debt and limited prospects for a well-paying job. Additionally, the Department has:

- developed a simpler online Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form and announced that it will provide students with earlier and easier access to complete the FAFSA;
- strengthened oversight to ensure that career training programs eligible for federal student aid dollars do not leave students buried in debt with poor employment outcomes;
- expanded the capabilities of the College Scorecard to include new data on outcomes and college value that give consumers better information to help them make the right college choices for them; and
- created opportunities to make college debt more manageable through income-driven repayment plans that tie payments to income to help struggling borrowers.

The Department believes that the top priority for postsecondary institutions should be to focus on outcomes so that students can get good jobs with their degrees. The Department has urged states and private institutions to view higher education as a public good by continuing to invest in their students without reducing funding for postsecondary education. At the same time, the Department supports a broad range of efforts to foster innovation that will help to drive down the cost of attaining a college degree. The Department is also working to identify ways to give colleges and universities more flexibility in their offerings that move beyond traditional requirements associated with class time and the location of where instruction takes place and consider new technologies that can reach more learners and measure growth in student competencies.

Equity

The Department continues to be true to its mission to promote and support equal access to a quality education. It has ramped up its civil rights protection efforts in the following ways.

Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC): The CRDC shows school and state-by-state statistics on such topics as diversity of school staffing, financing, the degree to which students are college- and career-ready when they graduate, and rates of disciplinary actions by race and ethnicity. This information makes the characteristics of a school transparent to the public and allows for comparisons. Regarding discipline, for example, the data show that African American and Latino students and students with disabilities tend to be disciplined proportionately more than their peers. In response to that finding, the Department released [Rethink Discipline: Resource Guide for Superintendent Action](#) to provide suggestions for finding more effective ways of handling behavior in schools.

Processing of Civil Rights Information and Cases: The [Department's Civil Rights Report](#), published in April 2015, outlines accomplishments in this area. For example, the Department:

- Wrote and released 11 comprehensive policy guidance documents in FY 2013–14 to notify schools and other recipients of their legal obligations and to help them comply with the law;
- In FY 2013, received 9,950 complaints, initiated 30 compliance reviews and directed inquiries, and resolved 10,128 cases overall. In FY 2014, the Department received a record-high 9,989 complaints, initiated 38 compliance reviews and directed inquiries, and resolved 9,407 cases in total;

- Instituted a new policy of publicizing lists of schools under investigation by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), including a list of colleges subject to pending sexual violence cases, and of uploading nearly every resolution agreement and letter reached during FY 2014 and beyond onto its website. As a result, schools and the public can now access more than 500 resolutions on the [OCR website](#), which provide examples of what schools are doing to come into compliance with civil rights laws.

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

The ability of the United States to compete successfully in a global economy continues to depend, in large part, on increasing rates of completion for postsecondary certificates and degrees, which provide students with the skills needed to be effective in today's economy. Regrettably, the dream of obtaining a postsecondary education is swiftly falling beyond the reach of many students and their families. As costs for college tuition and other related fees and expenses continue to soar, family savings and nonfederal aid sources are diminishing as a percentage of those costs. There is growing concern that the rising costs of obtaining a postsecondary certificate or degree will continue to greatly outpace availability of funds and ultimately overwhelm the traditional resource mix that so many rely on remaining intact. Accordingly, providers of postsecondary education must work with federal, state, and other stakeholders to help bend this unsustainable cost curve.

