

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

EQUITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE

2023

EXECUTIVE ORDER 14091



MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

In America, talent can come from anywhere; however, access to educational opportunities—which help our students reach their full potential—is not equitably distributed. At the U.S. Department of Education (Department), we believe education is the foundation of opportunity for all people and the springboard that puts the American Dream within reach.

We are answering President Biden’s call to champion equity across government by working intentionally to address the disparities in educational opportunity and access long faced by underserved students, families, and communities.

As Secretary, I have tasked the Department to assess how our policies, grants and other programs perpetuate opportunity gaps and develop policies to break down these barriers. Such efforts are especially vital at a moment when States, districts, and schools are working to address learning losses that disproportionately impacted underserved students.

This Equity Action Plan reflects our efforts to address persistent opportunity gaps and build a better education system than the one we had before the pandemic and embodies the Department’s “Raise the Bar: Lead the World” agenda. First, thanks to President Biden’s historic investments in public education, including providing \$122 billion in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds for Title I Schools, this plan includes supporting State and local efforts to accelerate learning and provide a comprehensive, rigorous, and academically excellent education to every student. Second, we’re improving learning conditions with new efforts to elevate, grow, and diversify the teaching profession, leveraging the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act’s bold investments to help address chronic absenteeism, better supporting students’ mental health and positive school climates, and advancing robust parent and family engagement in schools. Third, we’re focused on creating opportunities for students of all backgrounds to succeed in our globally competitive society and by investing in multilingual learning and reimagining pathways to college and careers. Finally, we are working to increase college affordability and completion so that all students have access to quality, postsecondary education that leads to careers that provide economic mobility and stability.

Our prosperity at home and competitiveness abroad hinge on our collective will to ensure all children, youth, and adult learners have equitable opportunities to discover their passions, find their purpose, and fulfill their potential. This moment demands that we reject complacency and embrace equity at all levels and work together to realize education’s power to transform lives, strengthen families, uplift communities, increase our competitiveness, and fuel our prosperity for generations to come.

It’s time to Raise the Bar.



Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.
U.S. Secretary of Education

ADVANCING EQUITY THROUGH AGENCY EQUITY MISSION

At the U.S. Department of Education (Department), 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, ensuring access to a comprehensive and well-rounded education, strengthening supports for students’ mental health and wellbeing, empowering educators, expanding access to multilingual learning, 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.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the Department, we believe that high-quality public education—from prekindergarten through postsecondary learning and beyond—lifts communities, unites people around student success, strengthens our democracy, grows our economy, and empowers people to realize their passion and potential. That is why we are committed to ensuring that all students receive an education that enables them to thrive in school and in life.

The Department’s 2023 Equity Action Plan Update reflects efforts to address economic disparities through targeted funding to build and support a more just and equitable educational ecosystem and supports the Department’s “Raise the Bar: Lead the World” initiative –to transform our educational system and unite around what truly works—based on decades of experience and research—to advance educational equity and excellence. Raise the Bar recognizes that our nation has what it takes to continue leading the world—especially when we deliver a comprehensive, rigorous education for every student; boldly improve conditions for learning; and ensure every student has a pathway to multilingualism and to college and careers. When the bar is raised in education, all our nation's students win. Our students will build skills to succeed and reach new heights in the classroom, in their careers, and in their communities, making a positive difference in the world for generations to come.

This plan highlights and builds upon the Department’s programs that foster educational equity such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the federal Pell Grant program, authorized by the Higher Education Act of 1965 as well as the use of the Secretary’s supplemental priorities for discretionary grants, including priorities to promote educational equity and adequacy in resources and opportunity for underserved students and support for entities, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). To inform the development of this plan, the Department has engaged with the key elementary, secondary and postsecondary leaders, parents, innovators, and researchers to seek input and feedback on these strategies.

Additionally, the Department has engaged in equitable exchanges of information through gathering public comments, technical assistance, and hosting listening sessions. The Department is in partnership with State- and local-educational agencies in its commitment to address school attendance, including supporting districts with the highest rates of chronic absenteeism and will continue to increase engagement. The Department has sought to expand more equitable access to engagement in listening sessions and public comment periods by adding new places and channels to communicate these engagement opportunities to a wider audience by utilizing networks that reach racially, economically, and geographically diverse populations. Reflective of the input the Department has received, the Department has included five strategies in its 2023 Equity Action Plan Update that will help lead us to educational equity and excellence:

1. **Improve college access, affordability, and degree completion for underserved students to increase economic mobility.** The Department aims to address barriers to college access, affordability, and completion by supporting colleges to enroll more students from underserved groups, including students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students who are English learners, and others to raise graduation rates and close graduation rate gaps for these student populations, and offer affordable credentials of value that lead to careers offering economic mobility.
2. **Implement Maintenance of Equity requirements to ensure historically underserved students have equitable resources for learning recovery.** The Department aims to ensure that school districts serving historically underserved student groups, including students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students who are English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and others have the resources they need to support learning recovery. This includes the allocation of \$122 billion in ARP funds for Title I schools, and the ARP's Maintenance of Equity requirements to protect high poverty schools from reductions in State and local education funding.
3. **Address inequities faced by justice-impacted individuals by expanding access to postsecondary learning opportunities that improve outcomes for communities and reduce recidivism rates.** The Department aims to ensure that our society is more just and equitable through supporting better opportunities for education during periods of incarceration and post-release. Current initiatives are set to improve the well-being of people who are incarcerated and increase successful reentry outcomes, smoothing pathways to further education, increasing workforce readiness and engagement, and reducing recidivism and preventing crime. This includes the partnerships that exist between institutions of higher education, correctional agencies, accrediting agencies, and community-based organizations.
4. **Advance equity in and through career and technical education.** The Department aims to invest in career and technical education to create new and inclusive pathways to well-paying jobs and upward mobility. This includes leveraging data to promote strategies that reduce segregation by gender, race, and ethnicity in high school career and technical education (CTE) programs.
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 Department aims to address the youth mental health crisis by working with states to support local educational agencies (LEAs) with high rates of poverty through three top priorities: (1) increasing the skills and knowledge of existing school personnel to support the mental health needs of students; (2) increasing the supply of mental health professionals who can work with students; and (3) increasing funding through the Medicaid program to support school health services, including mental health services.

