



Giving Every Student a Fair Shot

Progress Under the Obama Administration's Education Agenda

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“Our commitment to [our children’s] education means giving them the knowledge they need to thrive and lead. ... The future belongs to the nation that best educates its people. If we continue building on the progress we’ve made ... I’m confident we will continue to be that nation.”

– President Barack Obama, May 3, 2016

Education’s Promise

As the parent of two school-aged children and a former high school social studies teacher and middle school principal, I have seen the difference that a quality education makes in unlocking the vast potential of every child. And as U.S. Secretary of Education, I understand that education is critical to expanding opportunity, growing a thriving national economy, and ensuring American leadership in the 21st century and beyond. Education also is vital for preparing all our people for lives of engaged citizenship.

The mission of the U.S. Department of Education is to promote educational excellence and help all students—regardless of their race, religion, income level, sex, first language, ability status, or any other demographic factor—have equal access to educational opportunity.

I would like to share with you the great progress our nation has made in spurring systemic reform and promoting innovation across America’s education system—from preschool through college—over the last eight years, and highlight critical areas where we must build on promising practices and success. But first, it’s important to set this progress in context.

When President Barack Obama entered office in 2009, the nation was in the midst of a severe economic crisis. A set of key policies and investments, beginning with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, helped to get Americans back to work and secure the nation’s long-term prosperity.

The President understood that education must be one of those investments, and the Recovery Act helped jumpstart efforts to better serve all students, especially the most disadvantaged; make college more affordable; and save hundreds of thousands of teacher and education jobs. The Recovery Act helped lay the foundation for ambitious education reform, and over the last eight years, the Department of Education has supported states in their work to hold all students to high standards, build data systems that better track student growth, turn around struggling schools, lift up educators, and embrace innovation in teaching and learning. Today—due to these efforts and the commitment of educators, state and local leaders, communities, families, and students—the nation’s education system is stronger and better able to support the success of every learner.

Notable Progress in Education From Preschool through College

President Obama came into office with a strong vision for improving education to advance all students' opportunity and success. Elements of that vision included expanding access to quality preschool, raising graduation rates, and taking actions to help all students achieve to high standards. It also included promoting quality instruction; measuring student achievement so schools and families would know if students were succeeding; supporting great educators, especially for our highest-needs students; improving students' access to technologies that can personalize learning; and increasing college accessibility, affordability, and completion.

I am proud to say that the country has made significant progress toward that vision.

Greater Access to Preschool and More High School Graduates

Investments by the Department of Education and states have created unprecedented access to quality preschool. From 2009 to 2015, 31 states increased the percentage of four-year-olds enrolled in state-funded preschool. And, efforts from both the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services have focused new attention on the importance of the quality of early learning programs.

The nation's high school graduation rate has reached a record high, at just over 83 percent. Even as all groups of students have made progress, students of color, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities are closing gaps with their peers.

Dropout rates are at historic lows. In 2009, about 3 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 did not have a high school credential; by 2014, that number had fallen by 17 percent to 2.5 million. In 2008, approximately 1,800 "dropout factories" produced a significant portion of students who dropped out of high school. By focusing resources and attention on these schools, the Administration helped states and communities reduce that number by nearly half.

Higher Standards and Better Assessments

Early in his Administration, President Obama expressed support for the state-led effort to revise and adopt higher academic standards that prepare all young people for success in college and careers. By 2016, 49 states and the District of Columbia had adopted and are implementing higher college- and career-ready expectations for student performance and are using improved assessments aligned with these expectations. The Obama Administration encouraged states' voluntary adoption of rigorous, state-developed standards through its first [Race to the Top](#) grant competition in 2009, along with a set of other policies designed to support all students, especially those with the greatest needs. Race to the Top also provided support for states to undertake meaningful and necessary reforms across their education systems to better align teaching and learning to these higher standards, including \$350 million for new assessments that are aligned to college- and career-ready expectations and that are suitable for measuring deeper learning and informing instruction.

