

Message From the Secretary

November 16, 2023



The civil rights leader Benjamin Mays once said, “The tragedy of life is often not in our failure, but rather in our complacency; not in our doing too much, but rather in our doing too little.”

While we had much to celebrate over fiscal year 2023, including unprecedented federal resources for education and important gains in recovering academic losses following the pandemic, there is room for even more progress and growth in fiscal year 2024. I have said that in our nation’s effort to move from pandemic recovery to thriving, the biggest barrier to our progress is complacency. Across America, we need the collective will to raise the bar for our students and our schools and the ambition to realize our nation’s full potential to lead the world.

At the U.S. Department of Education, we know there is work to do to expand equity and excellence throughout our nation’s education system and for every learner.

That’s why we are laser-focused on our visionary initiative, “Raise the Bar: Lead the World.” This plan represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to revolutionize our nation’s education system, from preschool through college and preparation for careers and lifelong learning. It is a bold agenda with an even bolder purpose: to reverse decades of neglect and underinvestment in critical support for our nation’s public school classrooms, colleges, students, and educators so America can continue leading the world in education and propel learners of every age and all walks of life to never-before-seen levels of success.

This work has never been more urgent.

Our plan consists of four key areas: achieving academic excellence, improving learning conditions, and preparing students for global competitiveness, and increasing college affordability and completion.

We believe that if we invest in these building blocks of success, we will elevate our nation’s educational system and student outcomes to levels not seen in decades. For too long, we saw chronic underinvestment in education, much to the detriment of students, families, teachers, communities, and our nation’s future. When compared to other developed countries, students in the United States continue to underperform academically. What’s more, teachers remain underpaid, and in far too many instances, overworked and underappreciated with current system-wide conditions failing to attract a new generation of talented educators to the profession. We have an opportunity and an obligation—with a sense of urgency—to invest in what we know works to improve teaching and learning across the country.

As a former teacher and school principal, I have always believed and *seen with my own eyes* the transformative power of education to change lives. Raise the Bar has the power to do that and more. We owe it to the students, families, and educators of today and the leaders of tomorrow to see this work through.

The following pages of this report highlight accomplishments from this past year, examine how the Department of Education is executing our ambitious plan, and outline the ways President Biden's fiscal year 2024 budget proposal supports the advancement of educational equity and progress.

Through the first pillar of Raise the Bar, *achieving academic excellence*, the Department is supporting state and local leaders to accelerate students' learning and deliver a comprehensive, rigorous educational experience for every student. We're working to ensure states and districts continue to deploy pandemic relief funds to improve student learning. These efforts build upon Congress' appropriation of more than \$190 billion (including funding provided through the American Rescue Plan) to help schools reopen and address learning loss.

The ARP investments allowed states and districts to hire additional teachers, school counselors, and other vital school professionals, offer tutoring and one-on-one support to students, and extend learning time through high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs.

I'm encouraged that these historic investments and resources are showing positive results. Several states have returned to pre-pandemic achievement levels on state and literacy assessments, and we're seeing promising results for the United States on international reading assessments. To date, schools have committed nearly 60 percent of their ARP funds to address lost learning time and accelerate academic recovery.

At the Department, we also are continuing to offer technical assistance, issue guidance, and hold convenings with educators, parents and families, communities, and other stakeholders to ensure they have the necessary tools and resources to improve students' academic outcomes and tackle disparities in educational opportunity.

To reverse decades of underperformance fueled by educational underinvestment and neglect, and to Raise the Bar for all students, we'll need continued, collaborative action at every level.

That's why President Biden's fiscal year 2024 budget calls for \$20.5 billion for the federal Title I program to help states and districts close opportunity gaps and support academic recovery. The budget also includes \$500 million to expand high-quality preschool for children eligible to attend Title I schools and an investment of an additional \$2.7 billion for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including increasing funding for preschool programs, early intervention services, and recruiting special education personnel.

