



Our Role & Misson

The U.S. Department of Education is the agency of the federal government that establishes policy for, administers and coordinates most federal assistance to education. It assists the president in executing his education policies for the nation and in implementing laws enacted by Congress.



Mission of the Department of Education

The Department of Education helps students of all ages accomplish greatness by providing support, opportunities and equal access to learning.

We inspire students to accomplish their goals so they can achieve educational excellence and global competitiveness.

The U.S. Department of Education fulfills its purposes as declared by Congress by engaging in four main pillars of focus.



ESTABLISH AND ADMINISTER FINANCIAL AID FOR EDUCATION
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IDENTIFY MAJOR EDUCATIONAL ISSUES AND RECOMMENDS REFORM
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1098-E Tax Form

Resources by State



The Department of Education establishes policies relating to federal financial aid for education, administers distribution of those funds, and monitors their use.

Like most federal activities, Department of Education programs must first be authorized by Congress through legislation that is signed into law by the president. The Department then develops regulations that determine exactly how a program will be operated. These regulations are published in the Federal Register for public comment and reviewed by Congress. Congress must also vote to appropriate the money that each program will receive annually.

The Department distributes financial aid to eligible applicants throughout the nation for early childhood, elementary, secondary and postsecondary education programs. Federal programs benefit all students, and special programs exist to serve individuals with disabilities, those who live in poverty, American Indians, immigrants and those with limited English proficiency. Federal funds for education are distributed using three methods: a set formula, competition and financial need determination.

By formula: Some programs follow a formula prescribed in the bill approved by Congress authorizing a program. Such a program might be set up so that qualified agencies receive an amount of money that is determined by the number of students meeting certain criteria in that state or school district. For example, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Department allocates money to the states to help them provide a free, appropriate public education for children with disabilities based on the number of children reported by each state as having special developmental or educational needs.

By competition: Federal money also is awarded on the merit of competitive applications. Applicants are ranked in order of merit and the most qualified applications are awarded funds. Those eligible for such funding include state and local education agencies or school districts; education partnerships (programs jointly sponsored by education institutions and the private sector); colleges and universities; individual researchers; and community-based organizations such as nonprofit agencies.

By financial need determination: The third basis on which federal money is awarded is financial need. For example, postsecondary students applying for grants, loans and fellowships must prove family financial need according to established guidelines.



The Department of Education collects data and oversees research on America's schools, and disseminates this information to Congress, educators, and the public.

The Department oversees research on most aspects of education; collects data on trends; and gathers information to help identify best practices in education, including teaching techniques that work. Employees of the Department, as well as contractors and grant recipients, carry out the research.

Research findings and statistics are disseminated to educators, policymakers, parents, researchers and the general public in the form of reports and publications—both printed and online. Recent publications have covered the latest national assessments of educational progress in a variety of subject areas, innovations in education, the condition of education in America, annual reports on a variety of federal education programs, how to improve mathematics education and many other pertinent education topics. In a typical year, the Department publishes hundreds of publications and millions of copies to meet the public's demand for information.



The Department of Education identifies the major issues and problems in education and focuses national attention on them.

The Department makes recommendations for education reform. The secretary advises the president in this regard and leads the Department in implementing the president's education policies in many arenas—from the preparation of legislative proposals for Congress to decisions about education research priorities. Of vital importance in formulating and implementing policies is the Department's close work with a variety of advisory groups and organizations composed of citizens from all walks of life who have an interest and expertise in education and who provide significant ideas on key policies and programs.

In addition, the secretary brings national attention to education issues by giving speeches, writing articles for publication, addressing the media and making personal appearances in schools and other education settings. The Department further highlights education issues by sponsoring and participating in national conferences and other similar activities, such as the Blue Ribbon Schools and Presidential Scholars award programs, the Teaching Ambassador Fellows Program, the Student Art Exhibit Program, and special events and ceremonies to honor teachers or students.



The Department of Education enforces federal statutes prohibiting discrimination in programs and activities receiving federal funds, and ensures equal access to education for every individual.

The Department enforces five civil rights statutes to ensure equal educational opportunity for all students, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, disability or age. These laws extend to all state education agencies, elementary and secondary school systems, colleges and universities, vocational schools, proprietary schools, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, libraries and museums, and other entities that receive U.S. Department of Education funds. Specific examples of those whose rights are protected include homeless children with disabilities, individuals with limited English proficiency, women and girls in athletic programs, and people in need of vocational rehabilitation.

Responsibilities outside of the Department of Education

In creating the Department of Education, Congress specified that:

No provision of a program administered by the Secretary or by any other officer of the Department shall be construed to authorize the Secretary or any such officer to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school, or school system, over any accrediting agency or association, or over the selection or content of library resources, textbooks, or other instructional materials by any educational institution or school system, except to the extent authorized by law.

(SECTION 103[B], PUBLIC LAW 96-88)

The Department does not:

- establish schools and colleges
- develop curricula
- set requirements for enrollment and graduation
- determine state education standards
- develop or implement testing to measure whether states are meeting their education standards*

These responsibilities are handled by the **various states and districts**, as well as by **public and private organizations** of all kinds, **not by the U.S. Department of Education**.

*SINCE 1969, THE DEPARTMENT'S NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS HAS CONDUCTED THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS (NAEP). IT IS THE ONLY NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE AND CONTINUING ASSESSMENT OF WHAT AMERICAN STUDENTS KNOW AND CAN DO IN MAJOR ACADEMIC SUBJECTS AND PROVIDES A WEALTH OF DATA ABOUT THE CONDITION OF EDUCATION IN THE U.S. NAEP IS NOT THE SAME AS TESTING DONE BY EACH STATE TO MEASURE HOW WELL ITS STUDENTS MEET THE STATE'S ACADEMIC STANDARDS; HOWEVER, A LARGE DISCREPANCY BETWEEN CHILDREN'S PROFICIENCY ON A STATE'S TEST AND THEIR PERFORMANCE ON NAEP MAY SUGGEST THE STATE NEEDS TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT ITS STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS AND CONSIDER MAKING IMPROVEMENTS.



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EDUCATION. ACHIEVEMENT. EXCELLENCE.

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