More Personalized Learning through Technology

Recognizing the power of technology to transform learning, the President made connecting schools to high-speed broadband one of his priorities. That resulted in a five-year effort called [ConnectED](#), which aims to connect 99 percent of students to high-speed broadband by the year 2018. Today, 20 million more

students are connected and the nation is on track to meet the President's goal. In addition, through the Department's [Future Ready](#) effort, 3,100 superintendents and 25 states have launched initiatives to make learning powered by technology a priority.

Historic Investments in Higher Education

The Administration also increased college affordability by making the largest investment in financial aid for higher education since the GI Bill was passed more than 70 years ago, increasing annual aid to students by more than \$50 billion and tax benefits by over \$12 billion, helping more students graduate from college than ever before.

This progress was possible because of the collective efforts of students, educators, families, communities, and local leaders. Here are some of the ways the Department of Education supported their work:

Early Learning

The Administration's [Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge](#) supported more than 20 states in designing and implementing cohesive systems of early learning programs and services for children from birth to age five. Those states serve more than half of the nation's children with the highest needs.

For example, with the grant that Delaware received in 2012, the state has created a new state-level agency dedicated entirely to early learning, conducted more than 19,500 comprehensive student health screenings, and reached more than 33,000 parents and families to increase public awareness about the importance of quality early learning for young children.

When President Obama entered office, fewer than three-quarters of states offered state-funded preschool. That is why, in 2013, the President put forth the bold [Preschool for All](#) proposal to establish a federal-state partnership providing high-quality preschool for all four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families. All but four states now offer preschool to young children.

The [Preschool Development Grants](#), jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, have been a down payment on the President's vision, investing \$750 million to support quality early learning for nearly 100,000 children in 250 communities in 18 states in its first three years.

Opportunity and Success in Elementary and Secondary Schools

In 2009, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 – the nation's education law that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorized in 2001 – was two years overdue for an update and its requirements were becoming unsustainable. President Obama made the reform and revision of NCLB an early priority in his education agenda. In March 2010, the Administration laid out a blueprint for fixing the outdated law. After nearly two more years without reauthorization, the President instructed the Department to move forward a voluntary process to provide states with flexibility from NCLB's most burdensome provisions in exchange for a commitment to undertake more meaningful reforms to raise expectations and improve results across the education system.

In 2015, President Obama signed the bipartisan [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#), which embraces many of the Obama Administration's priorities and initiatives for early, elementary, and secondary education. These elements include a commitment to expanding early learning; college- and career-ready standards; accountability systems that better differentiate between schools based on multiple measures of success; evidence-based interventions targeted to schools and students most in need of help; and annual,

statewide assessments that provide vital information on student progress, with concrete and transparent measures of access to opportunity for all students.

The law also includes a commitment to locally tailored systems for school improvement in states, with a focus on the lowest-performing schools, those with low graduation rates, and those where groups of students are furthest behind. The Department already has moved forward with resources to help states implement the law in a way that supports a well-rounded education for every student and builds upon the President's [Testing Action Plan](#).

Importantly, ESSA reinforces the civil rights protections of the original 1965 law. It has a strong focus on underserved students—such as students of color, students from low-income families, Native-American students, [English learners](#), students with disabilities, [foster youth](#), [homeless students](#), and migrant and seasonal farmworker children—so all students receive a quality education that prepares them for college and careers.

Innovation and Evidence of What Works in Education

One of the hallmarks of the Administration's approach to improving education has been its investments in innovation and its commitment to supporting interventions and approaches that are backed by evidence of success.

Eight years ago, federal grants were rarely awarded based on evidence of their likelihood to succeed. Today, dozens of Department-funded competitive grants prioritize research and evaluation as a condition for awards. That change started with the first-of-its-kind, [Investing in Innovation \(i3\)](#) program, which is reaching over 2 million students in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, through projects designed to improve literacy, support rural education, enhance science instruction, and more.