2022 EQUITY ACTION PLAN UPDATE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Department's inaugural [2022 Equity Action Plan](#) focused on five areas: prioritizing college access and college completion; ensuring equitable impact of ARP funding for K-12 students; investing in resources to help advance civil rights; advancing equity in contracting and procurement; and advancing equity in grant process strategies. The Department remains committed to continuing progress in these areas. Select accomplishments include:

1. Prioritized college access and college completion as accessibility, affordability, equitable funding, and verification remain barriers to postsecondary education.
 - **Improved Accessibility:** 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. The Department also awarded over \$40 million in Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) and TRIO Upward Bound grants in FY23 for programs focused on helping low-income students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities gain access to college.
 - **Improved Affordability:** The Department worked to secure a [\\$500 hundred increase in the maximum Pell Grant](#) award, the largest increase in 10 years, in the FY23 Omnibus Appropriations bill and awarded \$22 million in grants to colleges to address students' basic needs, including food, housing, transportation, and childcare earlier this fiscal year. The Department has implemented a number of efforts over the last year to ease repayment and reduce debt burden for student loan borrowers, which disproportionately impacts low-income students and students of color, including recently approving 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, bringing the total approved debt cancellation to \$127 billion for nearly 3.6 million Americans. The Department also rolled out initial implementation of the [SAVE plan](#) last fall, which is the most affordable repayment plan ever created, and has already enrolled more than 4 million borrowers.
 - **Equalized Funding:** The Department worked to secure a [significant increase](#) in appropriations for programs to strengthen HBCUs, TCUs, HSIs and MSIs in the FY23 budget. The Department issued Notices Inviting Applications (NIAs) for and awarded a number of Title III/V grant programs to strengthen HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs, including Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISIs) and HSIs over the last year, and published the NIA for the new \$50 million HBCU, TCU, and MSI Research and Development Infrastructure grant last summer, which aims to provide funds to implement transformational investments in research infrastructure, including research productivity, faculty expertise, graduate programs, physical infrastructure, human capital development, and partnerships leading to increases in external funding.

- **Improved Completion:** The Department 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 NIA for the Postsecondary Student Success Grants 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 HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs through Federal Student Aid ([FSA](#)) in partnership with Guaranty Agencies to increase completion rates and decrease default rates.
 - **Increased Value:** The Department has reinstated the FSA enforcement office, which was closed under the previous Administration, to better protect student loan borrowers by ensuring that schools are adhering to the federal student aid program rules and delivering quality education to students.
- 2. Ensured equitable impact of ARP funding for K-12 students to support student groups most disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, including but not limited to students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, multilingual learners, students experiencing homelessness, and migratory students.**
- The Department implemented [Maintenance of Equity](#) ARP Elementary and Secondary School Relief (ESSER) requirements to ensure historically underserved students have the State and local resources necessary for continued recovery.
 - The Department provided guidance, including weekly technical assistance calls with State educational agencies (SEAs) and educational materials, including frequently asked questions (FAQs), optional reporting templates, and webinars, and other targeted supports to States to promote continued equitable investment of State and local resources in K-12 education in high-poverty communities.
 - The Department continues to work with States to provide technical assistance in using historic investments in Title I, now totaling \$19 billion annually, along with other permissible funding sources to sustain key activities funded by ARP; this includes increasing academic achievement, supporting students' mental health, expanding access to preschool, and strengthening teacher recruitment and retention.
 - The Department continues to collect per-pupil and full time equivalent (FTE) staff data from States on the LEAs and schools they have identified as serving the highest proportion of students in poverty in FY19-23.
- 3. Invested in resources to help advance civil rights to identify inequities in educational opportunities as the country grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on students' academic, social, and emotional development.**

- The Department’s Office for Civil Rights ([OCR](#)) has remained committed to advancing equity for underrepresented and disadvantaged student groups and ensuring compliance with civil rights laws within its authority. OCR released fact sheets addressing [migratory children](#)¹, [unaccompanied children](#), students who are [English learners](#), diversity and inclusion activities [under Title VI](#) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), and [Title VI](#) protection from discrimination based on shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics.
- OCR also released a [Press Release](#) reminding schools of their legal obligations to address discrimination, a [Resource Document](#) on confronting racial discrimination in student discipline, and [Guiding Principles](#) for creating safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair school climates. Additionally, the Department released a [Toolkit](#) for creating inclusive and nondiscriminatory school environments for LGBTQI+ students.

4. Advance Equity Contracting and Procurement to identify opportunities to award higher dollar actions to minority owned small businesses as they received significantly fewer overall dollars in procurement actions.

- The Department’s Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization ([OSDBU](#)) within the Office of Finance and Operations ([OFO](#)) has remained committed to providing small, women-owned, disadvantaged, service-disabled veteran-owned, HUBZone, and all other categories of small businesses with equitable opportunities to participate in both prime and subcontracts.
- The Department’s White House Initiatives on Advancing Educational Equity, Excellence, and Economic Opportunity for [Black Americans](#), [Hispanics](#), [HBCUs](#), and [Native Americans and Strengthening TCUs](#) (Initiatives) and Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships ([CFBNP](#)) has remained committed to ensuring that historically underserved communities in procurement and contract activities receive full and equal participation to minimize barriers. The Initiatives and CFBNP has leveraged public participation, community engagement, and outreach to promote equitable and effective utilization of food vendors, speakers, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, speech-to-text transcribers, and other engagement strategies.
- The Department is committed to creating equitable strategies to engage policy influencers, stakeholders, community leaders, and key decision makers to create more procurement and contract opportunities by mitigating barriers.

