Goal 1. Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education:

Increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults.

Goal Leader: Ted Mitchell, Under Secretary

Public Benefit

Increasing college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults requires attention to three equally important factors to facilitate success: availability of good consumer information and financial aid, strong motivation by students and families, and access to affordable, high-quality learning opportunities.

Prior to entering postsecondary education, prospective students need easily accessible information on the cost of attendance and financial aid; rates for career placement, graduation, and college loan defaults; labor market outcomes and projections of labor market demand; loan repayment and management options; and other subjects crucial to understanding the affordability and value of the postsecondary institutions and programs of study available. Students deserve to know that, whether they enter a college, university, career training program, or adult education program, the credential they earn will be affordable and its value will be recognized as an indication that they possess the necessary knowledge and skills for success in the workplace and in life.

Providing federal student aid in a simple, reliable, and efficient manner is primarily how the Department supports college access, affordability, quality, and completion. In FY 2015, the Department delivered nearly $128 billion in grants, work-study, and loan assistance to almost 12 million postsecondary students at over 6,100 schools.[1] In addition, the Department administered $2 billion annually in grants to strengthen postsecondary institutions and promote college readiness, and nearly $1.7 billion more in grant funds for career and technical education (CTE), adult education (including literacy and civics education), and correctional education to help youths and adults secure the skills that equip them for work, civic participation, and lifelong learning.[2]

The Department has taken significant steps to increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion in recent years. Resources developed by the Department, such as the College Affordability and Transparency Center, the Financial Aid Shopping Sheet, the College Scorecard, a consolidated student aid website, and new loan counseling and financial literacy resources, now provide students and families with new and enhanced tools for informed decision-making. In particular, the release in FY 2015 of a vastly expanded College Scorecard—including many important metrics that have not been published before—has set a new standard for consumer information about postsecondary education. Redesigned with direct input from students, families, and their advisers, the College Scorecard provides the clearest, most accessible, and most reliable national data on cost, graduation, debt, and postcollege

[1] Federal Student Aid Annual Report FY 2015.
[2] Note that CTE formula funds go to both secondary and postsecondary programs; approximately 40% of the amount listed goes to postsecondary programs.

earnings. Gainful Employment regulations will also ensure that students are informed about key outcomes for occupational-oriented programs before they enroll and that programs not meeting established standards will lose eligibility for access to federal student aid funds. In addition, the Department continues to simplify the FAFSA so it is easier and faster for students to apply for aid, and has improved the process. Beginning with the 2017–18 award year, students can apply earlier and electronically retrieve tax information filed for an earlier year, rather than waiting until tax season to complete their applications. Learning about aid eligibility options much earlier in the college application and decision process will allow students and families to determine the true cost of attending college—taking available financial aid into account—and make more informed decisions. New and expanded repayment plans, including Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and Revised Pay As You Earn (REPAYE), make debt more affordable for students after they leave school. America's College Promise, the President's proposed new federal-state partnership to to make two years of community college free for responsible students, would significantly impact affordability by letting students earn the first half of a bachelor's degree and earn skills needed in the workforce at no cost. This proposal will require everyone to do their part: community colleges must strengthen their programs and increase the number of students who graduate, states must invest more in higher education and training, and students must take responsibility for their education, earn good grades, and stay on track to graduate. The Department will build on these efforts to ensure that all Americans, regardless of their financial circumstances, will have the opportunity to access and complete an affordable postsecondary degree or other postsecondary credential.

Analysis and Next Steps

Objective 1.1: Access and Affordability. Close the opportunity gap by improving the affordability of and access to college and/or workforce training, especially for underrepresented and/or underprepared populations (e.g., low-income and first-generation students, English learners, individuals with disabilities, adults without high school diplomas, etc.).