One [i3 grantee](#), Spurwink Services, Inc., has developed its Building Assets Reducing Risks (BARR) program over the last six years. The project is designed to provide teachers, school staff, and administrators with professional development and to restructure the ninth grade so students are served by teacher teams. As Spurwink built evidence of its effectiveness through its initial i3 funding, Spurwink received sequentially larger i3 grants, enabling the BARR program's expansion from one Minnesota high school to nine states across the country. Now, partner schools are seeing improved reading and math achievement, higher graduation and course passing rates, and decreases in student suspensions and absenteeism. The i3 program continues under ESSA as the Education Innovation Research (EIR) program.

In addition, the Department has encouraged states to focus on evidence of [student success in special education](#). And, through the [Race to the Top-District grant program](#) and President Obama's Next Generation High School's Initiative, the nation has seen more than \$850 billion in public and private investment toward the President's charge to use evidence of what works to redesign America's high schools; to better personalize learning; and to ensure that students are engaged in more meaningful, hands-on opportunities to prepare for their future.

The Department is continuing to add to the knowledge base in education by sharing results from promising programs, including [pilots](#) that aim to, among other things, identify what works to expand [college opportunity and success for students from all backgrounds](#) and [second-chance efforts](#) that help incarcerated individuals who have paid their debts to society turn around their lives through postsecondary education. The [First in the World](#) program also is contributing to our understanding of research-backed practices that can accelerate and improve college access, affordability, and completion.

Support for Educators and the Teaching Profession

As a student, the son of lifelong New York City public school educators, a former social studies teacher and middle school principal, and now as Secretary of Education, I understand the power teachers have to make a difference in students' lives. So, I am proud to serve in an Administration that, from its beginning, has worked to uplift and invest in teaching.

One of President Obama's first acts was to save more than 325,000 teacher and educator jobs as part of the Recovery Act. As the economy was in a sharp downslide, state and local governments were losing the tax revenues they use to support their schools. In deep downturns, it is the federal government that has the ability to step in and provide the resources necessary to shore up school funding and keep teachers in the classroom, educating our children.

But our focus on teachers did not stop there. The Department has invested approximately \$3 billion in competitive grants to develop educator talent and support teachers and school leaders in high-needs districts. The Department's [Teacher and School Leader Incentive Grants](#) funded over 130 projects serving more than 2,000 schools across the country to improve pay, reward effective teachers, and provide greater professional opportunities to educators in high-poverty schools.

In addition to these investments, I am proud that the Department has brought the voices of educators into policy discussions that affect the work they do each day through the [Teaching](#) and [Principal Ambassador Fellowship](#) programs—recently expanded to include school counselors and other educators.

The Department also encouraged states to respond to teachers' demand for better feedback on their practice and opportunities to grow as professionals by strengthening educator evaluation and support systems and redesigning compensation to reward excellence. Today, through the Department's [Teach to Lead](#) initiative, teachers across the country are being empowered to lead change in their classrooms, districts, and states, and to elevate the voices and expertise of educators to help students achieve.

And in 2016, the Department issued [regulations](#) to help ensure graduates of teacher training programs are ready to succeed in the classroom, while giving states flexibility to develop standards of program effectiveness and measure outcomes.

In Monroe, Louisiana, for example, the "Believe and Prepare Program"—with support from this Administration's Race to the Top initiative—is helping the state prepare its next generation of teachers to work in an environment where all students are held to high standards, by pairing teacher candidates in preparation programs with mentor teachers for a year-long residency.

The nation also is on track to meet the President's goal of recruiting and training an additional [100,000 outstanding teachers](#) in the critical fields of science, technology, engineering, and math by 2021 through private and public sector investments.

Believing that zip code should never determine a child's access to great teachers and school leaders, the Department's [Excellent Educators for All](#) initiative called on states to develop plans that would give disadvantaged students the same access to high-quality educators as their more advantaged peers.