¹ This fact sheet uses the term “migratory children” in its common usage, to include children who are highly mobile or have parents or guardians who are highly mobile. The term does not rely on the definition of “migratory children” found at 20 U.S.C. § 6399(3) (defining “migratory children” for the purposes of education programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Migrant Education).

- The Department updated the OSDBU site to maximize access and opportunity for small businesses to participate.
- The Department published a [resource](#) on the Forecast of Department Contract Opportunities to help ensure that small businesses have access to specific opportunities and requirements.
- The contents on the contracts information page from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) have been moved to the a [new location](#) titled “Doing Business with the Department”. The page consolidates information and shares resources related to policies and regulations, contract opportunities, and how the Department equitably supports small businesses.

5. Advanced equity in grant process strategies through funding programs that focused on improving access to high-quality educational opportunities and programs that pursue innovations in teaching and learning with an emphasis on underserved students.

- Designated the \$1 billion from the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) as the [Stronger Connections Grant Program](#). This enables SEAs to competitively award subgrants to high-need LEAs for activities to support safe and healthy students under ESEA section 4108.
- Funded 264 grants with \$1 billion in BSCA funds to more than 40 states to increase the supply of school-based mental health professionals under the [School-Based Mental Health Services Grant](#) and the Mental Health Services Professional Demonstration ([MHSPD Grant Program](#)). At least 40 States used “high poverty” in their definition of high-needs school. The Department estimates these 5-year grants will result in an increase of 14,000 mental health professionals. In FY23, nearly 50 percent of the MHSPD grants include a partnership with MSIs, HBCUs, or Tribal Colleges. In a [letter](#) to State educational agencies, the Department encouraged states to prioritize funding for districts with high rates of poverty and one of the following a high student-to-mental health professional ratio; high rates of chronic absenteeism, exclusionary discipline, and/or referrals to the juvenile justice system, bullying/harassment, community and school violence, or substance abuse; or students who recently experienced a natural disaster or traumatic event.
- The Department issued revised non-regulatory [guidance](#) to inform SEAs, LEAs, institutions of higher education, schools, educators, partner organizations, and other stakeholders on how they can use evidence-based activities, strategies, and interventions to strengthen education investments.
- The Department also published a [training](#) to inform grantees of sourcing requirements for capital improvements authorized by the Build America Buy America Act (BABAA).

STRATEGY #1 – IMPROVE COLLEGE ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY, AND DEGREE COMPLETION FOR UNDERSERVED STUDENTS TO INCREASE ECONOMIC MOBILITY

This strategy aims to address barriers to college access, affordability, and completion by supporting colleges to enroll more students from underserved backgrounds, including students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students who are English learners, and others to raise graduation rates and close graduation rate gaps for these student populations, and offer affordable credentials of value that lead to careers offering economic mobility.

Whole-of-Government Equity Objective(s):

- **Educational Equity:** Pursue educational equity so that our Nation’s schools put every student on a path to success.
- **Economic Justice:** Build a strong, fair, and inclusive workforce and economy.

Collaborating Agencies: We collaborate with the U.S. Department of the Treasury to obtain critical information about students’ income to help them secure financial aid and, after students leave, to help them secure assistance with repaying their loans and to assess the outcomes of programs and institutions. We also collaborate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to increase access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to increase broadband access for eligible college students.

Barriers to Equity: 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 more than 50 percent of white adults.² Only 15 percent of students from the lowest-income families earn bachelor’s degrees by age 24.³

- **Accessibility:** Exacerbated by the pandemic, undergraduate enrollment has declined for all students since 2019, including Native American (-7.9 percent), Black (-7.3 percent), Hispanic (-5 percent) and Pell Grant recipients (-9.9 percent) students, which threatens our ability to continue to increase postsecondary attainment rates in this country.³ Students of color and low-income students face a number of barriers to enrolling in postsecondary education, including lack of sufficient access to counselors and advisors to support them with completing college admissions and financial aid applications.⁴
- **Affordability:** The financial burden of paying for college has increased for students and families as prices have soared and the purchasing power of the Pell Grant has diminished over time, now covering only about 25 percent of average college costs.⁵ As

² [Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the US 2022 Historical Trend Report.pdf](#)

³ [IES NCES Digest of Education Statistics Table](#) and [Trends in Student Aid – College Board Research](#)

⁴ [Research Brief \(ed.gov\)](#)

⁵ [publications-Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the US 2022 Historical Trend Report.pdf \(coenet.org\)](#)

a result, low-income students and students of color face considerably more unmet financial need than their peers; the average net price after grant aid for students from the lowest-income families represents 94 percent of their annual family income compared with 14 percent for students from the highest-income families.⁶ To make up the difference, low-income students and some students of color are more likely to borrow, and face more difficulties repaying their loans especially since they are also more likely to drop-out with debt but no degree.⁷

- **Funding:** Postsecondary institutions serving larger proportions of students of color and low-income students receive less funding per student on average than other institutions, such that four-year institutions serving larger proportions of Black students and Pell Grant recipients only spend half as much on instructional expenditures per student compared to other institutions.⁸ These funding inequalities are due in part to state policies that provide more funding to more selective, research-intensive public institutions than the less-selective public four-year universities and community colleges that students of color and low-income students are more likely to attend. This is also due to the concentration of these student populations in states with lower higher education expenditures overall, particularly in the South.⁹
- **Completion:** While completion rates have increased modestly overall in recent years, about one-third of students starting in four-year institutions do not complete their degrees within six years, and about two-thirds of students starting at two-year institutions do not complete their credentials within three years. Double-digit gaps in completion rates remain between students of color and white students (e.g., a 22-percentage point gap between Black and white students) and low-income and high-income students (e.g., a 22-percentage point gap between Pell Grant recipients and non-recipients) in four-year institutions. Furthermore, completion rates have declined for Black and Hispanic students in the two-year sector, widening gaps with white students.¹⁰ There are a number of obstacles to completion for students of color and low-income students, including insufficient, inaccessible, or uncoordinated academic and financial support services at the under-resourced institutions they are more likely to attend.¹¹
- **Value:** While postsecondary education is critical to achieving economic mobility in this country, people of color, people from low-income circumstances, and women, especially women of color, often earn less than their peers with the same college credential. This is partly due to persistent wage discrimination against these populations in the

