

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 2.4: Turn Around Schools and Close Achievement Gaps. Accelerate achievement by supporting states and districts in turning around low-performing schools and closing achievement gaps, and developing models of next-generation high schools.

Objective Leader:

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

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

Turning around the lowest-performing schools, closing achievement gaps, increasing high school graduation rates, and decreasing disparities in graduation rates are critical to achieving the President's goal of once again having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. States and districts have assumed the challenge of focusing on their lowest-performing schools, and directing significant resources and support in order to improve student outcomes dramatically. Since 2009, more than 1,700 schools have received up to \$2 million per year for three years through the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program to implement rigorous intervention models intended to turn these schools around. Nearly two-thirds of the schools in the first two cohorts and over half of schools in the third cohort have made progress in improving student achievement in reading, and a similar percentage have shown improvement in math. However, some participating schools have also shown decreases in performance, and more work is needed to ensure that the progress is sustained. To assist states in this challenging work, the Department strengthened the SIG program in FY 2015 by, among other things, including three new models, including an evidence-based, whole school reform model, and allowing additional time for planning and implementation. The Department also continued to partner with the Corporation for National and Community Service to support the School Turnaround AmeriCorps program grantees, and partnered with the President's Council on Arts and Humanities to support the Turnaround Arts Initiative, including expanding that initiative to incorporate early learning as a turnaround strategy.

In addition, the nation has made significant progress in increasing overall graduation rates, but gaps between rates for different student groups continue to persist. See also the Explanation and Analysis of Progress for objective 4.1 for additional information on the Department's efforts to improve the national high school graduation rate and to close gaps between groups of students.

Challenges and Next Steps:

Turning around the lowest-performing schools is extremely challenging work and takes several years to show progress and success. As a result, there are challenges in communicating that this is a long-term process, not a short-term fix, and managing expectations of what success looks like along the way. Additionally, as major grant programs are ending, such as RTT and SIG, there may be fewer resources available in states and districts to support school turnaround. Sustaining successful school turnaround is a major challenge for states, districts, and schools.

In addition to financial resources, sustaining successful school turnaround requires effective technical assistance and support from the Department. In particular, there is a significant need for effective turnaround leaders for the lowest-performing schools, which the Department is attempting to address through its [Turnaround School Leaders program](#), a program focused on helping districts, in partnership with states, IHEs, and nonprofit or for-profit partners, develop leaders with the specialized skills needed to turn schools around.

The ESSA 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. However, the provisions and ultimate impact of the new law are still being evaluated, and plans for implementation have yet to be fully developed. The FY 2016 APR will provide additional detail on the impact of the ESSA.

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
2.4.A. Number of persistently low graduation rate high schools	SY: 2011–12 775	SY: 2011–12 775	SY: 2012–13 737	SY: 2013–14 680	699	MET	5% annual reduction	5% annual reduction ²
2.4.B. Percentage of Cohort 1 priority schools that have met the state exit criteria and exited priority school status ³	SY: 2013–14 NA	NA	16.3% ⁴	NA	15%	NA ⁵	NA	NA
New Metric: Percentage of SIG schools in Cohort 5 that are above the 25th percentile in mathematics, as measured by their state assessments	SY: 2013–14 19.7%	NA	NA	SY: 2013–14 19.7%	NA	NA	TBD	TBD

² The baseline data for this performance metric were recalculated from what was reported in the *FY 2013 Annual Performance Report and FY 2015 Annual Performance Plan*. The targets remain at a 5% reduction each year.

³ 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 20.0% and 25.0%, respectively.

⁴ Metric reported as TBD in the *FY 2014 Annual Performance Report and FY 2016 Annual Performance Plan*. 2014 actuals show the 2014 target was “**Met.**”

⁵ The FY 2015 data for this metric are not available. Further, the Department has decided to remove this metric due to unforeseen challenges in using the data provided by states. These challenges are discussed in more detail in appendix B of this report.

Goal 2 – Strategic Objective 2.4

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
2.4.C. Percentage of Cohort 1 focus schools that have met the state exit criteria and exited focus school status ⁶	SY: 2013–14 NA	NA	11.9% ⁷	NA	15%	NA ⁸	NA	NA
New Metric: Percentage of SIG schools in Cohort 5 that are above the 25th percentile in reading/language arts, as measured by their state assessments	SY: 2013–14 20.1%	NA	NA	SY: 2013–14 20.1%	NA	NA	TBD	TBD

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:

2.4.A. ED*Facts*; annually

2.4.B. ED*Facts*; annually

2.4.C. ED*Facts*; annually

⁶ 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 20.0% and 25.0%, respectively.

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 “Met.”

⁸ The FY 2015 data for this metric are not available. Further, the Department has decided to remove this metric due to unforeseen challenges in using the data provided by states. These challenges are discussed in more detail in appendix B of this report.