For example, Connecticut is implementing its "LEAD CT" initiative, which focuses on school leadership. The program offers a suite of supports for principals, such as a 12-month "Turnaround Principals Program" that includes coaching, a summer institute, and a monthly community of practice—all with the goal of retaining principals for at least five years in schools with high populations of disadvantaged students and students of color.

Strong Student Supports and a Focus on Our Most Vulnerable

From the start, the Obama Administration recognized that in addition to strong instruction, supporting students' success also requires attention to the other needs that affect students' learning, including poverty, health challenges, difficult family circumstances, violence, and institutional barriers to success that may stand in their way.

That is why the Department launched [Promise Neighborhoods](#) to help 50 of the nation's most disadvantaged and underserved communities create partnerships among more than 700 schools and local public and private organizations to better meet the needs of children, youth, and families for healthcare, after-school programs, counseling, mentoring, and other services.

For example, the Indianola Promise Community (IPC) in the Mississippi Delta, supported by a grant from the Department's Promise Neighborhoods program, is investing in comprehensive, cradle-to-career approaches to ensuring children have strong systems of support in their neighborhood, including quality early learning, parent counseling, and community mentors for youth, with great schools at the center. These efforts have made a powerful difference in the readiness of IPC's young children for kindergarten.

The importance of partnerships also is reflected in the Administration's [My Brother's Keeper \(MBK\) initiative](#), which aims to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their potential. Nearly 250 communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have accepted the MBK Community Challenge and are developing their own action plans to expand opportunity and improve life outcomes for every young person. Through MBK, the Administration furthered efforts to combat [chronic absenteeism](#) in schools and match vulnerable young people with [mentors](#) to improve their chances of success.

The Department also worked to make classrooms safe and supportive environments for all students by addressing [bullying](#) and working with states and districts across the country to ensure that children and youth—regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity—can succeed and thrive at school. Additionally, the Department launched a [national conversation](#) on reducing the use of exclusionary discipline practices, which, too often, push students out of classrooms rather than provide them with the supports to improve behavior and achievement.

Through [School Climate Transformation Grants](#), the Department provided assistance to states and districts to implement evidence-based frameworks for improving the behavioral and learning outcomes of all students. And, in 2014, the Departments of Education and Justice released a first-of-its-kind set of [tools and resources](#) to help schools improve discipline practices while ensuring students' civil rights are protected. This work was part of an Administration-wide effort to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline; and in line with this aim, the Department took steps to [strengthen correctional education](#) and [expand opportunity for those who are involved in the justice system](#).

And, recognizing that diversity benefits all students, the Department furthered a conversation about diversity throughout the country, while making diversity a priority for funding in many of its programs.

The Protection of Students' Civil Rights

One of the Obama Administration's highest priorities has been to safeguard the access of all students to a world-class education. Since 2009, the Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has enforced America's civil rights laws across our nation's educational institutions to uphold justice for countless students and families, by conducting a record number of investigations, responding to more than 75,000 civil rights complaints, and entering into more than 5,000 resolution agreements with schools and education programs, from preschool through college. These numbers demonstrate greater awareness in the field about students' civil rights in education, as well as OCR's mission and work to enforce them and protect students.

OCR's policy guidance, investigations, and other resources are being used to support students' equal access to educational resources, prevent discrimination and safeguard the rights of all students, protect students' safety, eliminate bullying, make schools and instruction accessible and meaningful for students of all abilities and backgrounds, and prevent and respond to sexual violence in schools and on college campuses.

OCR also issued a richer, more robust, and easily accessible [Civil Rights Data Collection \(CRDC\)](#) than ever to highlight opportunity gaps. Through the Administration's efforts to improve the usefulness and transparency of data, information from the CRDC also was transformed, for the first time, into online story maps that paint an understandable, graphical picture of our [challenges in education](#).