⁶ [publications-Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the US 2022 Historical Trend Report.pdf \(coenet.org\)](#)

⁷ [Exploring Equitable Postsecondary Value](#)

⁸ [Exploring Equitable Postsecondary Value](#)

⁹ [Gaps in College Spending Shortchange Students of Color - Center for American Progress](#)

¹⁰ [Graduation rate from first institution attended for first-time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at 4-year postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity, time to completion, sex, control of institution, and percentage of applications accepted: Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2014](#) and [IES NCES Digest of Education Statistics Table and Graduation Rates for Selected Cohorts, 2009–14; Outcome Measures for Cohort Year 2009; Student Financial Aid, Academic Year 2016–17; and Admissions in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2017](#)

¹¹ [NASFAA Thought Force Report Under Resourced Schools](#)

workforce;¹² however, this is also partly due to some colleges and universities not providing a quality, affordable education that leads to improved economic circumstances for their students. For example, nearly 1,800 career training programs are estimated to fail at least one of the two metrics on student debt burdens and earnings gains in the new Gainful Employment rule. The rule's Earnings Premium test will measure whether at least half of program graduates earn more than a typical high school graduate, given that most students attend postsecondary education at least partly to improve their earnings or job prospects.¹³

Evidence Base to Support Strategy:

- **Accessibility:** Research has shown that students who complete the FAFSA are much more likely to enroll (and continue to re-enroll) in college, reducing enrollment “melt” especially during the summer between high school and college.¹⁴ However, surveys have found that 10 percent of students did not fill out a FAFSA because they found the forms too complicated, and that a quarter of Black students and one-third of Hispanic or Latino students who did not file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) didn't have the information needed to finish it. Making it easier to fill out the FAFSA can address one of the key barriers to enrolling in college for students of color and low-income students.¹⁵
- **Affordability:** Research has found that a \$1,000 increase in grant aid can increase college enrollment by 4 percentage points, and that a \$1,000 increase in need-based grant aid can increase college completion by nearly 4 percentage points. Increased grant aid provided by institutions, states, and the federal government can help address barriers to college access and completion for students of color and low-income students.¹⁶
- **Funding:** Research has found that a 10 percent increase in total expenditures can generate an additional 55 bachelor's degrees per year at a typical four-year university, while a decrease in spending can negatively affect degree completion at already underfunded institutions such as community colleges. Equalizing funding for

¹² [Racial, gender wage gaps persist in U.S. despite some progress](#)

¹³ [PINC-03. Educational Attainment- People 18 Years old and Over by Total Money Earnings, Work Experience, Age, Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex](#) and <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/10/10/2023-20385/financial-value-transparency-and-gainful-employment>

¹⁴ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018061.pdf>

¹⁵ [The Role of Simplification and Information in College Decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment | NBER](#)

¹⁶ Dynarski, Susan. 1999. [Does Aid Matter? Measuring the Effects of Student Aid on College Attendance and Completion. National Bureau of Economic Research. Working Paper 7422.](#) [http://www.nber.org/papers/w7422.](http://www.nber.org/papers/w7422)

Castleman, Benjamin and Bridget Terry Long. 2013. [Looking Beyond Enrollment: The Causal Effect of Need-Based Grants on College Access, Persistence, and Graduation.](#)

https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/btl/files/castleman_long_-_looking_beyond_enrollment_-_fsag_paper_7-31-13.pdf

less selective four-year universities and community colleges, especially minority-serving institutions, can boost completion rates, which tend to be lower at these institutions due given the financial barriers facing both students and institutions alike.¹⁷

- **Completion:** Research has shown that comprehensive reform efforts, such as The City University of New York’s (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) model, that provide integrated advising, financial aid, and academic support can increase completion rates by 15-20 percentage points and increase students’ post-college earnings by over 10 percent, including for students of color and low-income students.¹⁸
- **Value:** Research has shown that institutions and programs can improve workforce outcomes for students by intentionally designing college-to-career pathways, contextualizing basic skills into career-aligned courses, providing proactive career advising and navigation support, and leveraging industry partnerships to provide students with work-relevant learning experiences.¹⁹

Actions to Achieve Equity:

To address these barriers, the Department will pursue the following actions:

- **Accessibility:** The Department will address the barriers that low-income students face in applying for, and receiving, federal student aid to increase their enrollment in postsecondary education by [simplifying the FAFSA](#) form, automatically populating Internal Revenue Service (IRS) 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. The Department will also continue to [promote educational opportunity and diversity](#) in colleges and universities in the wake of the recent Supreme Court decision limiting the use of race in and of itself as a factor in college admissions by utilizing the National Center for Education Statistics to consider ways to collect and publish more information on college admissions. And the Department will continue to fund the GEAR UP and TRIO programs focused on supporting low-income, first-generation students and students with disabilities to access college, including support with completing the FAFSA and other college admissions forms.
- **Affordability:** The Department will 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

¹⁷ [The Impact of Price Caps and Spending Cuts on U.S. Postsecondary Attainment](#) as cited in [Gaps in College Spending Shortchange Students of Color](#)

¹⁸ Evaluating Replications of CUNY’s Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) | MDRC From Degrees to Dollars | MDRC

¹⁹ [Designing and Delivering Career, Pathways at Community College](#)

students' access to basic needs supports such as childcare, housing, and nutrition assistance. The Department will also build on our work to date to support student loan borrowers by conducting three [negotiated rulemaking](#) sessions this fall to provide an alternative path to debt relief following the Supreme Court ruling earlier this year that blocked a plan to discharge loan debt, including for former Pell Grant recipients.