While most students are able to repay their loans, many feel burdened by the enormity of their aggregate debt, especially as they seek to find a well paying job, start a family, buy a home, launch a business, or save for retirement. To address this problem, the Department continues to focus on efforts intended to make postsecondary education more affordable and loan repayments more manageable by implementing initiatives from the President's Value and Affordability Agenda. The Department continues to work on numerous activities to safeguard student borrowers, including new methods to communicate with borrowers regarding the availability of income-based repayment programs; expanding the Pay as You Earn income-based repayment plan to cover additional borrowers; working to strengthen and clarify matters related to the discharge of federal student loans under a variety of circumstances; and collaborating with Treasury and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau on a series of statutory, regulatory, and administrative recommendations. Other examples of the emphasis in this area can be seen in the President's proposal for the America's College Promise program, supporting subsidized tuition at community colleges; UpSkill America, with numerous corporate partners making commitments to support frontline workers in developing improved skills, additional training, and needed certifications; and the recently proposed College Opportunity and Graduation Bonus Program, which would provide an infusion of \$7 billion in mandatory budget authority to support colleges and universities in enrolling and graduating a significant number of low- and middle-income students, as well as improving their institutional performance.

APG: 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: The President set a goal for the United States to 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 ages 25–34 allows us to assess progress in preparing the next generation of United States workers and to benchmark for international comparisons.

Progress: Starting from a baseline of 44.0 percent in 2012, the Department projected that the annual increase of educational attainment among ages 25–34 would grow progressively each year above the four-year historical average of 0.7 percentage points and established a performance target of 45.6 percent. This APG has been achieved, as 45.7 percent of adults ages 25–34 have an associate's degree or higher, exceeding the performance target (note that the rate reflects prior-year data, in this case from 2014, but is reported in 2015 when data are available). Department activities that support this goal include redesigning the College Scorecard to include additional information that helps students make more informed choices, promoting institutional innovation to foster college completion, and implementing evidence-based practices that support student success.

Opportunities and Challenges: Continued success toward achieving this goal will depend largely on whether and to what extent states and institutions: (a) implement policies and programs to increase 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. Although the Department has 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.

Goal 2. Elementary and Secondary Education: Improve the elementary and secondary education system's ability to consistently deliver excellent instruction aligned with rigorous academic standards while providing effective support services to close achievement and opportunity gaps, and ensure all students graduate high school college- and career-ready.

The goal for America's educational system is clear: every student should graduate from high school ready for college, career training, or a career. Every student should have meaningful opportunities from which to choose upon graduation from high school. Over the past few years, states, districts, and schools have initiated groundbreaking reforms and innovations to try to meet this goal. According to the [2015 *Building a Grad Nation* report](#), the national high school graduation rate hit a record high of 81.4 percent, and for the third year in a row, the nation

remained on pace to meet the goal of 90 percent on-time graduation by 2020. This sixth annual update on America's high school dropout challenge shows that these gains have been made possible by raising graduation rates for groups of students that have traditionally struggled to earn a high school diploma. The report also includes a comprehensive look at the student groups and geographic areas that contribute to this progress and that will be key in meeting the 90 percent goal.

APG: 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 college- and career-ready standards, coupled with high-quality formative and summative assessments to measure the extent to which students are mastering the standards, is the foundation to improving educational outcomes for all students.

Progress: Most states have adopted college- and career-ready standards and are in the process of developing and testing assessments aligned with those standards. The Race to the Top - Assessment (RTTA) consortia, which included 29 states, DC, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, completed the operational administration of their assessments during spring 2015. In September 2015, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) released revised criteria, procedures, and guidance for the Department's peer review of state assessment systems under Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*.

Opportunities and Challenges: A challenge facing the Department over the next two years is supporting states in their plans to implement these standards and aligned assessments for all students, including English learners, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and low-achieving students. To address this challenge, the Department is developing and targeting technical assistance activities that aim to increase state capacity to leverage limited resources and continue to identify promising practices across multiple states. The Department will also begin conducting peer review of state assessment systems, providing examples of promising and best practices in the field. Additionally, the Department will build a library of existing resources to assist state educational agencies in full and effective transition to college- and career-ready standards, leveraging work that has occurred during Race to the Top with other partner organizations, such as Achieve, Student Achievement Partners, the National Parent Teacher Association, and others, and work internally to coordinate the provision of technical assistance across OESE, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and other related offices and programs. The Department also funds a Center on Standards and Assessments Implementation (part of the ESEA Comprehensive Centers program) to help build the capacity of state educational agencies to implement college- and career-ready standards.