College Access, Affordability, and Completion

The Obama Administration has remained steadfast in its commitment to an agenda that will provide every student with the opportunity to earn an affordable, high-quality degree or credential that offers a clear path to economic security and success. Early in his Administration, President Obama established a goal to lead the world with the highest proportion of college graduates by the end of this decade.

The Department ended student loan subsidies for private banks and shifted more than \$60 billion in savings back to students and taxpayers. That change allowed us to increase the maximum [Pell Grant](#) award by over \$1,000 while tying it to inflation for the first time ever. It also has given us the ability to improve service to borrowers and to better protect students and the federal investment. These efforts to strengthen Pell Grants alone [cut the cost of college](#) by about \$3,700, on average, for more than 8 million students in 2015. These efforts also have helped 2 million more students afford college annually than when the President took office. New analysis by the President's Council of Economic Advisors suggests that these investments led to an additional \$20 billion in aggregate earnings by 2014-2015, a nearly 2:1 return on the investment.

In addition, the President's [American Opportunity Tax Credit](#) provides up to \$10,000 for four years of college tuition, and will cut taxes by over \$1,800, on average, for nearly 10 million families in 2016 alone.

The Department took major steps to help students and families obtain financial aid for college by making it easier and faster to fill out the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#), and by enabling people to apply for aid earlier—starting in October as the college application process gets underway, rather than in January. The Department also made it possible for families to use earlier, electronically available tax information when filling out the FAFSA, allowing students and families to complete the form sooner and receive a more accurate estimation of aid. Today, students applying for college can complete the FAFSA at the same time, so they have more information about college costs as they are working through the application process. Schools can provide students with earlier information about school-based aid that they will receive and students can make better, more informed choices about where to apply and attend college.

The Department's [Financial Aid Shopping Sheet](#) and new [College Scorecard](#) are giving students and families timely, reliable information about college cost and value—including the most comprehensive, comparable national data ever published on students' employment outcomes.

In addition to [keeping student loan interest rates](#) low, a move that could [save a typical student](#) \$1,000 over the life of his or her loans, the Department improved and expanded income-driven loan repayment options. As of June 2016, more than 5 million borrowers were enrolled in income-driven repayment plans like the President's "Pay as You Earn" plan, which caps monthly student loan payments at 10 percent of income to keep their debt manageable. Due, in part, to these programs, student loan default rates have decreased across the country in recent years, and continue to trend downward. The Department also has worked to implement a [Student Aid Bill of Rights](#) and [improve loan servicing](#).

Making college affordable is important, but it is also critical to make sure when students put time and resources—and taxpayers put resources—into higher education, that students attend institutions that are delivering a high-quality education. Over the last eight years, the Department has taken steps to protect students and taxpayers from fraudulent or failing schools that leave students with unaffordable debts. Through landmark [Gainful Employment regulations](#), the Department is holding low-performing career colleges accountable for their results. The Department has strengthened accreditation, the quality stamp of approval that colleges need before accessing federal financial aid. And the agency is ensuring that borrowers who have been harmed by their school's misconduct can seek [debt relief](#), while protecting taxpayers by holding schools that mislead and defraud students accountable for the cost of that debt relief.

All of the Department's actions support efforts to ensure the nation once again leads the world in college attainment, underpinning America's economic growth and prosperity. And, today, more students are graduating from college than ever before—with over 27 million college degrees and credentials awarded since the President took office.

A Roadmap to Sustain and Accelerate Progress

"What lies ahead of all of us is...a question of courage and commitment. It's a daily fight not just to educate, but to increase social mobility, to strengthen families and communities and to create hope and opportunity for those that need it the most. I believe, deeply, that with the support of this nation's people, we will see change that benefits generations to come."

– Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, November 12, 2015

In an America where education lives up to its promise as the great equalizer—a force that can overcome differences in background, privilege, and circumstance—opportunity is abundant.