- **Funding:** The Department will continue to work to [increase appropriations](#) for Title III/V grant programs to strengthen HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs, implement a [new grant competition](#) to increase research funding and infrastructure in HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs with awards to made in the fall. The Department will also ensure successful implementation of the [HBCU Partners Act](#) to strengthen federal support for HBCUs across agencies, including working with HBCUs to 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 [more than \\$12 billion in funding disparities](#).
- **Completion:** The Department will 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. The initiative will also include developing new Scorecard dashboards using the Department's data to recognize inclusive institutions providing equitable value to students and provide postsecondary leaders with information to further increase their impact. The initiative complements the new [Postsecondary Student Success Grants](#) program to implement evidence-based interventions to increase completion rates, which will be awarded later this year.
- **Value:** The Department will 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 make more than high school graduates and earn enough to repay their loans. These protections are expected to help address the financial barriers that students of color and low-income students face in the workforce after attending institutions that either did not offer quality programs or did not support them through to degree completion yet left them with debt to repay.

Proposed Metrics (Outputs and Outcomes):

Near- to Medium-Term

- **Accessibility:** Release the new simplified FAFSA form in December 2023 with IRS data integration and measure near-term year-over-year increases in the number of students completing the new FAFSA compared with the prior FAFSA.

- **Affordability:** Select and implement new options for debt relief following negotiated rulemaking in October-December 2023, and fully implement the new income-driven repayment plan, SAVE, by June 2024, measuring near-term decreases in undergraduate loan payments and increased participation due to auto enrollment after missed payments.
- **Equitable funding:** Release NIAs for Title III/V grant programs to strengthen HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs (specific grants and timelines TBD pending budget) and implement the new HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs Research Funding grant with awards made by December 2023. Near-term measures include number of technical assistance activities provided to grantees to support implementation of the grants.
- **Completion:** Measure engagement with the Raise the Bar initiative through three more summits for approximately 200 attendees each to be held in fall 2023 (on Student Transfer and Credit Mobility Policies), spring 2024 (Holistic Student Advising and Wraparound Supports) and fall 2024 (Career-Relevant Learning Experiences). Implement Postsecondary Student Success Grant Program with awards by December 2023, and measure near-term implementation through the number of technical assistance activities provided to grantees including on evaluation. Tentatively plan to launch new Scorecard dashboards in summer/fall 2024 with user metrics to be developed.
- **Value:** Released the final Gainful Employment regulations by November 2023 to take effect in July 2024 and measure near-term implementation with the number of institutions/programs successfully complying with the new reporting requirements. The low-value watch list is tentatively expected to launch in 2025 with user metrics to be developed.

Longer-Term

- **Accessibility:** Measure increase in FAFSA completion rates for the overall population, including by students of color and low-income students; approximately 600,000 more low-income students are expected to receive Pell Grant awards with the new FAFSA. Analyze and address disparities in application and award (e.g., FAFSA verification) rates by key demographics including race, income, and gender to further increase federal aid accessibility.
- **Affordability:** Continue to increase uptake of [public service loan forgiveness](#) among eligible borrowers and measure uptake of the new SAVE program by quantifying the [volume of loans covered](#) by SAVE (which is projected to increase between 1-19 percentage points depending on the institutional sector). Analyze and address disparities in PSLF and SAVE application and approval rates by key demographics including race, income, and gender.
- **Funding:** The Department's FY24 budget requests \$1.76 billion – \$429 million over FY23 – to enhance institutional capacity at HBCUs, Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities (TCCUs), MSIs, and low-resourced institutions, including community colleges. This includes \$350 Million for research and development at HBCUs, TCCUs,

MSIs, and \$30 billion over 10 years for tuition subsidies at eligible four-year HBCUs, TCCUs, MSIs.

- **Completion:** Increase commitment and engagement by institutions and States to increase completion rates, close completion gaps, and confer credentials of value through Raise The Bar activities, including engaging nearly 1,000 field leaders through summits from 2022-2024. Generate new evidence and exemplars from the new Postsecondary Student Success Grant program about what works to improve completion, with annual data collections (2024-2028) and evaluations to be published in 2028 and beyond.
- **Value:** Hold institutions accountable under the [Gainful Employment rule](#) for programs that leave students unable to pay their debt or no better off than if they had not obtained the credential, upon implementation in July 2024. Under the new rule, career training programs that fail either of the metrics in a single year will be required to provide warnings to students, and programs that fail the same metric in two out of three consecutive years would lose eligibility to participate in Title IV Federal financial aid programs. About 1,700 career training programs enrolling nearly 700,000 students are projected to fail at least one of the two metrics in the new Gainful Employment rule in a single year.

Public Participation and Community Engagement:

The Department has engaged the field formally through public comments, listening sessions, user surveys and testing, and technical assistance, and informally through proactive outreach to key postsecondary State and institutional leaders, intermediary organizations, and researchers on a regular and on-going basis. We will continue to offer technical assistance, hold summits, and engage in informal outreach to these constituencies on an on-going basis to inform our efforts.

STRATEGY #2 – IMPLEMENT MAINTENANCE OF EQUITY REQUIREMENTS TO ENSURE HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED STUDENTS HAVE EQUITABLE RESOURCES FOR LEARNING RECOVERY.

This strategy aims to ensure that school districts serving historically underserved student groups, including students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students who are English learners, and others, have the resources they need to support learning recovery. More specifically, the Maintenance of Equity provision safeguards high-poverty school districts and schools from disproportionate reductions in per-pupil State and local education aid.

Whole-of-Government Equity Objective(s):

- **Educational equity:** Ensure students from historically underserved groups—including students from low-income backgrounds, students of color, students who are English learners, students with disabilities, migratory students, and students experiencing homelessness—have the resources they need to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic to receive a quality education and live productive lives.