Objective Leaders:
Jon O'Bergh, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Under Secretary (OUS)
Jim Runcie, Chief Operating Officer, Federal Student Aid (FSA)
Michael Yudin, Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

The Department supported or initiated a number of efforts and made progress toward this objective, despite limited ability to impact college costs or control price. The Department unveiled the expanded College Scorecard, a college choice tool that provides a wealth of customizable data—including many important metrics that have not been published before—so students and families can make informed choices based on the criteria most important to them. The Department also made the data behind the Scorecard publicly available in order to jumpstart efforts across the country to develop meaningful metrics for accountability. The Department continues to seek ways to simplify the FAFSA so it is easier and faster for students and families to apply for financial aid. Beginning with the 2017–18 award year, students can apply earlier and electronically retrieve tax information filed for an earlier year, rather than waiting until tax season to complete their applications. The number of IHEs agreeing to utilize the Financial Aid Shopping Sheet, a model form that makes it easier for students to compare financial aid offers, grew from around 2,000 in 2013–14 to more than 3,000 in 2014–15 following an outreach effort to encourage institutions to sign on.

Recognizing that FAFSA completion significantly increases chances that students will actually enroll in college, the Department issued guidance clarifying that state authorities may share FAFSA completion data with nonprofit organizations. This adds to the list of authorized entities that includes LEAs, The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grantees, tribal education authorities, and Indian organizations, so those entities can maximize the number of their students that complete the FAFSA.

The Department has taken additional actions to help struggling federal student loan borrowers manage their debt. The Department held negotiated rulemaking sessions and finalized regulations in October 2015 that expand Pay As You Earn, an income-based repayment program, to all student borrowers who have direct loans. In the wake of the collapse of Corinthian Colleges, the Department announced in June of this year that it would begin implementing a previously little-used provision in the law called "defense to repayment," which allows borrowers to seek loan forgiveness if they believe they were defrauded by their college under state law, and assigned a Special Master to oversee the high volume of loan discharge cases. Since then, the Special Master has issued two reports with recommendations for developing a process to handle these borrower defense claims. The Department also announced its intent to establish a negotiated rulemaking committee in FY 2016 to address loan discharge and borrower defense issues, held two public hearings in September for the rulemaking, and since the end of the fiscal year has selected negotiators and announced three negotiated rulemaking sessions to be held in January, February, and March. The Department began to wind down contracts with five private collection agencies that provided inaccurate information to borrowers, and is revising existing contracts to ensure the proper balance between the interests of the borrower and of the taxpayer, as well as to increase the Department's oversight capabilities.

Subsequent to FY 2015, the Department issued a report on October 1, 2015 with U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau on a series of statutory, regulatory, and administrative recommendations to safeguard student borrowers. The recommendations include establishing: a way for borrowers to authorize the Internal Revenue Service to release income information for multiple years to the Department to determine monthly payments under income-driven repayment plans; loan servicing standards; principles for borrower defense legislation; a streamlined discharge process for borrowers eligible for a total and permanent disability discharge of their loans; increased borrower protections in the federal student loan program; and protections for private student loan borrowers. The Under Secretary is overseeing a process to collect feedback from student borrowers and loan servicers in order to strengthen loan servicer contracts when they are renegotiated in the future.

Research indicates that correctional education programs for prisoners reduce recidivism rates. The Department therefore launched a Second Chance Pell Grant pilot through the Experimental Sites program. The goal of this limited pilot program is to increase access to high-quality educational opportunities and help incarcerated individuals successfully transition out of prison and back into the classroom or the workforce. In addition, the Department invested in a series of demonstration projects through the Improving Reentry Education grant competition, and launched a program to improve the outcomes of juvenile justice youth in the reentry process through a strong partnership with the Department of Justice (DOJ).

The partial restoration of Ability to Benefit provisions tied to career pathways restored access to federal student aid for millions of older youth and adults who lack a high school credential and are enrolled in a program that is part of a career pathway. The Department provided guidance through a Dear Colleague letter and initiated a series of webinars and other technical assistance activities to hold up programs and institutions that illustrate how to appropriately administer these new provisions. These efforts significantly open up affordable opportunities for those who were unable to complete high school due to a variety of reasons.