My vision and great hope for the future is that every child is set up for success from the start with access to high-quality early learning. Public elementary and secondary schools are well-resourced, diverse, and able to use broadband and cutting-edge technology to enhance learning. Schools that need the most help get the most support, and all students have access to a world-class, well-rounded education that prepares them for success in college and beyond in a 21st century economy. The teaching profession is respected and diverse, with an effective, well-prepared, and supported teacher in every classroom.

High school graduation rates continue to reach record heights, and graduates have the skills and information they need to choose and succeed in the college or career training program of their choice. Two years of free community college is as universal as elementary and secondary education. College students get the support they need to graduate with a meaningful degree, and without unmanageable debt. And America is once again first in the world in college completion.

Many of the Obama Administration's key investments and initiatives are just beginning to pay off; and, while the progress has been substantial, much work remains. None of it will be easy. It will require challenging the status quo, making hard choices, and eliminating generations of inequity. But I believe—as I hope you do, too—that it is work we can and must do if America is to fulfill its promise as a nation where everyone gets an equal opportunity to succeed.

Giving Every Child a Shot from the Start

Despite significant progress over the past eight years, six out of every 10 four-year-olds are still not enrolled in publicly funded preschool programs. States and districts, in collaboration with the federal government, must take additional steps to expand access to high-quality early learning so that all children enter kindergarten ready for success in school and beyond. More also must be done to ensure early learning is inclusive of students who are historically underserved and most vulnerable, including children with disabilities and dual language learners.

The nation's new education law, ESSA, provides more opportunities to support early learning by reaffirming the use of federal Title I funds for preschool-aged children, as well as including new provisions to promote coordination in early learning among local communities; align preschool with early elementary school; and build the capacity of teachers, leaders, and others to provide the highest-quality early learning services to young children.

A version of the Preschool Development Grants program is authorized in ESSA. It must continue to be implemented in a way that increases quality *in addition to* access, ensuring that children are set up for success in elementary school and beyond.

This new program will reach only a small percentage of children who need quality preschool, so new investments from all levels are necessary. Congress should pass the [Strong Start for America's Children Act](#), which received bipartisan support in Congress, and take steps to realize President Obama's [Preschool for All proposal](#).

Realizing the Promise of ESSA

ESSA is a bipartisan achievement that provides the statutory foundation to close stubborn opportunity and achievement gaps and to address the persistent inequities in the nation's education system. The successful implementation of ESSA is critical to the advancement of the nation's educational progress.

The law creates a new federal-state partnership in education, and calls upon educators at all levels to work to provide a rigorous, well-rounded education to every child—an education that not only includes math and reading, but also subjects such as social studies and civics, world languages, biology, music, the arts, and computer science.

ESSA enables states to rethink their accountability systems and their intervention strategies in schools that underperform. Through ESSA, states will go beyond graduation rates and test scores to evaluate school effectiveness by adding their own indicators of quality and progress, such as chronic absenteeism

or access to and success in advanced coursework. In implementing ESSA, it is critical that states use their flexibility to raise the bar for all students, not to lower it.

The legislation also includes protections and resources for underserved students, and states will be required to take actions to improve schools where students or groups of students are struggling and in high schools that have low graduation rates year after year. States and districts must work closely with educators, parents, community and civil rights leaders, and others to ensure these actions are evidence-based, impactful, and appropriate to each community's unique circumstances.

Included in ESSA is the Promise Neighborhoods initiative, a key Administration program that mobilizes community resources in support of students in our highest-needs areas. These supports must be targeted in the right ways, which is why states and communities must identify their needs and gather evidence of what works to drive the interventions they choose to use. The Department will evaluate the effectiveness of programs and widely share results. But, for this initiative to realize its potential and meet the demand for this type of work, more resources are needed.

I believe giving educators and schools the resources they need to do their jobs well is critical. And while money is never the only answer, it is important that the nation's highest-needs schools and communities receive the funding necessary to accelerate achievement and close opportunity gaps.

Supporting Educators and Elevating the Teaching Profession

As a former teacher and school principal, I am thrilled that ESSA includes a focus on teacher quality and ensuring educators can access the professional supports necessary to do their best work with students.