Collaborating Agencies: N/A

Barriers to Equity:

- 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.

Evidence Base to Support Strategy:

- 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 percent less (about \$800 per student) combined State and local revenue than low-poverty districts.
- Following the Great Recession, high-poverty districts experienced an inequitable share of funding and staffing cuts. (Knight, D.S. (2017).²⁰

Actions to Achieve Equity:

To address these barriers, the Department has assisted and will continue to assist with implementation of the ARP Maintenance of Equity requirements. These requirements include:

ensuring an SEA does not disproportionately reduce per-pupil State funding to high-need LEAs; ensuring an SEA does not reduce per-pupil State funding to the highest-poverty LEAs below their FY19 level; ensuring an LEA does not disproportionately reduce State and local per-pupil funding in high-poverty schools; and ensuring an LEA does not disproportionately reduce the number of FTE staff per pupil in high-poverty schools. The Department is assisting with successful implementation by:

- Allocating the \$122 billion in ARP funds to schools to Title I Schools, with requirements to direct resources to student groups who are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic through evidence-based interventions. ARP dollars are distributed according to the federal Title I formula for States to ensure we are serving students from low-income backgrounds who were underserved before the pandemic.
- Providing weekly technical assistance calls with SEAs, educational materials, including FAQs, optional reporting templates and webinars, and other targeted supports to States in addressing student attendance, academic acceleration, and mental health.

²⁰ Are High-Poverty School Districts Disproportionately Impacted by State Funding Cuts?: School Finance Equity Following the Great Recession. Journal of Education Finance 43(2), 169-194.).

- Collecting 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.
- Celebrating progress as States comply with this requirement through a variety of compliance pathways including distributing supplemental payments to high-poverty school districts.

Proposed Metrics (Outputs and Outcomes):

Near- to Medium-Term

- The number of States that have come into compliance with the Maintenance of Equity requirements, thus ensuring that students from historically underserved groups do not experience a disproportionate share of per-pupil spending and FTE staffing cuts.
- The number of LEAs receiving supplemental payments to address disproportionate per-pupil reductions in State aid.

Longer-Term

The number of States requesting technical assistance to inform possible adjustments to funding formulae beyond the immediate two-year requirement.

Public Participation and Community Engagement:

The Department will provide guidance documents and other supports, technical assistance, and office hours to States and engage with State and local leaders on policy implementation.

STRATEGY #3 – ADDRESS INEQUITIES FACED BY JUSTICE IMPACTED INDIVIDUALS BY EXPANDING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THAT IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR COMMUNITIES AND REDUCE RECIDIVISM RATES

Improve the ability of justice-impacted individuals to access and complete education.

This strategy aims to ensure that the Department can contribute to making our society more just and equitable through supporting better opportunities for education during periods of incarceration and post-release. Current initiatives are set to improve the well-being of people who are incarcerated and increase successful reentry outcomes, smoothing pathways to further education, increasing workforce readiness and engagement, and reducing recidivism and preventing crime. This includes the partnerships that exist between institutions of higher education, correctional agencies, accrediting agencies, and community-based organizations.

Whole-of-Government Equity Objective(s):

- **Educational Equity:** Ensure that our Nation’s correctional systems further support the educational and economic mobility of people who are incarcerated or confined and justice-impacted learners.
- **Criminal Justice:** Improve the educational experiences of students involved in the criminal justice system.

Collaborating Agencies: Department of Justice (DOJ)

Barriers to Equity:

- Black, Indigenous, and people of color,²¹ individuals with disabilities,²² and LGBTQI+ persons²³ are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. These trends of criminal justice system involvement and incarceration represent a serious and stubborn set of challenges to equal and equitable participation in high-quality education by all segments of society.
- Educational attainment of people who are incarcerated or confined and justice-impacted learners is incredibly important. Unfortunately, many people in prison lack the education and workforce skills they need to succeed in the labor market. Fifty-eight percent of people who are incarcerated do not complete an education program while in prison.²⁴ Limited-skilled individuals caught up in the incarceration cycle may not be able to access educational programs. Given that education is an important determinant of social and economic well-being,²⁵ it is critical to reconnect this population to educational opportunities. Investments in rehabilitative measures can help facilitate the successful completion of secondary education, as well as transitions to postsecondary education and the labor market.

²¹ Nellis, A. (2021). [The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in State Prisons](https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf). Washington, DC: [The Sentencing Project](https://www.sentencingproject.org/). <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf>. See also, [The Prison Policy Initiative \(2021\)](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/10/08/indigenouspeoplesday/). The U.S. criminal justice system disproportionately hurts Native people: the data, visualized. <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/10/08/indigenouspeoplesday/>

²² Maruschak, L.M., et al. (2021), Disabilities Reported by Prisoners. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/drpspi16st.pdf>

²³ Meyer IH, Flores AR, Stemple L, Romero AP, Wilson BD, Herman JL. [Incarceration Rates and Traits of Sexual Minorities in the United States: National Inmate Survey](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5227944/pdf/AJPH.2016.303576.pdf), 2011-2012. *Am J Public Health*. 2017 Feb;107(2):267-273. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5227944/pdf/AJPH.2016.303576.pdf>

²⁴ National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, U.S. National Supplement: Prison Study 2014, PIAAC 2012/14

²⁵Shankar, J., Ip, E., Khalema, E., Couture, J., Tan, S., Zulla, R. T., & Lam, G. (2013). Education as a social determinant of health: issues facing indigenous and visible minority students in postsecondary education in Western Canada. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 10(9), 3908–3929. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph10093908>

Evidence Base to Support Strategy:

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.²⁶ 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.²⁷

Actions to Achieve Equity:

To address these barriers, the Department 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 as incarcerated and confined learners with disabilities, have in pursuing adult education, career and technical education, Registered Apprenticeship programs, and two- and four-year degree programs that are offered in correctional facilities.

