

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.

Goal Leader: Ann Whalen, Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Delegated the Authority of the Assistant Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

Public Benefit

The goal for America’s elementary and secondary educational system is clear: every student should graduate from high school ready for college and a career. Every student should have meaningful opportunities from which to choose upon graduation from high school. Over the past several years, states, districts, and schools have initiated groundbreaking reforms and innovations to try to meet this goal. For the first time, almost every state is supporting higher standards that will demonstrate that students who meet those standards are truly college- and career-ready. Many states are implementing assessments that are not only aligned with these new standards, but also gauge essential skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and the application of knowledge. At the same time, states, districts, and schools are working to meet the challenges of ensuring that every classroom has an excellent teacher and every school has a strong and effective leader; building local capacity to support successful school turnarounds; redesigning high school education by building stronger connections among secondary education, postsecondary education, and the workplace; and improving teacher preparation and classroom instruction in STEM education.

However, while many schools are increasing the quality of instruction and improving academic achievement, there is also broad agreement that the United States education system fails to consistently provide all students with the excellent education necessary to achieve college- and career-readiness. The result is that too many of our students are failing to reach their full potential. Data from the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that low-income students scored 24 to 28 points below their more advantaged peers. The achievement gaps between black and white students were between 24 and 32 points and achievement gaps between Hispanic and white students were between 18 and 24 points.¹

Many children, particularly children from low-income families, students with disabilities (SWDs), ELs, and children of color, confront not only an achievement gap, but also an opportunity gap. Today, a student attending a high school with high minority enrollment is much less likely to be offered calculus and physics than a student in a high school with low minority enrollment. Closing the opportunity gap will require that school resources, talent, and spending be targeted toward kids who need help the most.

The Department’s elementary and secondary education reforms focus on the building blocks needed for schools, school districts, and states to more consistently deliver excellent classroom instruction for all students. The foundation of these reforms is a system for improving learning

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 Reading and Mathematics Assessments, http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#/

and teaching that aligns with college- and career-ready standards, high-quality formative and summative assessments, and engaging and effective instructional content. Ensuring that U.S. students have the critical thinking skills and other tools they need to be effective in the 21st-century economy means improving teaching and learning in all content areas—from language arts and STEM to history, civics and government, geography, foreign languages, the arts, economics and financial literacy, environmental education, computer science, health education, and other subjects.

On December 10, 2015, the President signed a reauthorization of the ESEA, the ESSA. The law requires that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers and that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards. It also continues the ESEA's focus on ensuring that states and school districts account for the progress of all students, take meaningful actions to improve the lowest-performing schools, and ensure equitable access to excellent educators. The Department is developing approaches to best support the implementation of the ESSA. The FY 2016 APR will provide additional detail on the impact of the ESSA for the Department's work.

Analysis and Next Steps

Objective 2.1: Standards and Assessments. Support implementation of internationally benchmarked college- and career-ready standards, with aligned, valid, and reliable assessments.

Objective Leader:

Ary Amerikaner, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Strategic Initiatives, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

States have recognized the need to improve the rigor and quality of their standards and assessments. With standards in place, educators are designing instructional strategies to engage students and implementing support systems to strengthen college- and career-ready skills for all students, including those with disabilities and ELs.

Results for this metric are most influenced by actions taken by states and LEAs, but also are influenced by other factors. For example, the complexity of developing appropriate assessment instruments and approaches for students poses significant challenges, especially for children from low-income families, children who are ELs, and children with disabilities. Developing and administering college- and career-ready assessments and supporting teachers through training related to the new standards will require continuing support.

Challenges and Next Steps:

On December 10, 2015, the President signed a reauthorization of the ESEA, the ESSA. The law requires that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers and that vital information is provided to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards. The FY 2016 APR will provide additional detail on the impact of the ESSA.

While the Department evaluates how it will best implement the requirements of the new law, where applicable, it will continue to leverage federal investments, including Titles I, II, and III of the ESSA, as well as IDEA, and provide guidance and technical assistance to states to ensure that teachers and principals are well prepared and students have the resources and support needed to graduate from high school ready for college and careers.

A key challenge facing the Department over the next two years relates to the changes states may make to their currently adopted college- and career-ready standards due to decisions implemented by state leadership or state legislatures. Another key challenge is supporting states with the implementation of their college- and career-ready aligned assessments for all students, including ELs, SWDs, and economically disadvantaged and low-achieving students, to ensure that all students are prepared for postsecondary success.

The Department is taking steps to address these challenges by developing and targeting technical assistance activities that will, in part, increase state capacity to leverage limited resources and continue to identify promising practices across multiple states. First, the Department has released its [Title I assessment peer review guidance](#), which highlights the requirements for a high-quality assessment to help support state assessment development; in FY 2016, the Department will begin conducting peer review of state assessment systems. The Department will also build a library of resources (i.e., a central location for practitioners looking for best practices) to assist state educational agencies (SEAs) in transitioning to college- and career-ready standards, leveraging work that has occurred during RTT with other partner organizations such as Achieve, Student Achievement Partners, National Parent Teacher Association, and others. In addition, the Department is working internally to coordinate the provision of technical assistance across OESE, OSEP, and other related offices and programs. The Department also funds a Center on Standards and Assessments Implementation (part of the Comprehensive Centers program) that helps build the capacity of state educational agencies to implement college- and career-ready standards. The Department will continue to work with states by taking such steps as providing technical assistance and guidance to states as they implement the next steps outlined in the President’s Testing Action Plan announced in November 2015.

U.S. Department of Education Indicators of Success	Baseline	2013 Actuals	2014 Actuals	2015 Actuals	2015 Current Year Target	Current Year Results	2016 Out-Year Targets	2017 Out-Year Targets
2.1.A. Number of states/territories that have adopted college- and career-ready standards ²	SY: 2012–13 49, plus DC	49, plus DC	49, plus DC and Puerto Rico	SY: 2014–15 51 (49 plus DC and Puerto Rico)	50	MET	52	52
2.1.B. Number of states/territories that are implementing next-generation reading and mathematics assessments, aligned with college- and career-ready standards ³	SY: 2012–13 0	0	0	SY: 2014–15 49 (48 plus DC)	50	NOT MET	52	52

NA = Not applicable.
TBD = To be determined.

² Revising metric language to include “states/territories” to align with the 2014–15 APG statement. 2014 Metric reported as “**Not Met**.” However, metric was “**Met**” given the inclusion of territories to align with the APG statement.

³ Metric is aligned with an APG. Revising metric language to include “states/territories” to align with the 2014–15 APG statement.

Goal 2 – Strategic Objective 2.1

Academic Year (AY) is a collegiate year spanning August–May; School Year (SY) spans August–July and is aligned with a P–12 school year; Fiscal Year (FY) corresponds to a federal fiscal year; Calendar Year (CY) spans January–December.

Data Sources and Frequency of Collection:

2.1.A. *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Flexibility Monitoring*; annually

2.1.B. ESEA Flexibility Monitoring; annually