Now and into the future, states and districts can take advantage of [resources provided by the law](#) to support teachers in important ways, such as expanding communities of practice for teachers to hone their craft and develop key skills or establishing career ladders that parallel systems in other high-performing nations. Ultimately, states and districts will decide the use of these funds, which also could strengthen teacher preparation by offering more hands-on teacher training, further strategies for increasing the diversity of the workforce, or provide cultural competency training. It is critical that states and districts consider the best uses of funds and invest in new strategies, rather than simply sticking with "business as usual."

As a nation, we also must build on [efforts](#) to ensure new teachers enter classrooms with the preparation and support to succeed and teacher training programs continuously improve while meeting the need for great educators in every community and every school. The Department will continue its work with states to make sure all students have [equitable access to excellent educators](#).

Making Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math a National Priority

Part of preparing students for success in the 21st century entails preparing them to graduate from high school ready for college and careers and giving them access to quality learning in [science, technology, engineering, and math \(STEM\)](#).

Over the last eight years, the Obama Administration's efforts have resulted in unprecedented levels of public-private collaboration in support of next-generation STEM education, including policies and budgets focused on maximizing federal investment in hands-on, rigorous STEM learning and innovative efforts to inspire and recognize young inventors, discoverers, and makers. That [includes](#): substantial progress to meet the President's goal of training 100,000 excellent STEM teachers in a decade; more engineers graduating from U.S. universities than ever before; more than \$1 billion of philanthropic investments in response to the President's call to action; and the start of traditions such as the White House Science Fair to encourage a new generation of students.

In addition, starting with the President’s State of the Union, 2016 has been a year of action for expanding access to computer science (CS) in elementary and secondary education. This year alone, 14 states have taken action to expand CS education; a new CS Advanced Placement course has launched and is already in 2,000 classrooms; and more than 500 organizations have made commitments to expand CS learning.

An important next step to build on that grassroots momentum and truly make STEM a national priority would be for Congress to realize the President’s [Computer Science for All](#) proposal, a \$4 billion effort that would give all students the chance to learn CS in school.

Preparing America’s Students for a Diverse World

Attending diverse schools—those where children [learn next to peers](#) who hail from various backgrounds and speak different languages and are taught by [diverse educators](#)—is essential for helping our students get ready for the world they will encounter outside of school and, increasingly, throughout their lives. The benefits of diversity in education are great. It boosts empathy and reduces bias. Diversity exposes students to perspectives and ideas that expand their views and prepares all students for success in today’s world and workforce.

Yet, we have significant evidence showing there are too many communities and schools across the country where racial and socioeconomic isolation is greater today than it was decades ago. Some places are taking on this issue, but the nation needs broader and more concerted efforts to develop diverse schools.

Increasing diversity in classrooms and schools will require deliberate decisions by policymakers at every level. It will require state and local leaders to institute policies that acknowledge how education, housing, and transportation must work together in support of strong, socioeconomically diverse communities. Parents, families, and students themselves also can advocate for the schools that they know will enable young people to thrive.

Congress can help, too, by enacting [legislation](#) based on the Obama Administration’s proposed [Stronger Together initiative](#) to accelerate voluntary, local diversity initiatives.

Leading the World in College Attainment

We must continue to build on the efforts of the Obama Administration to ensure all Americans have the opportunity to gain the knowledge and skills needed to grow our economy and strengthen our democracy.

President Obama’s [America’s College Promise \(ACP\)](#) proposal, which would make access to two years of community college as universal as access to high school, is an important step toward ensuring that every American can build the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in our growing economy. Taken together, America’s Promise Grants; dual enrollment experimental sites; and at least 38 independently funded, free community college programs bring the number of new programs to over 100 since President Obama announced ACP in his 2015 State of the Union address. These new programs are raising over \$280 million to serve more than 210,000 students. As communities work to expand college opportunity, Congress should support their progress by passing the [America’s College Promise Act](#), which has been introduced both in the Senate and House of Representatives.