²⁶ Patrick Oakford et al., “Investing in Futures: Economic and Fiscal Benefits of Postsecondary Education in Prison” (Vera Institute of Justice, January 2019), <https://www.vera.org/publications/investing-in-futures-education-in-prison>.; Davis, Lois M., Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, and Susan Turner. Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Post release Outcomes? [A Meta-Analysis of Correctional Education Programs](#) in the United States. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. https://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP67650.html.; Amy Loyd and Amy L. Solomon, U.S. Department of Education; U.S. Department of Justice (2023). [Paving the Path From Prison to College. Newsweek](#). Retrieved from: <https://www.newsweek.com/paving-path-prison-college-opinion-1814094>.

²⁷ Leah Bacon, et al., Laying the Groundwork: How States Can Improve Access to Continued Education for People in the Criminal Justice System (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2020).

- 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 could use Pell Grants beginning July 1, 2023, which will result in new PEPs being offered in states.

Proposed Metrics:

Near- to Medium-Term

- Number of PEPs approved by the Department.
- Number of states that participate in the Integrated Education and Training (IET) as part of their states Adult Education and Family Literacy program to support Corrections Design Camps.

Longer-Term

- Number of PEPs receiving renewed approval by the Department.
- Number of individuals who are incarcerated participating in PEPs eligible for Pell Grants.
- Number of credentials attained by students participating in PEPs.

Public Participation and Community Engagement:

To develop this strategy, the Department consulted extensively with leaders of State and local correctional agencies, institutions of higher education, correctional education professionals, individuals who were formerly incarcerated, and private non-profit entities such as the Vera Institute of Justice, The Education Trust, and Jobs for the Future. The Department will continue to work with these groups and other relevant stakeholders to identify challenges and solutions and to forecast future areas where more support and work is needed.

STRATEGY #4 – ADVANCE EQUITY IN AND THROUGH CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

This strategy aims to leverage data to promote strategies that reduce segregation by gender, race, and ethnicity in high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs.

Whole-of-Government Equity Objective(s):

- **Educational Equity:** Pursue educational equity so that our Nation’s schools put every student on a path to success in careers and community.

- **Economic Justice:** Build a strong, fair, and inclusive workforce and economy to increase the economic and workforce mobility of every student in high-quality career pathways.

Collaborating Agencies: Department of Commerce, Department of Labor (DOL), National Science Foundation (NSF)

Barriers to Equity:

High school CTE programs that are not intentional and systematic in applying equity-centered strategies can perpetuate gaps in student enrollment based on race, gender, and ethnicity. These data show that student enrollment in certain CTE programs mirrors that of the labor market, as evidenced, for example, by the predominance of women in education, health care, and human service programs and men in architecture and construction, manufacturing, and transportation programs.²⁸ This practice can perpetuate occupational segregation²⁹ that suppresses the wages of women³⁰ and people of color³¹ and contributes to the underrepresentation of students of color in programs that prepare individuals for higher-wage, in-demand occupations in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.³²

Evidence Base to Support Strategy:

- 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.³³ As noted in April

²⁸ Giani, M. S. (2019). [Who is the modern CTE student?](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596293.pdf) A descriptive portrait of career and technical education students in Texas. American Enterprise Institute. Retrieved from: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596293.pdf>.

²⁹ Burbank, C., Romanillos, R., and Williams, B. (2021). [Equity in CTE & STEM Root Causes and Strategies: A Call to Action](https://napequity.org/wp-content/uploads/RC_Call-To-Action_FNL_2021-04-24.pdf). PA: NAPE Education Foundation, Inc. Retrieved from: https://napequity.org/wp-content/uploads/RC_Call-To-Action_FNL_2021-04-24.pdf. See also Callahan, J. Ito, M., Campbell Rea, S. et. al. (2019). [Influences on Occupational Identity in Adolescence: A Review of Research and Programs](https://clalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Influences_on_Occupational_Identity_Adolescence.pdf). Irvine, CA: [Connected Learning Alliance](https://clalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Influences_on_Occupational_Identity_Adolescence.pdf). Retrieved from: https://clalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Influences_on_Occupational_Identity_Adolescence.pdf.

³⁰ Levanon, Asaf, Paula England, and Paul Allison, “[Occupational Feminization and Pay: Assessing Causal Dynamics Using 1950-2000 U.S. Census Data](https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-abstract/88/2/865/2235342),” *Social Forces*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (December 2009): 865-91. Retrieved from: <https://academic.oup.com/sf/article-abstract/88/2/865/2235342>.

³¹ Zhavoronkova, M., Kahattar, R., and Brady, M. (2022). [Occupational Segregation in America](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/occupational-segregation-in-america/). Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. Retrieved from: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/occupational-segregation-in-america/>.

³² Leu, K. B., and Arbeit, C. A. (2020). [Differences in High School CTE Coursetaking by Gender and Race/Ethnicity. Career and Technical Education Research](https://doi.org/10.5328/cter45.1.33), 45(1), 33-61. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.5328/cter45.1.33>. See also Hamilton, A.F., Malin, J. and Hackmann, D., 2015. [Racial/Ethnic and Gender Equity Patterns in Illinois High School Career and Technical Education Coursework](https://doi.org/10.21061/jcte.v30i1.712). *Journal of Career and Technical Education*, 30(1), Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.21061/jcte.v30i1.712>.

³³ Kantrov, Ilene & Shields, Katherine. (2020). [Harnessing Data to Drive Equity: How Can Schools Assess and Increase Progress on Equity in CTE Participation? \(Techniques, Vol. 95, No. 3, March 2020, pp. 38-43\)](https://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/data-drive-equity.pdf). Retrieved from: <https://www.edc.org/sites/default/files/data-drive-equity.pdf>. See also Burbank, C., Romanillos, R., and Williams, B. (2021). [Equity in CTE & STEM Root Causes and Strategies: A Call to Action](https://napequity.org/root/). Pennsylvania: NAPE Education Foundation, Inc. Retrieved from: <https://napequity.org/root/>.

