

Goal 4. Equity:

Increase educational opportunities for underserved students and reduce discrimination so that all students are well-positioned to succeed.

Goal Leader:

Catherine Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

Public Benefit

Equity of opportunity is the foundation of the American dream, and equity in education is a cornerstone to building a strong, globally competitive workforce. From birth through adulthood, in institutions of early learning, P–12 schools, career and technical education, postsecondary education, adult education, workforce development, and independent living programs, the Department’s goal is to ensure that all of our nation’s students have access to the educators, resources, and opportunities to succeed. Accordingly, the Department is committed to improving outcomes for all students—regardless of income, home language, zip code, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, or disability—through its major education initiatives. Moreover, the Department also recognizes the need to increase educational opportunities systemically for underserved populations, including by exploring ways to increase equitable access to resources and effective teachers within states and districts.

To foster equitable access to early learning education, through the Preschool Development Grants program, the Department, together with the Administration for Children and Families at HHS, is providing access to high-quality preschool for thousands of children from low- and moderate-income families in hundreds of communities across the nation. With the inclusion of this program in the ESSA, which reauthorized the ESEA, the Department will continue to foster increased access to high-quality preschool for the neediest children.

In P–12 education, through the SIG program, ESEA, and other federal programs, the Department is providing significant resources to dramatically improve the nation’s lowest-achieving schools by using turnaround interventions and strategies and identifying the low-achieving schools that are showing strong evidence of successfully turning around. The Department is focused on supporting innovation, not just compliance monitoring, and is focused on spurring growth in achievement, not just absolute achievement measures as done in the past. In FY 2015, Department launched programs and initiatives designed to study and address chronic absenteeism and high school dropouts as well as to promote best practices in improving the rates of high school completion and graduation. The Department also started interagency planning to encourage greater socioeconomic diversity in schools and to provide greater educational opportunity for disconnected youth.

The Department worked to increase the number of low-income high school students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Building on partnerships with the Department of Labor and other federal agencies, the Department continued to expand career pathways for youth and adults by increasing access to high-quality secondary and postsecondary CTE programs, registered apprenticeship programs, and other forms of advanced technical training.

In higher education, the Department developed the President's America's College Promise proposal to make two years of community college free for eligible students. Through the First in the World program, the Department also awarded grants to IHEs to promote evidence-based strategies and practices for college access and completion, focusing on low-income students. Through SIP, the Department is supporting IHEs to help them become self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students through improvements in academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability.

Civil rights data collection, policy development and enforcement are the tools for ensuring that recipients of federal funding provide educational opportunities absent discriminatory barriers. The Department's OCR continues to address issues of equity in educational opportunity through both its policy and enforcement work by issuing detailed policy guidance; conducting vigorous complaint investigations; procuring strong systemic remedies; pursuing aggressive monitoring of resolution agreements; launching targeted and proactive compliance reviews and technical assistance activities; collecting and publicizing school-level data on important civil rights compliance indicators; and participating in intra- and interagency work groups to share expertise and best practices.

Analysis and Next Steps

Objective 4.1: Equitable Educational Opportunities. Increase all students' access to educational opportunities with a focus on closing achievement gaps, and remove barriers that students face based on their race, ethnicity, or national origin; sex; sexual orientation; gender identity or expression; disability; English language ability; religion; socioeconomic status; or geographical location.

Objective Leader:

Bob Kim, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Strategic Operations and Outreach, Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

Throughout FY 2015, the Department continued its efforts to expand equitable educational opportunities through its budget priorities, grants, and initiatives in the P–12 and postsecondary spaces, as well as through interagency collaborations and taskforces.

The Department has placed increased emphasis on ensuring educational equity through forward-looking strategies, such as FY 2016 budget development. For example, the Department proposed investing in equity measures in its FY 2016 budget, with \$2.7 billion or almost 12 percent increase for ESEA programs and substantial increases across many programs.

P–12 Education

The Office of Early Learning in the Department's OESE and the Administration for Children and Families at HHS awarded grants to launch high-quality preschool for 33,000 children from low- to moderate-income families in over 200 communities in the 18 Preschool Development Grants states. The 20 Race to the Top-ELC states have finalized their Annual Performance Reports showing their states' progress in developing or enhancing their early learning systems. OCR also worked with HHS to develop a policy statement on discipline in early learning environments.

The Department continued to support the SIG program, ESEA Flexibility renewal, and the Excellent Educators for All initiative. On February 9, 2015, the Department published a notice of

final regulations (NFRs) for SIG, incorporating changes from the FY 2014 appropriations act and lessons learned from implementation, so that SIG can better support turnaround efforts in the lowest-performing schools. The SIG NFR made slight adjustments to the four historical SIG models and includes three new SIG models: an early learning model, an evidence-based, whole school reform model, and a state-determined whole school reform model.

