

A GREAT EDUCATION HELPS TO CREATE LADDERS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL STUDENTS

"America is not a place where chance of birth or circumstance should decide our destiny. And that is why we need to build new ladders of opportunity into the middle class for all who are willing to climb them."

– President Barack Obama, February 12, 2013

Since the time of Horace Mann, America has worked to make its public schools "the great equalizer," ensuring every child would have the opportunity to join a thriving middle class. Too often, however, poverty endures from generation to generation, and schools often struggle to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students. Today, children raised in the bottom fifth of family incomes nationally have a 70 percent chance of remaining below the middle income level as adults. Through "Ladders of Opportunity," the Obama administration will establish comprehensive, coordinated approaches to improving support for the most vulnerable students.

THE NEED

At each stage of their educational lives, students growing up in low-income communities fall behind their peers. They participate in early learning at far lower rates than more affluent students, enter school less ready, and are more likely to drop out. For those students who graduate from high school, they are less likely to go to college, and less likely to graduate. This hurts young people, their families,

and their communities, and damages America's economic strength and international competitiveness. To ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed in college and the workforce, the nation must address the needs of students in low-income communities and low-performing schools, as well as homeless students, children of migrant workers, students in foster care, and other learners who face challenges to success.

THE GOAL

The Obama administration's goal is to build and coordinate systems of support so that America's most vulnerable children succeed from cradle to career, and have a clear path to the middle class.

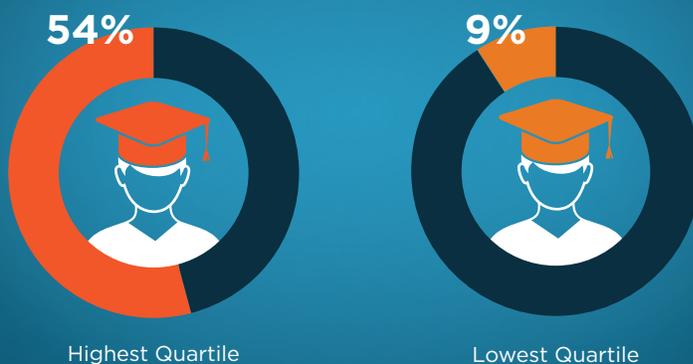
THE PLAN

President Obama has announced a set of proposals that will create ladders of opportunity and help transform some of our highest-poverty communities and grow the middle class. These include a \$75 billion plan to partner with states to expand high-quality preschool to every child, a \$300 million initiative to reinvent America's high schools, and a \$659 million investment to continue the drive to turn around our lowest-performing schools. The President also is proposing a \$240 million increase—to a total of \$300 million—for a major expansion of the Promise Neighborhoods program.

Promise Neighborhoods supports locally-driven efforts to significantly improve the educational and developmental outcomes of children and youth by providing a birth-to-career continuum of rigorous and comprehensive education reforms, effective community services, and strong systems of family and community support—with high-quality schools at the center. Promise Neighborhoods also

THE COLLEGE COMPLETION GAP

Most students from the highest-income quartile complete college, while only nine percent from the lowest-income quartile earn a college degree.



is a central component of the administration's new Promise Zones, which will include up to 20 high-poverty communities. Promise Zones bring together multiple federal agencies—the Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and Justice—to ensure that federal programs and resources are focused intensely on communities with high concentrations of poverty. The federal government will work in partnership with local leaders to address federal, state, and local barriers that could impede progress and help them to access the resources and expertise they need to create jobs, leverage private investments, increase economic activity, reduce violence, and expand educational opportunities. For more, see the Department's crosscut document for several of the administration's investments to help our nation's most vulnerable children and youth succeed in school.



PROGRESS

The U.S. Department of Education is working in close partnership with states and local communities to implement the President's vision for comprehensive education reform, particularly for children and youth who face the greatest barriers to success. States and districts across the country are working to adopt college- and career-ready standards for all students; ensure that the neediest students learn from effective and prepared teachers; turn around their lowest-performing schools; and build data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals about how they can

improve their practices. The administration also has taken steps to dramatically increase college access, affordability, quality and completion, especially for low-income students and first-generation college-goers.

MODELS

Since 1990, the Harlem Children's Zone has provided free support to children and families through new schools, parenting workshops, a pre-school program, after-school programs, and child-oriented health programs. Harlem Children's Zone offers a comprehensive, neighborhood-focused approach with the goal of breaking the cycle of poverty, and has seen major improvements in children's academic performance. For example, Harlem Children's Zone reports that 100 percent of third graders at two of their schools tested at or above grade level in mathematics. The Promise Neighborhoods program builds on successful practices from the Harlem Children's Zone and similar programs. Today, funds from the federal Promise Neighborhoods program are helping 46 communities—from cities like Boston and San Antonio to rural areas like Berea, Kentucky.



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