The Department continues to leverage ESEA flexibility to support full adoption and implementation of college- and career-ready standards, with high-quality, aligned, valid, and reliable assessments. Additionally, the OSEP Results Driven Accountability (RDA) framework and State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) development process help states increase their focus on college- and career-readiness for students with disabilities and close achievement

gaps between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. By collaborating across OSEP, OESE, and other offices on RDA and SSIP, the Department will help states similarly coordinate across offices in their agencies.

APG: 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: 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. However, as part of the renewal process, the Department offered states the flexibility to adjust their timelines. As of June 30, 2015, eight states have fully implemented teacher and principal evaluation and support systems.¹

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' 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 will continue to use its ESEA flexibility renewal process to provide support and encourage forward motion in implementing evaluation and support systems.

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 effectiveness of early learning is [well documented](#). Every child should have the opportunity for a great start in life. According to recent [Civil Rights Data Collection](#) data, big opportunity

¹ "Fully implemented" is defined as the school year in which teachers and principals receive effectiveness ratings.

gaps start at the very beginning of formal education. Nationwide, 60 percent of school districts have public preschool programs but 40 percent—almost 7,000 districts—do not offer these programs. Based on the [most recent CRDC data from SY 2011–12](#), nearly 10,000 school districts today have a public, district-based preschool program, but more than half of those districts—57 percent—offer only part-day programs, and barely half of the school districts that have public preschool programs make them available to all children within the district.

Additionally, the most recent State Preschool Yearbook from the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) shows fewer than 30 percent of 4-year-olds in the United States are enrolled in state-funded preschool programs; and for those who do attend, 41 percent were served in programs that met fewer than half of the NIEER quality standards benchmarks.

The Department will keep working to improve access to high-quality early learning through its implementation of grants already in the field and continued close partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services.

APG: 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, can be used to inform professional development to improve the early learning workforce, be included in a state's comprehensive early learning assessment system, and improve student achievement and program effectiveness.

Progress: The Department anticipated exceeding the goal of at least nine states collecting and being able to report disaggregated data on the status of children at kindergarten entry using a common measure by September 30, 2015. Five RTT-ELC states implemented KEAs in the 2014–15 school year, and the Department expects 7 additional RTT-ELC states to begin implementing their KEAs in the 2015–16 school year, bringing the total to 12 states projected to implement a KEA during the 2015–16 school year.

Opportunities and Challenges: Constructing, testing, and implementing KEAs across every school in every state will be challenging and will take time. In addition, states will need to ensure that the KEAs are implemented in a balanced way that does not result in the loss of a significant amount of instructional time. Additionally, two of the three Enhanced Assessment Grants grantees that are consortia may experience challenges coordinating across states due to differences in their policies and procedures. The Department is working with these grantees to minimize these coordination challenges.

Goal 4. Equity: Increase educational opportunities for underserved students and reduce discrimination so that all students are well-positioned to succeed.

Equal opportunity is a core American value that helps form a national identity, solidify democracy, and strengthen the economy. Far too many students, especially in disadvantaged groups and communities, lack access to a high-quality education, including strong teaching,

rigorous coursework, high standards, engaging enrichment activities, safe environments, high-quality preschools, and affordable higher education. The outcomes of our education system continue to reflect unacceptable inequities. Schools with many students from low-income families are more likely to be under-resourced schools.

According to the most recent data from the FY 2012 School District Finance Survey, in 23 states, 6.6 million students from low-income families are at risk when it comes to state and local education funding. In these states, districts serving the highest percentage of students from low-income families spend fewer state and local dollars per pupil than the lowest poverty districts, even though students from low-income families have greater educational needs. Since 2002, the gap between per pupil expenditures in high- and low-poverty school districts [has actually grown wider](#)—from a gap of 10.8 percent to a gap in the 2011–12 school year of 15.6 percent.

