

Pursuant to Executive Order 14091 (February 16, 2023) on  
"Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for  
Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

## 2023 Equity Action Plan Summary

# U.S. Department of Education

## Delivering equity through ED

At the U.S. Department of Education (ED), we believe that our nation's future is brighter when we provide every student in every community with equitable access to an academically rigorous, well-rounded education in a safe and inclusive school. We are answering President Biden's call to prioritize equity across government by working intentionally to ensure our policies, grants, and programs address longstanding disparities in education still faced by underserved students, families, and communities. Our "Raise the Bar: Lead the World" agenda tackles these inequities head on with an emphasis on accelerating learning in our schools, strengthening supports for students' mental health and wellbeing, empowering educators and multilingual learners, and reimagining pathways to college and careers. Together, we can build an education system that ensures all students have opportunities to discover their passion, find their purpose, and realize their potential.

## New strategies to advance equity

The Department has identified five areas of focus for its 2023 Equity Action Plan through visits to communities, listening sessions, and roundtables with people impacted by or interested in these issues, grantee and research community discussions, Tribal consultations, formal written invitations for comment, and more. The Department will continue to engage the public on these action areas, its progress, and next steps throughout the year and beyond.

**1. Improve college access, affordability, and degree completion for underserved students to increase economic mobility.** *Despite gains over the last 15 years, postsecondary attainment rates are still not high enough to meet the need for skilled workers to power our economy, and considerable gaps remain by race and income—with fewer than one-third of Black and only about one-fourth of Hispanic and Native American adults holding postsecondary credentials, compared to over 50% of white adults. Only 15% of students from the lowest-income families earn bachelor’s degrees by age 24. Exacerbated by the pandemic, undergraduate enrollment has declined for all students since 2019, including Native American (-7.9%), Black (-7.3%), Hispanic (-5%), and Pell Grant (-9.9%) students, which threatens our ability to continue to increase postsecondary attainment rates in this country. To address these barriers and others, ED will:*

- Address the barriers that low-income students face in applying for, and receiving, federal student aid (FSA) to increase their enrollment in postsecondary education by [simplifying the Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\) form](#), automatically populating Internal Revenue Service data to help students fill out

the FAFSA and reducing the verification burden on students receiving financial aid through the release of the new FAFSA form in December 2023, and further implementation of the FAFSA Simplification Act in the 2024-25 award year.

- Work with Congress to double the maximum Pell Grant by 2029, work with states to increase the number of states and institutions offering free community college, and continue to work with institutions to increase students' access to basic needs supports such as childcare, housing, and nutrition assistance.
- Ensure successful implementation of the [HBCU PARTNERS Act](#) to strengthen federal support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) across agencies, including helping HBCUs increase capacity to apply for federal programs, and work with states to support funding parity between 1890 land-grant HBCUs and their counterparts to address the [over \\$12 billion in funding disparities](#).
- Continue to lead the [Raise the Bar: Attaining College Excellence & Equity](#) initiative, focused on supporting data-driven improvement in inclusive institutions to improve outcomes for students, including students of color and low-income students. The initiative will include a series of summits, playbooks, and webinars on evidence-based practices that equitably improve completion including data, advising, transfer, and career-relevant learning.
- Continue to protect students from postsecondary institutions or programs that offer little to no financial value by publishing a [low-financial-value watch list](#) of programs and institutions not serving students well, and beginning to implement a new, stronger [gainful-employment rule](#) to help ensure that program graduates

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make more than high school graduates and earn enough to repay their loans.

**2. Implement Maintenance of Equity requirements to ensure historically underserved students have equitable resources for learning recovery.** *State funding formulas are mechanisms that can better target additional education aid to historically underserved students. However, many states' school funding formulae are regressive, with less money going towards students who are historically underserved and are more reliant on state funding. This means that students may not get the proper resources that set them up to succeed. Across states, districts serving students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and other underserved groups tend to receive less state funding than lower poverty districts. For example, an analysis by The Education Trust indicated that high-poverty districts receive, on average, 5% less (about \$800 per student) in combined state and local revenue than low-poverty districts. To address these barriers and others, ED will:*

- Continue to assist with successful implementation of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Maintenance of Equity requirements, which include ensuring a state educational agency (SEA) does not disproportionately reduce per-pupil state funding to high-need local education agencies (LEAs); ensuring a SEA does not reduce per-pupil state funding to the highest-poverty LEAs below their FY 2019 level; ensuring a LEA does not disproportionately reduce state and local per-pupil funding in high-poverty schools; and ensuring a LEA does not disproportionately reduce the number of full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff per pupil in high-poverty schools.
- Allocate the \$122 billion in ARP funds to Title I Schools, with requirements to direct resources to student groups that are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic through evidence-

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-based interventions. ARP dollars are distributed according to the federal Title I formula for states to ensure we are targeting students from low-income backgrounds who were underserved before the pandemic.

