

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 2.3: School Climate and Community. Increase the success, safety, and health of students, particularly in high-need schools, and deepen family and community engagement.

Objective Leader:

Heather Rieman, Chief of Staff, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

Strengthening school and classroom climate in preschool through 12th-grade settings is an essential precondition to scalable improvements in the academic achievement, socioemotional wellbeing, and college and career readiness of American public school students. While states, districts, and schools across the country have made real strides reforming approaches to school discipline and climate in order to ensure effective environments for more students, significant challenges remain to guaranteeing safe and supportive schools in which to learn and grow for all students. More than one in five students report being bullied in school; national data continue to suggest that suspensions and expulsions disproportionately impact minority students and SWDs; and too few schools are employing school climate data and interventions as part of their continuous improvement strategies. Maximizing instructional time to prepare all students for the rigors and opportunities of meaningful postsecondary educations and careers requires that these issues are addressed at every level of the P–12 system.

During FY 2015, the Department has pursued a vigorous strategy to improve school climate and community and encourage the nationwide adoption of evidence-based practices to ensure safe and supportive learning environments for all students. In June 2015, the Department hosted a two-day convening for 19 high-needs school districts to support their local implementation of “early warning systems” to identify and support students at-risk of falling behind in school and/or dropping out. This convening served to highlight effective local practices to use data strategically to identify students in need of additional support. To shine a light on effective reforms in school discipline policy and practice, and in support of the administration's My Brother's Keeper initiative, the Department sponsored—in collaboration with the White House and DOJ—a major summit on school climate and discipline, entitled “[Rethink Discipline](#),” on

July 22, 2015. This summit brought to the White House over 45 school districts and a coalition of public and private partners to elevate effective reforms of school discipline in schools, with the goal of highlighting best practices in eliminating disproportionalities and bias in the administration of school discipline. At the summit, the Department also released a new resource for school district superintendents and their leadership teams—“[Rethink Discipline: A Resource Guide for Superintendent Action](#)”—that provides suggested action steps and links to free resources to support communitywide efforts to reform and improve the efficacy of local school discipline and climate policy and practice. The Department also supported the development of new school climate survey resources that states, districts, and schools can use, free of charge, to systematically collect and act on school climate data from multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers, noninstructional school staff, and parents and families (to be released in FY 2016). The Department also laid significant groundwork for the launch of “[Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism](#),” which aims to raise nationwide awareness of and encourage action to combat the serious problem of chronic absenteeism affecting between five and seven and a half million students each year. In collaboration with HHS, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), DOJ, and a coalition of public and private partners, the Department released on October 7, 2015, a Dear Colleague letter and community toolkit for states, districts, and schools that includes actionable strategies to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism within communities.

Challenges and Next Steps:

Improving school discipline and climate policy and practice nationwide remains a significant challenge given the many differentiated contexts in which this work must unfold. There simply is no one right way to approach the challenge of ensuring safe and supportive learning environments for all students, and a spirit of experimentation and innovation is critical to sustaining motivation for and persistence in tackling what are often extraordinary challenges at the state, district, and school levels. Challenges to improving school discipline and climate include a lack of funding for and focus on this work, which can often be treated as “extra” or “additional” work not necessarily related to the core functions of school systems. When practitioners and policymakers do not understand the relationship between conditions for learning and student achievement, it is difficult to enshrine effective school discipline and climate practice and policy. To meet this challenge, the Department continues to advance the Supportive School Discipline Initiative in partnership with DOJ, offering technical assistance to states and districts that are working to reduce bias and disproportionalities in the administration of school discipline. Moreover, the Department also continues to pursue a vigorous strategy to improve school discipline and climate that includes a major focus on the upcoming release of the 2013–14 CRDC, which will include updates to national school discipline data as well as the first-ever national data on chronic absenteeism. The Department will leverage the data on chronic absenteeism to promote effective cross-sector efforts to meet student needs in order to ensure that student are able and ready to attend and succeed in school every day.

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
2.3.A. Disparity in the rates of out-of-school suspensions for students with disabilities and youth of color (youth of color metric)	SY: 2011–12 10.7% point disparity	Not Collected	TBD SY 2013–14 data collected in 2015 and available in 2016	Not Collected	NA Biennial Metric	/	6.7% point disparity	NA Biennial Metric

Goal 2 – Strategic Objective 2.3

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
2.3.B. Disparity in the rates of out-of-school suspensions for students with disabilities and youth of color (SWDs, IDEA only metric)	SY: 2011–12 5.7% point disparity	Not Collected	TBD SY 2013–14 data collected in 2015 and available in 2016	Not Collected	NA Biennial Metric		2.7% point disparity	NA Biennial Metric

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:

2.3.A. Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC); biennially

2.3.B. CRDC; biennially