All young people in this country must have the chance to learn and achieve. Identifying opportunity gaps is the first step that schools and districts should take to address educational inequities. The [Civil Rights Data Collection](#) is a powerful tool, because it documents real-world impact. These data provide important markers and starting points for discussion within the Department and among education stakeholders.

APG: 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: Through Race to the Top (RTT), the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) flexibility, and other federal programs, the Department is providing significant funding, technical assistance, and accountability intended to improve the nation's lowest-achieving schools dramatically by, among other strategies, using intensive turnaround models and identifying the low-achieving schools that are showing strong evidence of successfully turning around. The Department is focused on supporting innovation, not just compliance monitoring, and on spurring growth in achievement, not just absolute achievement measures.

Increasing the national high school graduation rate and decreasing disparities in the graduation rate is critical to achieving the President's goal of once again having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. The nation has made significant progress in increasing both high school graduation rates and degree attainment rates, but gaps between rates for different student groups continue to persist.

Progress: The Department received and is reviewing State Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators. In June 2015, the Department hosted 19 local educational agencies with high dropout rates among students of color to provide technical assistance and support. The

Department also began the CRDC collection of data for the 2013–14 school year, which is including for the first time collection of the number of students absent 15 or more days.

Opportunities and Challenges: One key challenge for this APG is sustaining the reforms when an individual school's 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 has provided 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.

Additional challenges include: capacity challenges at state, district, and school level mean some intervention challenges persist; ensuring alignment between SIG, RTT, ESEA flexibility, and other programs and initiatives; and lack of data to define success. 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.

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, evidence, transparency, innovation, and technology.

The foundation for improving systemic capacity is an infrastructure that supports data-driven decision-making. Stakeholders must have access to relevant, useful, and timely data; and they need the skills to better understand and make use of the data. With relevant and actionable data and the ability to use it, policymakers and educators will be able to appraise how states, districts, schools, and students are currently performing; measure progress; pinpoint gaps; improve practice; better address student needs; and make sound decisions. States are developing systems that will yield valid, reliable data that are essential to achieving these purposes, but there is much more work to do. The Department will continue ongoing efforts to develop effective statewide longitudinal data systems, design voluntary common data standards to increase interoperability, and develop the capacity of institutions and staff to utilize data to improve teaching and learning.

APG: 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: Through its mix of grants, contracts, and internal analytic work, the Department supports the use of research methods and rigorous study designs that provide evidence that is as robust as possible and fit for the purpose. This APG tracks whether the Department is increasing its internal capacity to make competitive grant awards based on the existence of (and amount of) evidence in support of projects, where appropriate.

Progress: The Department surpassed the FY 2014 performance target for increasing the percentage of select new (noncontinuation) discretionary grant dollars that reward evidence. In FY 2014, 15.92 percent of the Department's discretionary dollars was awarded to new projects with supporting evidence of effectiveness, with five competitions in the Office of Innovation and Improvement, OESE, and Office of Postsecondary Education using evidence through eligibility requirements, competitive preference priorities, and selection criteria. The Department anticipates, based on internal projections and on past performance, that it will again meet its FY 2015 target.

Opportunities and Challenges: Using evidence to award competitive grants entails a shift in culture and capacity building across the Department to do it well. Additionally, goal targets are based on reasonable projections about which competitive grant programs may make new awards in a given fiscal year, but the actual dollar amount awarded will depend on final appropriations amounts and other funding decisions and trade-offs. Through the Regional Educational Laboratories and the What Works Clearinghouse, the Department continues to develop resources and webinars on evidence-related topics, such as creating high-quality logic models and designing rigorous evaluations. However, grantees vary in their comfort with and understanding of evaluation and use of evidence and the Department has limited resources to support grantees in conducting rigorous evaluations that would produce evidence of effectiveness.