2022 report from the [Equitable Data Working Group](#) established by the President in Executive Order 13985, “Equitable data illuminate opportunities for targeted actions that will result in demonstrably improved outcomes for underserved communities.”³⁴

Actions to Achieve Equity:

To address these barriers, the Department 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.³⁵ 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 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. State-reported data show that female and male participation in CTE programs in career clusters in which the other gender predominates varies widely across states, suggesting that the participation of students in programs that are non-traditional for their gender is highly dependent on the state and local context in which CTE programs in these clusters are implemented. 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

³⁴ Equitable Data Working Group (2022), [A Vision for Equitable Data Recommendations from the Equitable Data Working Group](#). Retrieved from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/eo13985-vision-for-equitable-data.pdf>.

³⁵ Section 3(48) of Perkins V defines the term “special populations” to mean “(A) individuals with disabilities; (B) individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including low-income youth and adults; (C) individuals preparing for non-traditional fields; (D) single parents, including single pregnant women; (E) out-of-workforce individuals; (F) English learners; (G) homeless individuals described in section 725 of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a); (H) youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system; and (I) youth with a parent who—(i) is a member of the armed forces (as such term is defined in section 101(a)(4) of title 10, United States Code); and (ii) is on active duty (as such term is defined in section 101(d)(1) of such title.

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 STEM from the National Science Foundation’s INCLUDES Network, information on strategies to increase female participation in Registered Apprenticeships from the DOL, and resources from other federal, state, and local equity leaders and exemplars.
- 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 racial and ethnic groups are participating in programs that prepare them for occupations in which their races and ethnicities are underrepresented.

Proposed Metrics:

Near- to Medium-Term

Percentage of states reporting in the Department’s annual Grantee Satisfaction Survey that the Department has provided technical assistance resources they found useful in advancing equity in CTE.

Longer-Term

- Reductions in the segregation of males and females among CTE career clusters.
- Increases in the representation of students of color among students concentrating their studies in programs in the STEM and IT career clusters.

Public Participation and Community Engagement:

The Department will engage state and local CTE leaders, equity advocates, and civil rights organizations, and other stakeholders in implementing its action steps and exploring new areas where the Department can provide leadership to advance equity in CTE.

STRATEGY #5 – INCREASE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES WITH AN EMPHASIS ON UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES, FROM THE HISTORIC LEGISLATION AND FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE BIPARTISAN SAFER COMMUNITIES ACT.

This strategy aims to address the youth mental health crisis through three top priorities: (1) increasing the skills and knowledge of existing school personnel to support the mental health

needs of students; (2) increasing the supply of mental health professionals who can work with students; and (3) increasing funding through the Medicaid program to support school health services, including mental health services.

Whole-of-Government Equity Objective(s):

- **Educational Equity:** Pursue educational equity so that our Nation’s schools put every student on a path to success.
- **Health Equity:** Advance equity in health, including mental and behavioral health and well-being, and deliver an equitable response to the COVID-19 pandemic in schools.

Collaborating Agencies: Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

Barriers to Equity:

The Kaiser Family Foundation highlights several factors that limit schools' current ability to effectively provide mental health services to students.³⁶ These factors include a shortage of mental health professionals, limited supply of school-based mental health services, and insufficient funding for school-based mental health services.

Evidence Base to Support the Strategy:

- This strategy is aligned with findings of the [National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#) released in January by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the [Youth Risk Behavioral Survey](#) released this past February by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). 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 percent of LGBTQI+ students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. Thirty (30) percent of females and 45 percent 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ Moreover, suicide was the second

³⁶ Nirmita Panchal, Cynthia Cox, Robin Rudowitz, “[The Landscape of School-Based Mental Health Services.](#)” [Kaiser family Foundation, September 6, 2022](#), <https://www.kff.org/other/issue-brief/the-landscape-of-school-based-mental-health-services/>

³⁷ [Centers for Disease and Prevention, Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Data Summary and Trends Report 2011- 2021](#), https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/yrbs_data_summary_and_trends.htm

³⁸ U.S. Department of Education. “Education in a Pandemic: Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America’s Students.” Retrieved from: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf>

leading cause of death among people aged 20-34.³⁹ Additionally, college students who experience basic needs insecurity also experience significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, planning, or attempt.⁴⁰

Actions to Achieve Equity:

To address these barriers, the Department will:

- Partner with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to provide technical assistance to SEAs and LEAs 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 K-12 stakeholders about 988, the Nation’s new suicide and crisis care line. Mental health is a major communications priority so the Department will continue to promote 988 and reframe messaging so that students and families are familiar with available resources.

Proposed Metrics:

Near- to Medium-Term

The Medicaid Budget and Expenditure System (MBES) expenditures reports for 2021 show more than \$5.98 billion in total computable payments for school-based health care services to Medicaid students. This report will be used to determine growth in school-based health services supported by the Medicaid program.

Longer-Term

14,000 new school-based mental health professionals to be trained by 2028 through the 5-year grants funded in FY 2023.

Public Participation and Community Engagement:

- The Department presented at the following conferences this fall; [the National Alliance of Medicaid in Education](#) (NAME); [the National Association of State Directors of Special Education](#) (NASDSE); and the [Social and Emotional Learning Exchange](#) hosted by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

³⁹ [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Facts About Suicide.](https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html) <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/facts/index.html>

⁴⁰ Katharine M. Broton, Milad Mohebali, Mitchell D. Lingo. [Basic Needs Insecurity and Mental Health: Community College Students’ Dual Challenges and Use of Social Support. 2022.](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00915521221111460) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00915521221111460>

- The Department has engaged the field formally through public comments, the Stronger Connections Webinar Series, and the BSCA Grant Program [FAQs](#), and informally through proactive outreach to key stakeholders such as local and State and leaders, mental health organizations, and researchers on a regular and on-going basis.