The Department released guidance for the [Excellent Educators for All](#) initiative during FY 2015. The initiative is directly tied to the goal of closing achievement gaps and ensuring equal educational opportunities; it is a three-pronged attempt to support states and districts as they work to ensure that low income students and students of color have equal access to effective and qualified educators. First, the Department required states to submit new Plans to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators (State Plans) in June 2015 and has reviewed and approved the plans of all 50 states, DC, and Puerto Rico. Second, the Department is currently implementing a \$4.2 million effort to support an Equitable Access Support Network (EASN) that provides meaningful technical assistance to states in developing and then implementing high quality plans. The Department also created and released state-specific Educator Equity Profiles. The Department sent each state a copy of its CRDC file to facilitate additional state-level data analysis. The Department held a number of webinars with states to ensure they understood how the data could help in developing equity plans.

Also, several offices across the Department continue to be involved in the White House My Brother's Keeper initiative, which aims to improve educational and other outcomes and reduce involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems for boys and young men of color. OSERS worked with OESE to identify districts with the highest numbers of males of color dropping out of school with the goal of providing these districts with technical assistance to support high needs students. OSERS also led a multistate convening to address disproportionate discipline rates for students of color. "[Rethink Discipline](#)," a day-long conference at the White House, was convened by the Department and DOJ in July 2015, bringing together education professionals from across the country to work on strategies for creating positive school climates and implementing effective discipline practices to reduce the overuse of unnecessary out of school suspensions and expulsions and replace these practices with positive alternatives that keep students in school and engaged in learning, but also ensure accountability.

OESE helped launch a new White House Administration initiative, [Every Student, Every Day: A National Initiative to Address and Eliminate Chronic Absenteeism](#). Led by the White House, the Department, HHS, HUD, and DOJ, the administration announced new steps to combat chronic absenteeism and called on states and local communities across the country to join in taking immediate action to address and eliminate chronic absenteeism by at least 10 percent each year, beginning in the current school year (2015–16).

OELA has been working with the White House Task Force on New Americans, particularly on highlighting promising practices for serving ELs, immigrants and refugees. In April, the Task Force released a new report that outlines the federal government's goals to strengthen its integration efforts nationwide and build welcoming communities. Additionally, the Task Force has launched an "[Educational and Linguistic Integration Webinar Series](#)," which has highlighted the work of researchers and practitioners who are working to support these populations. OELA has also partnered with the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans to launch a set of fact sheets on Black ELs to develop awareness for targeted actions to ensure that group of student receive appropriate attention and support.

The Office of the Secretary supported the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education in its efforts to coordinate across federal agencies to execute [Generation Indigenious](#), or Gen I, an interagency initiative to support Native youth.

OCTAE continued to coordinate the implementation of the [P3](#) initiative, a unique cross-agency initiative that gives state, local, and tribal governments greater flexibility in using their discretionary funds to test innovative strategies for improving results for disconnected youth. The first nine pilots were announced in October 2015. For the next round of P3, OCTAE has published a Notice of Proposed Priorities (NPP). The NPP includes proposed priorities for disconnected youth who are unemployed and not enrolled in education; ELs; individuals with disabilities; homeless; in foster care; involved with the justice system; or immigrants or refugees.

While ESSA will certainly impact much of the Department's work to promote equity in educational opportunity, the ultimate impacts 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.

Higher Education

In FY 2015, OPEPD worked with the Office of the Under Secretary and other offices to develop the America's College Promise to make two years of community college free for eligible students. OCTAE worked on preparing two solicitations related to reentry education.

The Department published a notice announcing a [First in the World](#) grant competition on May 11, 2015. The program is designed to promote evidence-based strategies and practices for college access and completion, focusing on high-need students. The \$60 million appropriated for this program was used to make 18 grants to IHEs, including 9 grants to minority-serving institutions totaling \$30 million. Two of the awards were Validation grants designed to replicate strategies proven to be successful in earlier evaluations.

[SIP](#) supports eligible IHEs in becoming self-sufficient and expanding their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen the institution's academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability.

In an effort to scale up successful practices that lead to completion, especially in the area of remedial education, the Department developed communities of practice among minority-serving community colleges. Lead institutions have been identified, recruited, and trained. Two communities of practice have been launched as of October 2015. The Department convened these communities of practice and others in November 2015 for the Student Success at Minority Serving Institutions conference.