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

Improving critical infrastructure, systems, and overall capacity continues to be the fundamental thrust and focus of Goal 6 of the *Strategic Plan*. Several priorities are essential to ensure that capacity is measurably increasing and improving. These include transformation of the human resources function and hiring process; and implementation of telework as a work benefit and flexibility, along with enhancing wide-scale productivity. A significant management focus is to increase the extent and quality of employee engagement efforts; promote continuous improvement in financial management; and hold contractors accountable for their work.

In information technology (IT), priorities include creating new strategies and tools, such as two-factor authentication and other threat mitigation activities, to decrease the ongoing cybersecurity threats to the Department's personnel, programs, contractual partners, and delivery systems. The Department is modernizing and consolidating its real estate portfolio, in an effort to meet the President's mandate to "freeze the footprint," and plans to make tangible reductions in total square footage used over the next several years.

Management Performance

The Department continues to make notable progress toward transforming its human resources system and hiring process. Following efforts begun in FY 2014, the Department enhanced leadership and technical expertise to the human resources team, helping to streamline hiring, bolster employee and labor relations and human capital policy development, for example. Human resources also introduced innovative strategies and resources to expand the hiring pools used by managers, which reduced the time to hire, and allowed the team to focus on other critical customer issues and capacity concerns.

The President's Management Agenda includes both mission-oriented and management-oriented Cross-Agency Priority Goals (CAP Goals), emphasized in FY 2015, and defined more fully, below. One of the standing CAP goals that relates to all agencies is on Cybersecurity. Recent, massive data breaches have occurred in both the private sector and in the federal government, testing and motivating the Department to place more investment and attention toward threat mitigation and IT security of its most critical infrastructure and related assets. These IT security incidents have also required an urgent, governmentwide response to both prepare for and defend against continuous and pervasive attacks against systems and agencies. The introduction of several new tools and processes has helped to secure the Department's IT security posture and has enabled employees to participate in identifying, reporting, and repelling known attacks. However, the increased capacity has also alerted the Department to an even greater volume of attacks than seen before. The Department's capacity for defense can be seen in certain key metrics, such as the number of agency IT security incidents, which continues to show fewer occurrences than targeted and anticipated, and which the Department managed to about 15 percent less incidents than expected. Increased investments in and creation of two-factor authentication, eradication of privileged user accounts, and continued security remediation through improved standard operating procedures and communication to stakeholders are showing some early signs of effectiveness and possible, repeatable successes.

In FY 2015, the Department continued making major efforts to bolster its impact in the people and culture element, with an enterprise-wide campaign to address employee engagement at the principal office component level, the basic work unit structure. The campaign's agenda covered employee engagement planning, including the development of a roadmap of essential and best practices, as well as engagement of the top-level management in each principal office component unit. Additionally, the Department met the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) newly mandated performance standard, with every senior executive being required to address employee engagement as a part of the annual performance agreement for the executives. Final participation rates resulting from the 2015 OPM Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey show significant gains in this area, with a 73 percent survey response rate—3 percent above the Department's target—and over 9 percent more than the 2014 response rate.

Other management elements that are critical to sound management are showing positive trends and results as well. The Department enhanced and improved its IT services and network delivery by increasing and moving storage capacity to a more secure and less expensive cloud based facility. It also made improvements to network speed, mobility solutions to enable telework, and data security. The Department reduced the cost of managing accounts receivables by outsourcing the management of most of that portfolio to a federal shared service provider, significantly reducing the cost per transaction. The Department recently launched a new initiative to migrate to 100 percent electronic vendor invoicing by FY 2018, which will both improve customer service and significantly reduce the internal processing costs of invoices. The Department's percent of compliance with contractor performance reporting requirements is the best in government, currently over 98 percent. To put these numbers in greater context, this performance ranks the Department as one of only four agencies that have compliance rates of 90 percent or more.