- Provide weekly technical assistance calls with SEAs and educational materials, including Frequently Asked Questions, to states in addressing student attendance, academic acceleration, and mental health.
- Collect per-pupil and FTE staff data from states on the LEAs and schools they have identified as serving the highest concentration of students in poverty in FYs 2019-2023. This ensures states interrogate their funding systems and levels through a consistent equity framework, provides states with dedicated technical assistance from Department experts, and allows Department staff to become better acquainted with school funding formulae design, with particular emphasis on states serving high numbers of students in poverty.
- Celebrate progress as states comply with this requirement through a variety of compliance pathways including distributing supplemental payments to high-poverty school districts.

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**3. Address inequities faced by justice-impacted individuals by expanding access to postsecondary learning opportunities that improve outcomes for communities and reduce recidivism rates.**

*Education can have a transformational impact on an individual's life—and education plays a vital role in easing an individual's reentry from jail or prison back into society. Studies have found that a postsecondary education helps justice-impacted people who were formerly incarcerated find jobs upon release, support their families, and contribute positively to their communities. Research also shows that access to education in prison lowers the odds of recidivating by 43 percent and saves taxpayers up to \$5 for every \$1 spent. However, policies have traditionally exacerbated the barriers that incarcerated people face when attempting to continue their education, including inadequate funding, local labor market trends and employer needs, statutory and administrative restrictions, and a lack of incentives and support to promote participation in education. To address these barriers and others, ED will:*

- Launch a new Second Chance Fellows Program by supporting an individual who was formerly incarcerated to work within the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. The selected individual will help to lead the Department's technical assistance efforts to better support institutions of higher education and correctional agencies to provide justice-impacted individuals with the support that they need, pre-and post-release, and will help the Department to be more effective in its work and expand its partnerships with other federal agencies to support learners who are justice-impacted.
- Improve the utilization of technical assistance assets across the agency to improve the quality and number of opportunities that learners who are impacted by the juvenile justice system, as well

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as incarcerated and confined learners with disabilities, have in pursuing adult education, career and technical education (CTE), Registered Apprenticeship programs, and two- and four-year degree programs that are offered in correctional facilities.

- Provide outreach and technical assistance to institutions of higher education, state and local correctional agencies, accreditors, and other relevant stakeholders to explain and facilitate their implementation of the requirements for approval of Prison Education Programs (PEPs) for which individuals who are incarcerated may use Pell Grants beginning July 1, 2023, which will result in new PEPs being offered in states.

**4. Advance equity in and through CTE.** *Disaggregating CTE participation and outcome data by gender, race, ethnicity, and other subgroups illuminates disparities in CTE access and success. Leaders in advancing equity in CTE consider disaggregation an essential foundational tool to advance opportunity. To address these barriers and others, ED will:*

- Promote greater transparency about student participation in CTE. For the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins V), which distributes \$1.4 billion annually to states to support and improve CTE at the secondary and postsecondary levels, the Department collects data from states on student participation in CTE programs within 16 career clusters that are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and “special population” status. These data have previously been disseminated as large static tables that have made it difficult to identify patterns of segregation and underrepresentation by students with different demographic characteristics. The Department will begin to supplement these tables with a dynamic, web-based data

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dashboard that will make clear the extent to which there is underrepresentation in different program areas by race, ethnicity, gender, and “special population” status at the national and state levels.

- Investigate collecting more data to support intersectional analyses. The Department will hold listening sessions with representatives of state agencies, civil rights organizations, and other stakeholders to explore expanding its collection of data on student participation in CTE by career cluster to data that are disaggregated by gender within each major racial and ethnic group and “special population” to support intersectional analyses. Participation data are now disaggregated by gender, race, ethnicity, and “special population” status only.
- Highlight state progress in reducing segregation by gender. Using state data, the Department will identify and then highlight and describe in a Dear Colleague letter the strategies used by states that have achieved relatively high levels of female participation in predominantly male career clusters and high levels of male participation in predominantly female career clusters.
- Share best practices among state partners. The Department will support a webinar series on advancing equity in CTE, spotlighting states that are leading data-driven equity initiatives in CTE; research-based resources on broadening participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) from the National Science Foundation’s INCLUDES Network; information on strategies to increase female participation in Registered Apprenticeships from the Department of Labor; and resources from other federal, state, and local equity leaders and exemplars.



