

Department of Education Announces Actions to Advance Equity in Education Jun 9, 2021

Today, building on the American Rescue Plan's historic funding for schools as drivers of equity and opportunity, the Department of Education announced a series of actions it is taking to advance equity in education and ensure schools across the nation are serving all students. Actions include the release of a report highlighting the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on K-12 and postsecondary students in underserved communities, the release of guidance to implement an historic provision within the American Rescue Plan that will ensure that the school districts with the highest poverty do not receive any per-pupil decrease in state funding below their pre-pandemic levels, and an Equity Summit Series the Department will be holding over the coming months. The actions aim to not only address inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but encourage schools more broadly to reimagine their education systems and practices and infuse equity into all of their work, so that every student has access to rigorous, culturally responsive, and fulfilling instruction. Today's announcements are part of the Department's ongoing efforts to implement President Biden's Day One Executive Order to advance racial equity and support for underserved communities across the federal government and build our schools and communities back better than before the pandemic.

"This is our moment as educators and as leaders to transform our education systems so they are truly serving all of our nation's students," said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. "While COVID-19 has worsened many inequities in our schools and communities, we know that even before the pandemic, a high-quality education was out of reach for too many of our nation's students and families. Our mission at the Department is to safely reopen schools for in-person learning, dramatically increase investments in communities that for too long have been furthest from opportunity, and reimagine our schools so that all students have their needs met. We must take bold action together to ensure our nation's schools are defined not by disparities, but by equity and opportunity for all."

The actions include:

The Department will launch an Equity Summit Series beginning on June 22nd

The Educational Equity Summit Series will launch [virtually](#) with the first event on June 22nd and will focus on how, as schools and campuses continue to reopen and welcome students back for in-person instruction, they must not return to the status quo. The first installment of the series will explore how schools and communities can reimagine our school systems so that every student has a voice in their school and classroom, particularly students from underserved communities, including communities of color, students with disabilities, and multilingual learners. The event will also feature discussions on how all students can access a high-quality education responsive to their needs, and how schools can create more culturally and linguistically responsive and inclusive learning environments for all students. The first installment will feature remarks from Department leaders, panel discussions focused on evidence-based practices and promising strategies for building equitable and inclusive environments in our schools, and insights from leaders working to make equitable and inclusive schools a reality. Participants include Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten, Dean of the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education Pedro Noguera, 2021 School Counselor of the Year Olivia Carter, and others. Interested participants can register to attend the Summit [here](#). Information about additional installments in the series will be announced later this summer.

The Department released a new report highlighting the disparate impacts COVID-19 has had on underserved communities

The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights released a [new report today](#) responding to the President's Executive Order on Supporting the Reopening and Continuing Operation of Schools and Early Childhood Education Providers. The report highlights how COVID-19 threatens to deepen divides in educational opportunity across our nation's classrooms and campuses if the pandemic's disparate impacts are not adequately addressed. The report explores how the impacts of the pandemic are falling disproportionately on students who went into the pandemic with the fewest educational opportunities, many of whom are from marginalized and underserved communities. Observations from the report include impacts of the pandemic on both K-12 and postsecondary education students, including how COVID-19 has deepened pre-pandemic disparities in access and opportunities facing students of color, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students, with significant impacts on their learning. The report also discusses how many students have lost access to mental health services during the pandemic, with early research showing disparities in negative mental-health impacts based on students' race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ identity, and other factors. Additionally, the report includes data discussing how the pandemic has caused heightened risk of harassment, discrimination, and other harms for Asian American and Pacific Islander students, and recognizes that the pandemic may have put students at heightened risk of sexual harassment, abuse and violence - particularly girls, women, and students who are transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming.

The Department is fully committed to confronting these impacts, which threaten to affect students' access to educational opportunities, particularly those who already face unequal access to quality education prior to the pandemic. The Educational Equity Summit Series will aim to identify evidence-based practices and promising strategies to address these disparities and explore ways states, schools, and communities can invest the unprecedented resources provided by the American Rescue Plan and proposed in President Biden's budget, the American Jobs Plan, and the American Families Plan to help close these gaps and support underserved students.

The Department released new guidance to support states as they invest American Rescue Plan funds in communities and schools with the least access to educational opportunity

Many students in underserved communities are facing multiple traumas as a result of the pandemic, and our states and districts must be responsive by targeting resources in schools and communities with the fewest resources. Last month, the Department [released guidance](#) on how states and school districts can use American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds and other pandemic recovery funds to advance educational equity in COVID-19 response. The guidance includes specific ways that schools can address the social, emotional, mental health, and academic impact of lost instructional time and support multilingual learners, students with disabilities, students experiencing homelessness, children and youth in foster care, migratory students, and other underserved students.

Today, the Department released its [Maintenance of Equity guidance](#) to implement an important provision of the American Rescue Plan as the nation continues to respond to the impact of COVID-19. For the first time ever, these requirements will ensure that school districts and schools serving a large share of students from low-income backgrounds will not experience disproportionate budget cuts—and that the school districts with the highest poverty do not receive any decrease in state per-pupil funding below their pre-pandemic level. In addition, high-poverty schools will also be protected from

disproportionate cuts to staffing. These provisions are critically important, as schools and school districts serving the greatest shares of students from low-income backgrounds have historically been underfunded and are more reliant on state funding than schools and school districts with lower concentrations of underserved students.

President Biden's budget proposes historic investments in Title I to address entrenched disparities in education systems

In addition to the historic resources the American Rescue Plan is providing states to address inequities made worse by the pandemic, President Biden's fiscal year 2022 budget proposes \$36.5 billion in formula grants for Title I schools, a \$20 billion increase from the 2021 enacted level. This investment will enable states and communities to reinvest in historically under-resourced schools and reimagine their education systems so all students can access high-quality education and have the support they need to succeed. The investment will provide meaningful incentives for states to examine and address inequities in school funding systems, as well as ensure teachers at Title I schools are paid competitively, provide equitable access to rigorous coursework, and increase access to high-quality preschool. States would be required to collect and report data analyzing gaps in these key foundational areas, and work with their districts to make plans to address them. As we look beyond recovery from the pandemic, we must ensure resources and support are reaching communities that have been most under-resourced, and this historic proposal will help make more equitable schools a reality for more students. For additional detail on this proposal, including the need for urgent action in these areas, please see the [President's FY 2022 Budget request](#).