The Department's human resource team is producing much needed policy guidance at a faster rate than in the previous three years, publishing pivotal guidance, such as those related to the telework program, alternative work schedules, and the merit promotion plan, a clear result of improved staff technical and leadership capability. Finally, a major change in management and culture-impacting effort is underway as the Department implements the OMB directive to reduce

significantly its real estate “footprint” and space inventory. While reduction of the overall square footage is the primary goal, this is a long-term endeavor of many years, and the Department recognizes that it must manage several other indirect dependencies that can derail the expected progress. However, the Department has made significant progress toward the first phase of the modernization of its headquarters building and is completing plans to effect the move of two regional offices from more expensive leased space to less expensive federally owned space.

These efforts, taken as a whole, are positioning the Department to benefit from and leverage continuous improvement to increase its overall capacity to deliver on and achieve its *Strategic Plan* goals.

Cross-Agency Priority Goals

In accordance with the *GPRA Modernization Act of 2010*, interim 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 Reform • Job-creating Investment • Infrastructure Permitting Modernization • STEM Education • Service Members and Veterans Mental Health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Service • Smarter IT Delivery • Strategic Sourcing • Shared Services • Benchmark and Improve Mission-support Operations • Open Data • Lab-to-Market • People And Culture

Performance.gov is updated quarterly for each CAP Goal. The website includes goal statements and other information, such as accountable senior leader(s) and contributing agencies. Quarterly performance updates for the website on progress will be provided by the goal leader in coordination with the Performance Improvement Council (PIC), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), corresponding governmentwide management council, and contributing agencies. (A-11, Part 6, 220.5)

In addition to the APGs, the Department contributes to the following four CAP Goals.

Cybersecurity Goal Statement: Improve awareness of security practices, vulnerabilities, and threats to the operating environment by limiting access to only authorized users and implementing technologies and processes that reduce the risk from malicious activity.

[A progress update through FY 2015 Q3](#) is available on Performance.gov. The update further clarifies the President’s commitment and sense of urgency in addressing cybersecurity threats, which are deemed to be significant threats to national security, public safety, and economic viability, particularly given recent major data breaches, such as that which occurred at OPM. In response to that incident and other threats of potential breaches, the Department participated in the White House’s “30-day sprint” to address known vulnerabilities, secure network infrastructures, and restrict access through improved authentication, among other key strategies.

The third quarter update shows substantive progress in three critical areas:

- **Information Security Continuous Monitoring (ISCM)**—Impactful increase in the number of *Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990* (CFO Act) agencies that met the Secure Configuration Management target;
- **Identify, Credentialing and Access Management (ICAM)**—Notable increase in the percentage of civilian users (privileged and unprivileged) using Personal Identification Verification (PIV) cards; and
- **Anti-Phishing and Malware Defense**—Encouraging increase in the number of CFO Act agencies that met the Blended Defense target.

Customer Service Goal Statement: 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.

[A progress update through FY 2015 Q3](#) is available on Performance.gov. The update defines the goal team and a governance plan and identifies subgoals and major actions to achieve impact. Milestones have been established for each of the four strategy areas and key indicators are in development.

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Education Goal Statement: Improve STEM Education by implementing the [Federal STEM Education 5-Year Strategic Plan](#), announced in May 2013, specifically:

- Improve STEM instruction.
- Increase and sustain youth and public engagement in STEM.
- Enhance STEM experience of undergraduate students.
- Better serve groups historically under-represented in STEM fields.
- Design graduate education for tomorrow's STEM workforce.
- Build new models for leveraging assets and expertise.
- Build and use evidence-based approaches.

[A progress update through FY 2015 Q3](#) is available on Performance.gov. The update highlights the formulation of a governance plan, and identifies subgoals and major strategies to achieve impact as well as key indicators for the action plan.

Service Members and Veterans Mental Health Goal Statement: Improve mental health outcomes for Service Members, Veterans, and their Families.

[A progress update through FY 2015 Q3](#) is available on Performance.gov. The update highlights governance plan alignment with the President's Executive Actions, and identifies subgoals and major actions to achieve impact as well as key indicators and milestones.

Additionally, the Department is a member of the Interagency Taskforce on Military and Veterans Mental Health.

Real time information on [CAP Goals](#) is available at performance.gov.