As part of the Reach Higher Campaign, the Department collaborated with the Office of the First Lady to create a competition to promote the development of mobile app solutions that will help students navigate education and career pathways, including CTE. (The competition was subsequently announced in October 2015.)

Although results for metrics 1.1.A, 1.1.B, 1.1.C, 1.1.D, and 1.1.E are influenced by actions taken by the Department, they are most influenced by factors that are beyond the control of the Department. For example, results for metrics 1.1.A and 1.1.B are most influenced by actions taken by postsecondary institutions, state and local agencies regarding funding decisions, and market forces and job creation trends. The Department met its FY 2015 performance targets for metrics 1.1.A and 1.1.B to slow the increase in average net price at public institutions. However, given the Department's limited ability to influence net price, the Department plans to replace these metrics with different metrics for FY 2016.

Regarding metric 1.1.C, the Department achieved its FY 2015 performance target to increase the number of high school students completing the FAFSA. Efforts such as the FAFSA completion project, increased outreach activities by FSA and other offices, and the Department's participation in the American Council on Education's National College Application Week initiative since 2011, likely contributed to success with this target.

States are required to submit data for metrics 1.1.D and 1.1.E by November 30 for the previous fiscal year. As such, the FY 2015 data are not available until spring 2016. The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA), signed by the President in July 2014, reforms the public workforce system by strengthening alignment and access to employment, training, education, and support services needed to succeed in the labor market. In particular, the WIOA includes many changes that are designed to strengthen and improve employment for individuals with disabilities, many served by the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Supported Employment programs. WIOA places significant emphasis on obtaining competitive integrated employment, especially in the amendments to the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973.* Program services are designed to maximize the ability of individuals with disabilities, including individuals with the most significant disabilities, to achieve competitive integrated employment through customized employment, supported employment, and other individualized services. The Department will continue to track national aggregate annual earnings of Vocational Rehabilitation consumers and transition-aged youth. Future annual earnings are expected to improve by the regulatory actions that the Department will undertake in FY 2016.

Challenges and Next Steps:

The Department will take additional actions to help struggling federal student loan borrowers manage their debt. These actions include publishing final rules in October 2015 that expand the Pay As You Earn repayment program to all student borrowers with direct loans, which is expected to help millions of struggling borrowers; building on successful pilot programs to communicate information about federal student loan repayment options; conducting rulemaking on loan discharge and borrower defense issues; and advocating for the administration's proposal for a single income-driven repayment plan.

America's College Promise, President Obama's proposed initiative announced in January 2015, would allow students to attend community colleges tuition-free if they attend at least half-time, make satisfactory academic progress to a degree, and maintain a 2.5 grade point average. If Congress passes legislation to enact the proposal, and all states participate and provide quality programs, the plan could benefit millions of students by making a higher education more affordable.

Although states are beginning to increase appropriations per full-time equivalent student, funding for higher education overall continues at historically low levels, which places pressure on institutions to raise costs in order to maintain quality and levels of service. Without specific programs, such as the proposed College Opportunity and Graduation Bonus program (discussed in strategic objective 1.3) and America's College Promise, the Department has little influence over state funding decisions and is limited in its ability to impact net price and college cost. Despite these challenges, the Department will continue to highlight institutions that are taking steps to ensure affordability for families and will support practices that reduce cost by reducing the time taken to earn a degree, such as competency-based education (see discussion of Experimental Sites programs in section 1.2), dual enrollment,[3] remedial education reforms, and improved articulation between institutions. The Department will also build on its existing work on consumer information tools, such as the College Scorecard; its work on consumer protections; and improving student loan servicing to ensure students have access to high-quality, affordable education and quality customer service.