Raise the Bar's second pillar focuses on *improving learning conditions for every student*. Part of that effort includes ensuring that all children have the opportunity to be taught by excellent educators. And one of our most urgent priorities to fulfill that goal is to ensure our nation's teachers receive equitable pay and ample opportunities for professional development.

Toward that end, in February of this year, the Department of Education announced \$18 million for the inaugural Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program to address educator shortages, increase high-quality teacher preparation programs, and strengthen the pipeline for educators of color. The program provides funding to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) to recruit and prepare a new generation of diverse and talented individuals for the teaching profession.

In a spirit of intentional collaboration, the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor have joined efforts to invest in teacher preparation programs and expand Registered Apprenticeships for educators. The Department of Education allocated more than \$27 million to support educator preparation programs with \$65 million from the Department of Labor to develop and scale apprenticeship programs across 45 states. Both departments have worked tirelessly to plan, launch, promote, and expand apprenticeship programs and support teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention. Thanks to these efforts, our nation went from just two states with registered apprenticeship programs for teachers to 25 in two years.

In addition to accelerating learning and supporting our educators, the mental health and well-being of our students remains a top priority. I'm proud that the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act allocates \$2 billion to state educational agencies for Stronger Connections Grants that help schools provide all students with safe and supportive environments for learning that are critical for their success, School-Based Mental Health Services grants to increase the capacity of school-based mental health service providers, and Mental Health Services Professional Development Grants to help states, school districts, and institutions of higher education train school-based mental health services providers for employment in schools and districts.

At the Department, we believe that the best way to achieve academic excellence and advance educational equity across the country is to ensure students from all backgrounds and in every community have access to robust academic resources, programs, and opportunities. That's why I'm proud that the fiscal year 2024 budget also allocates \$38 million to significantly strengthen our Office for Civil Rights and recruit additional personnel to safeguard the civil rights of students in schools and on college campuses. I am heartened that funding is expected to create more than 150 new, critical positions for this work.

Additionally, the Department is continuing our robust support for school communities. Under the Full-Service Community Schools program, we are providing \$150 million to coordinate services for students and families, such as mental health supports, early learning programs and robust parent engagement strategies, nutrition services, and high-quality tutoring. In fact, in January 2023, the Department funded the largest cohort of grantees in the history of this program. And through \$89 million in the Promise Neighborhoods program, we are supporting learners from cradle to career in underserved communities.

Through our third Raise the Bar pillar, *creating pathways for global engagement*, we are focused on reimagining college and career pathways and providing more and better opportunities for our students to become multilingual.

For example, through our Unlocking Career Success initiative, we are working with states and districts to develop more accessible, flexible, and innovative pathways for students to contribute to the global workforce by increasing access to dual enrollment, work-based learning, workforce credentials, and career advising and navigation in high school.

The Department has created a suite of tools and resources to complement our pathways work. We've launched a new website and organized multiple forums to gather input directly from stakeholders across the country, and we are catalyzing and mobilizing cross-sector collaboration that transforms our nation's high schools to become more student-centered, community-engaged, and career-connected.

This spring, the Department also helped launch the Career Z Challenge, awarding \$2.5 million for work-based learning innovation and opportunities. We also unveiled the Your Place in Space Challenge, which invites high school students to submit designs for a product or service to contribute to space missions and exploration—opening students’ minds up to the career possibilities that exist in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields.

Importantly, in August, the Department launched the Career Connected High School Grant program, which will award \$25 million to local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, and employers to pilot strategies that improve postsecondary education and career outcomes for students.

At the Department, we also recognize that multilingualism is a superpower that provides students with advantages in our global society and economy—and that unless we act with urgency to provide pathways to multilingualism for every student and to support the 5 million English learners in our public schools, we will miss an opportunity to set our students up for success. That’s why, through our pathways work, we are proud to support states to develop and improve English Development Programs and Multilingual Language Programs.