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- Explore new metrics. Perkins V currently has a performance indicator that assesses the extent of participation by males and females in CTE programs that prepare them for occupations that are non-traditional for their gender. In anticipation of the reauthorization of Perkins V in 2025, the Department will explore with representatives of states, civil rights organizations, and other stakeholders options for establishing comparable measures that assess the extent to which students from major racial and ethnic groups are participating in programs that prepare them for occupations in which their races and ethnicities are underrepresented.

**5. Increase mental health resources with an emphasis on underserved communities, from the historic legislation and funding provided by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act.**

*The CDC Youth Risk Behavioral Survey conveyed alarming findings of the prevalence of mental health or substance use disorders among for our nation's youth. Nearly 60% of female students and nearly 70% of LGBTQI+ students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. 30% of females and 45% of LBGTQI+ students seriously considered suicide. The report advances the critical need for schools to expand school-based services and to connect youth and families to community-based sources of care. Schools are a gateway to needed services that otherwise might be inaccessible for many young people. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated certain pre-existing challenges to student wellness and academic success, and the ongoing impacts of the pandemic continue to hinder some state and local recovery efforts. Moreover, suicide was the second leading cause of death among people aged 20-34. Additionally, college students who experience basic needs insecurity also experience significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, planning, or attempt. To address these and other barriers, ED will:*

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- Partner with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to provide technical assistance to SEAs and local education agencies to increase access to Medicaid reimbursement for school-based mental health services.
- Provide [resources](#) to address the effect of sexual harassment and violence on mental health.
- Advance resources and efforts to strategically share information with the K-12 list about [988](#), the Nation's new suicide and crisis care line. Mental health is a major communications priority so the Department will continue to uplift 988 and reframe messaging so that students and families are familiar with available resources.

## What ED accomplished

Below is a sampling of ED's progress delivering on equity and racial justice since its first Equity Action Plan in 2022.

- ***Took actions to promote educational opportunity and diversity in colleges and universities.***  
In the wake of the Supreme Court ruling last summer limiting the ability of colleges to consider an applicant's race in and of itself as a factor in deciding whether to admit an applicant, the Department provided colleges and universities with [resources](#) on what admissions practices and programs remain lawful to ensure diversity, convened a [National Summit on Educational Opportunity](#), and released a [report](#) on strategies for increasing diversity and educational opportunity.
- ***Awarded over \$40 million in [Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs \(GEAR UP\)](#) and TRIO [Upward Bound](#) grants in FY 2023 for programs focused on helping low-income students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities gain access to college.***
- ***Approved an additional \$9 billion in debt relief through fixes to income-drive repayment (IDR) and Public Student Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) programs and granting automatic relief for borrowers with total and permanent disabilities,***

What ED accomplished

***bringing the total approved debt cancellation to \$127 billion for nearly 3.6 million Americans.***

Also rolled out initial implementation of the [Saving on a Valuable Education \(SAVE\) Plan](#) this fall, which is the most affordable repayment plan ever created, and has already enrolled more than 4 million borrowers.

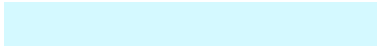
- ***Re-launched the [Raise the Bar: Attaining College Excellence & Equity](#) initiative with a summit this spring focused on data-driven improvement efforts to equitably increase completion rates for students of color and low-income students.***

Published the Notice Inviting Applications (NIA) for the [Postsecondary Student Success Grant Program](#) this summer, which the Department worked to increase from its initial appropriation of \$5 million to \$45 million this year, and renewed [Project Success](#), which provides funding to Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) through FSA in partnership with Guarantee Agencies to increase completion rates and decrease default rates.

- ***Funded 264 grants with \$1 billion in Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) funds to more than 40 states to increase the supply of school-based mental health professionals under the [School-Based Mental Health Services \(SBMH\)](#) and the [Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration \(MHSPD\)](#) grant programs.***

At least 40 states used “high poverty” in their definition of high-needs school. The Department estimates these 5-year grants will

What ED accomplished



result in an increase of 14,000 mental health professionals. In FY 2023, nearly 50 percent of the MHSPD grants include a partnership with MSIs, HBCUs, or Tribal Colleges.

- **Released a [press release](#) reminding schools of their legal obligations to address discrimination and [guiding principles for creating safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair school climates](#).**

Additionally, the Department released a [Resource Document](#) on confronting racial discrimination in student discipline, and a [Toolkit](#) for creating inclusive and nondiscriminatory school environments for LGBTQI+ students.