U.S. Department of Education Indicators of Success	Baseline	2013 Actuals	2014 Actuals	2015 Actuals	2015 Current Year Targets	Current Year Results	2016 Out-Year Targets	2017 Out-Year Targets
1.1.A. Rate of increase in net price of public four-year institutions[4]	AY: 2010–11 1.7%	AY: 2010–11 1.7%	AY: 2011–12 3.1%	AY: 2012–13 0.6%	AY: 2012–13 1.3%	**MET**	NA	NA
New Metric: Federal student loan delinquency rate	FY: 2015 21.7%	NA	FY: 2014 24.0%	FY: 2015 21.7%	NA	NA	+/- 3–5% over prior year's actuals	+/- 3–5% over prior year's actuals
1.1.B. Rate of increase in net price of public two-year institutions[5]	AY: 2010–11 1.7%	AY: 2010–11 1.7%	AY: 2011–12 3.2%	AY: 2012–13 0.1%	AY: 2012–13 1.3%	**MET**	NA	NA

[3] An Experimental Site project addressing dual enrollment was subsequently announced on October 30, 2015.
[4] Metric being removed at the end of the FY 2015 reporting period and being replaced with the metric identified as "New Metric" directly below it. If there is no corresponding "New Metric" identified, new metric TBD. Please refer to appendix B for details pertaining to the removal and addition of metrics. The proposed FY 2016 and 2017 targets for the metric being removed were 1.1% and 0.9%, respectively.
[5] Metric being removed at the end of the FY 2015 reporting period and being replaced with the metric identified as "New Metric" directly below it. If there is no corresponding "New Metric" identified, new metric TBD. Please refer to appendix B for details pertaining to the removal and addition of metrics. The proposed FY 2016 and 2017 targets for the metric being removed were 1.1% and 0.9%, respectively.

U.S. Department of Education Indicators of Success	Baseline	2013 Actuals	2014 Actuals	2015 Actuals	2015 Current Year Targets	Current Year Results	2016 Out-Year Targets	2017 Out-Year Targets
New Metric: Web traffic to the College Scorecard (as measured by unique visitors annually)	FY: 2015 91,011 (Excluding new Scorecard launch on Sept. 12, 2015)	NA	NA	91,011	NA	NA	1,500,000	1,800,000
New APG Metric: Number of data points or other information reports released on the FSA Data Center[6]	FY: 2009–14 12	NA	NA	12	NA	NA	15	30
1.1.C. Percentage of high school seniors filing a FAFSA	SY: 2012–13 59.2%	SY: 2012–13 59.2%	SY: 2013–14 60.1%	SY: 2014–15 60.5%	SY 2014–15 59.1%–61.1%	**MET**	+/- one percentage point of prior year's actuals	+/- one percentage point of prior year's actuals
1.1.D. Index of national aggregate annual earnings of VR consumers (based on the number of competitive integrated employment outcomes, hours worked, and hourly wages of VR consumers)	FY: 2010 $57,971,317	$61,824,728	$61,800,214[7]	TBD Data available Q1 FY16	$64,322,447	TBD	$65,608,896	$66,921,074
1.1.E. Index of national aggregate annual earnings of Transition-Age Youth (based on the number of competitive integrated employment outcomes, hours worked, and hourly wages of VR Transition-Age Youth)	FY: 2010 $15,971,665	$18,353,441	$18,540,576[8]	TBD Data available Q1 FY16	$19,094,920	TBD	$19,476,818	$19,866,354

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:
1.1.A. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS); annually
1.1.B. IPEDS; annually
1.1.C. The denominator is the number of graduating seniors according to the most recent projection by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The numerator is from FSA's Central Processing System and is based on the number of applications during the first nine months of the application cycle that are—as of September 30 of the first year of the application cycle—complete (not rejected); first-time filers; incoming freshmen, with or without previous college attendance; age 18 or less as of June 30 of the

[6] Metric is aligned with an APG.
[7] Metric reported as TBD in the *FY 2014 Annual Performance Report and FY 2016 Annual Performance Plan*. 2014 actuals show the 2014 target was "**Not Met**."
[8] Metric reported as TBD in the *FY 2014 Annual Performance Report and FY 2016 Annual Performance Plan*. 2014 actuals show the 2014 target was "**Not Met**."

first year of the application cycle; reporting high school diploma attainment; and attended a high school in the fifty states and Washington, DC; annually

1.1.D. Rehabilitation Services Administration-911 (RSA-911); annually