

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 2.2: Effective Teachers and Strong Leaders. Improve the preparation, recruitment, retention, development, support, evaluation, recognition, and equitable distribution of effective teachers and leaders.²

Objective Leader:

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

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

Over the past several years, states and school districts have made educator effectiveness a key priority in their reform efforts. States and districts are working on the development and implementation of high-quality teacher and principal evaluation and support systems, as well as broader human capital management systems that use the results of evaluation systems to inform targeted educator development and support opportunities, placement, retention, promotion, compensation, and other personnel decisions. The Department has supported the work of states and districts in this area through key programs and initiatives such as [Title I](#), [Title II](#), [RTT](#), [Teacher Incentive Fund](#), [ESEA Flexibility](#), [Excellent Educators for All](#), and the Comprehensive Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (in addition to the other regional and content comprehensive centers), and using these programs and initiatives to provide resources and technical assistance to states and districts so that they can move forward with successful implementation. In 2015, more states and districts are implementing teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that are based on multiple measures, including evidence of student learning growth as a significant factor.

² States with approved ESEA Flexibility requests were initially required to implement teacher and principal evaluation and support systems by 2014–15 or 2015–16, depending on the school year of initial approval. Through ESEA Flexibility renewal in fall 2014, the Department committed to working with states that need to make adjustments to implementation timelines or sequencing through the ESEA Flexibility renewal process.

Similar to objective 2.1, the results of this metric are greatly influenced by state and district actions, as well as other factors not in the Department’s control. As teacher and school leader evaluation and support systems are governed by state and local policies, without revisions in state policies and new partnerships with teacher and principal organizations, reforms of existing evaluation and support systems are unlikely to be successful.

Challenges and Next Steps:

Implementation of teacher and leader evaluation and support systems has proven to be very challenging work for states and districts, particularly during the time of transition to new standards and assessments, and has caused states to need to adjust timelines and sequencing of implementation steps. In order to mitigate these risks, the Department has provided flexibility to states regarding the use of student growth based on statewide assessments during the transition to new assessments, as well as other changes that are outside their original implementation timelines and plans under ESEA Flexibility. The Department is working to connect all states to experts who can provide technical assistance in this area. There are also challenges associated with teacher and principal support for the new systems. The Department is continuing to work with states to help them engage with educators and develop plans focused on continuous improvement so that they can make adjustments as needed.

Under ESSA, ESEA Flexibility waivers, including Principle 3—supporting effective instruction and leadership—expire on August 1, 2016. The FY 2016 APR will provide additional detail on the impact of the ESSA.

U.S. Department of Education Indicators of Success	Baseline	Actuals			2015 Current Year Target	Current Year Results	2016 Out-Year Targets	2017 Out-Year Targets
		2013	2014	2015				
2.2.A. Number of states that have fully implemented teacher and principal evaluation and support systems that consider multiple measures of effectiveness, with student growth as a significant factor ³	SY: 2012–13 6	6	7	8	37	NOT MET	22 ⁴	39 ⁵

NA = Not applicable.

TBD = To be determined.

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:

2.2.A. ESEA Flexibility Applications and Monitoring; annually

³ Metric is aligned with an APG.

⁴ The out-year performance targets are revised to reflect updated information provided by states through ESEA Flexibility renewal requests regarding implementation timelines.

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