Furthering our commitment to multilingual education, we’ve also invested \$890 million in Title III grants to all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico to support Language Instructional Educational Programs that empower our English learners and immigrant youth. That’s a \$93 million increase since the Biden-Harris Administration took office.

We are also continuing robust oversight of school’s obligations to serve English learners under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and taking affirmative steps to address language barriers and improve meaningful participation for every student in every school.

Additionally, we are proactively highlighting states and districts that are implementing evidence-based dual language programs and seals of biliteracy. Similarly, our support of grow-your-own initiatives, teacher residencies, graduate fellowships, and Augustus F. Hawkins grants will continue to promote a more multilingual educator workforce. Importantly, we also are making significant investments—including \$8 million in grants this summer—to promote and preserve Native languages and support Native teachers.

Through our final Raise the Bar pillar, we are working to make college more affordable and inclusive, and investing in student success.

We continue to increase funds for the Pell Grant program. The fiscal year 2024 budget proposes increasing the Pell Grant to \$8,215, with a commitment to doubling the maximum award by 2029.

The fiscal year 2024 budget also recognizes that more resources are urgently needed to enhance and sustain institutional capacity at community colleges, HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs and calls for free community colleges, requesting \$90 billion over 10 years. To jumpstart these efforts, the Biden-Harris administration is requesting \$500 million in discretionary funding to partner with states where free community college can lead to good jobs in high-demand industries.

The fiscal year 2024 budget also makes significant investments in the Department’s Office of Federal Student Aid, providing \$2.7 billion to support student loan borrowers, including critical improvements to financial aid program administration and student loan servicing.

Importantly, the Department has been relentlessly focused on fixing the nation's broken student loan system. Due to fixes to income-driven repayment, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program, and other actions the Department has taken, \$127 billion in debt relief has been provided for nearly 3.6 million borrowers. This represents more student loan forgiveness than has been granted under any other presidential administration in history.

Working to make college more affordable puts social mobility and the American Dream within reach—which benefits not only individuals, but also communities, our economy, and our entire country.

In addition to funding, resources, and our work on student debt, we're convening changemakers to recognize and promote institutions of higher education with demonstrated success, share promising practices for improving student outcomes, and support leaders who are raising the bar on college excellence and equity.

For example, over this last year, the Department convened a second Raise the Bar: College Excellence and Equity Summit, which featured higher education leaders sharing their data-driven strategies to reduce equity gaps and bolster graduation rates with the longer-term goal of systematizing and scaling programs that help deliver equitable outcomes for every student who wants a college education.

We know what works in education. If we marshal the collective will, our nation's 65 million students will realize their full potential to lead the world. Through our Raise the Bar efforts and investments, we recognize that our nation already has what it takes to get there.

For more on our plan and how we can continue to advance our shared priorities, visit: <https://www.ed.gov/raisethebar/>.

The Department continues to make stewardship of taxpayer funds and financial integrity top priorities. The performance data included and assessed in this Agency Financial Report are complete and reliable in accordance with federal requirements. The financial report includes information and assurances about the Department's financial management systems and controls as well as control opportunities noted by the Department. Similarly, the Department's related Annual Performance Report and Annual Performance Plan (Report and Plan) provides information on the overall performance of the Department as a federal agency. Each year this Report and Plan accompany the Department's annual budget submission and links performance goals with resources for achieving targeted levels of performance.

The internal control report identified one material weakness, "Controls Over the Relevance and Reliability of Underlying Data Used in Credit Reform Re-Estimates Need Improvement." This year, the independent auditor issued a disclaimer of opinion on the Department's FY 2023 balance sheet. The Department will develop and implement additional corrective action strategies to address the issues highlighted in the FY 2023 report. We remain committed to continually evaluating our programs, current business processes, and our internal controls for improvement opportunities in FY 2024 and beyond.

As we did in fiscal year 2023, we will keep working to ensure the future for our students, and our nation, is bright.



Miguel A. Cardona, Ed.D.

U.S. Secretary of Education