And Congress should enact evidence-based reforms leading to successful outcomes for students from all backgrounds and provide supports and incentives for students’ on-time and accelerated degree attainment, through initiatives such as the [On-Track Pell bonus](#) and allowing students to use Pell Grants

to attend college year-round to accelerate their progress toward completion. Congress also should protect students and taxpayers by ensuring institutions are held accountable for poor student outcomes and keep college more affordable by ensuring critical investments in student financial aid and streamlining loan repayment. Among other things, Congress should remove provisions that limit the Department's ability to oversee accreditors and close loopholes that allow for-profit institutions to rely solely on federal funds while exploiting service-members and veterans.

The Department also must continue to protect students and taxpayers from unscrupulous institutions. This means not letting poor-performing career colleges "off the hook" when they do not provide students with a quality education and leave student borrowers and taxpayers holding the bag. It means ensuring that schools are held accountable when they mislead or defraud students. And it means asking states to do their part by taking seriously the requirement that they authorize schools that operate in their jurisdiction.

The federal government cannot do this work alone, so states also must take responsibility for investing in their public higher education systems and authorizing and overseeing institutions as required by the Higher Education Act. Colleges also have more to do to support all their students to persist through graduation.

Continuing to Learn from What Works

For all students to achieve their potential, we must identify, develop, and implement the best practices, policies, and programs for our schools on an ongoing basis. This work entails building demand for evidence in education and encouraging innovation—particularly in service of our highest-needs students and to develop interventions that can be replicated, adapted, and scaled across the country. It also requires collaboration among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, modeled by the Department's close partnership with the [Institute of Education Sciences](#) (IES), which supports the majority of the Department's investments in data, research, and evaluation. And it requires investments in data, technology infrastructure, and dissemination mechanisms at all levels.

Unfortunately, research and development accounts for a small fraction—just 0.2 percent—of total national expenditures in public elementary education. By comparison, other knowledge-intensive sectors of the economy invest 10 to 20 percent in these efforts. Building on the groundwork laid by i3, the Department should continue to invest in programs that have demonstrated effectiveness and the potential for sustainability and significant scale, particularly through i3's successor program in ESSA—the Education Innovation and Research initiative. There are evidence requirements, in fact, throughout the law.

The federal government should replicate these efforts in higher education as well, investing in programs that scale up innovative and evidence-based practices to improve college completion rates, particularly for historically underrepresented students.

We know too many great practices and programs are confined to an individual school, college, or even a single classroom. The nation needs more researchers to study education interventions and share findings in ways that schools, districts, and states can use. The nation needs educators to collaborate and broadly share what they find to be the most successful strategies in reaching all students. And the nation needs states to devote time and resources to building and using evidence to improve education. We must continue to learn. We must always continue to ask, "How do we get better as a country?"

Maintaining a Focus on Helping to Ensure Students' Civil Rights in Schools

Our nation's many decades of civil rights promises seek to make access to meaningful opportunity a reality, on an equal basis, for every learner. We know we have not yet reached this important goal, but we have made real progress. OCR must continue its efforts—better supported through staffing sufficient to process its necessary, reinvigorated work—to make our schools even safer, fairer, and more equitable, and help to ensure all students have the chance to achieve their fullest potential.

Looking Forward

Everything we do in education—from investing in early learning; to providing each child with rich, well-rounded learning opportunities; to making sure schools are well-supported, safe, and diverse learning environments with great teachers; to getting all students to and through postsecondary education—is about that inextricable link between what our students learn and who they become. It is about achieving the America that all of us want for our children and grandchildren, where everyone can earn the knowledge and skills to succeed; where opportunity is plentiful and prosperity is widely shared; where communities are strong; and where all children can grow up to be whatever they choose. Creating and sustaining this America is not easy, [but it is possible](#). Together, we can make this a reality and ensure every American has a clear path to a bright future.