OCR and FSA continue to support the President's Sexual Assault Task Force to improve coordination, transparency, and effectiveness in responding to sexual violence in colleges and universities. The Task Force released a Resource Guide in September 2015, and is developing plans for the coming months, including a focus on technical assistance/regional convenings, research initiatives, and training/prevention at the P-12 level.

OCTAE and OCR are developing joint guidance to assist high schools, community colleges, other CTE providers, and state agencies in meeting their obligations under federal law to administer and oversee CTE programs, without discriminating on the basis of gender. OCTAE is working as well with FSA to promote greater awareness of new ability to benefit provisions that enable adults who lack a high school diploma or its equivalent to access student financial aid if they are enrolled in qualifying career pathway program.

Subpopulation Breakout for Metric 4.1.A: National high school graduation rate by race/ethnicity, other characteristics*

SY	Total	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian/ Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Black	White	Economically Disadvantaged	Limited English Proficiency	Students with Disabilities
2011–12	80%	67%	88%	73%	69%	86%	72%	59%	61%
2012–13	81.4%	69.7%	88.7%	75.2%	70.7%	86.6%	73.3%	61.1%	61.9%
2013–14	82.3%	69.6%**	89.4%	76.3%	72.5%	87.2%	74.6%	62.6%	63.1%

* Data are reported based on the requirements for individual states in the Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR).

** The United States 4-year ACGR for American Indian/Alaska Native students was estimated using both the reported 4-year ACGR data from 49 states and the District of Columbia and using imputed data for Virginia. Available at: http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/ACGR_RE_and_characteristics_2013-14.asp.

Data Source and Frequency of Collection: ED*Facts* universe collection, annual reports; annually

Challenges and Next Steps:

The following items delineate future challenges and next steps as the Department works to enhance educational opportunities for underserved populations.

As with all budget requests, the new and continuing proposals related to equity described above are dependent on final appropriations. Offices across the Department will maximize alignment with the Department’s issues of equity.

Staff worked diligently to approve state educator equity plans and to oversee implementation of the Excellent Educators for All initiative, addressing the urgency of progress on educator equity and the capacity of states to meet new data and planning requirements. OESE is managing a large technical assistance effort around the plans that will allow all states to receive intensive support. A cross-agency group is working to ensure this technical assistance includes stakeholders from the civil rights community to help states improve consultation efforts.

In FY 2015, the Department also promoted this goal through continued implementation of ESEA Flexibility. The [ESEA Flexibility renewal guidance](#), issued on November 13, 2014, focused on improving educational outcomes for all students, closing achievement gaps, increasing equity, and improving the quality of instruction. As part of the SEA’s process of ensuring that schools were accountable for the performance of all subgroups of students, in its renewal request, each SEA had to demonstrate that a school could not receive the highest rating in the SEA’s differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system if there are significant achievement or graduation rate gaps across subgroups that are not closing in the school. States were also encouraged, through the renewal process, to identify and address existing opportunity gaps that may contribute to achievement gaps.

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.

Goal 4 – Strategic Objective 4.1

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
4.1.A. National high school graduation rate ¹	SY: 2011–12 80.0%	SY: 2011–12 80.0%	SY: 2012–13 81.4%	SY: 2013–14 82.3%	83.0% ²	NOT MET	84.5%	85%
New APG Metric: Gap in the graduation rate between students from low-income families and all students ³	SY: 2013–14 7.7%	SY: 2011–12 8.3%	SY: 2012–13 8.1%	SY: 2013–14 7.7%	NA	NA	7.6% ⁴	7.4%
New APG Metric: Number of schools that do not have a gap or that decreased the gap between students from low-income ⁵ families and the state average of all students ⁶	SY: 2013–14 80%	SY: 2011–12 77.6%	SY: 2012–13 78.8%	SY: 2013–14 80%	NA	NA	81.2% ⁷	82.4%

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:

4.1.A. ED Facts; annually

¹ Metric is aligned with an APG.

² SY 2013–14 actuals are being used to compare against the FY 2015 target.

³ Metric is aligned with an APG.

⁴ SY 2014–15 actuals are being used to compare against the FY 2016 target; FY 2016 (SY 2015–16) data not available until 2017.

⁵ For purposes of this metric, eligibility for Free or Reduced Price Lunches (FRPL) under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is the primary source of data for identifying economically disadvantaged (low-income) students for reporting on student outcomes, including graduation rates. The Department is currently considering options for redefining “economically disadvantaged” students for student outcomes reporting and other uses. Should the Department make such a change, data on economically disadvantaged students may not be entirely comparable with data for previous years.

⁶ Metric is aligned with an APG.

⁷ SY 2014–15 actuals are being used to compare against the FY 2016 target; FY 2016 (SY 2015–16) data not available until 2017.