

Looking Ahead and Addressing Challenges

The U.S. Department of Education's commitment to equity and access are at the heart of its strategic planning and reporting across the six goals in the Department's *Strategic Plan*. Goals 1, 2, and 3 support access and Goals 1, 2, 3, and 4 support equity. Goals 5 and 6 support all of the other goals through the collection and use of [data](#) and through enhancing the operations and organizational capacity of the Department. Looking to the future, the Department will continue to celebrate states and local communities working to increase access and opportunity from early learning to college.

Graduation Rates

America's high school graduation rate has reached a record high, dropout rates are down, and 1.1 million more Black and Hispanic students are attending college than in 2008, according to [new National Center for Education Statistics data](#).

As a nation, America must accelerate that pace of change because today:

- a quarter of high schools with the highest percentage of African-American and Latino students do not offer Algebra II, and a third do not offer chemistry;
- about 40 percent of school districts do not offer preschool programs; and
- we have far too many students of color, primarily boys, being suspended and expelled from school.

The Department's work will not be done until it ensures that opportunity is not just a possibility, but a promise. Going forward, the Department will build on what it has already established:

- state-driven accountability that demands progress for all children;
- access to high-quality early education for low-income children;
- more flexibility for state decision-making;
- more support for principals and teachers to apply high standards to practice;
- reforming career education in high schools and community colleges; and
- reforming and simplifying the application process for student aid to help drive college affordability and completion.

Additionally, the Department will continue to strengthen the support systems necessary for all students to succeed. This includes promoting preschool access for all students, K-12 strategic reforms, and access, affordability, and completion of postsecondary education. To support the tracking and reporting of progress against the goals and objectives, the Department provides regular progress updates on its APGs on [performance.gov](#). Implementation of the Department's *Strategic Plan* 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.

Accomplishing the Department's strategic goals will require strong coordination and collaboration from Department staff working with Congress, partners at the state and local levels, and other stakeholders. Responding to legislative challenges and acting under fiscal constraints may impact the Department's ability to provide the necessary incentives and resources to increase quality, transparency, and accountability.