



**RAISE THE
BAR**

LEAD THE WORLD



September 2023

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The U.S. Department of Education is committed to ensuring that all students receive an education that prepares them to fulfill their promise and follow their dreams. Education opens doors, and we have an obligation to make sure it does so for all students.

That's why the Department remains focused on our agenda in prekindergarten through twelfth grade and higher education, called **"Raise the Bar: Lead the World."**

We know what works in education. What we need is 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. To do this, the Department is supporting state and local leaders to expand academic excellence by accelerating students' learning and delivering a comprehensive, rigorous educational experience for every student. We also are partnering with state and local leaders to boldly improve learning conditions by enhancing mental health supports for students and growing a well-trained,

well-supported, and diverse educator workforce. And we are helping to prepare all our nation's students for global competitiveness by increasing pathways to multilingualism, and to college and careers.

Many of the elements of this agenda already are being modeled brilliantly by districts and schools in every state. The key now is to lift up those practices and make sure pockets of excellence in some places are transformed into systems of success in all places. The Department is a strong partner in this work—from our technical assistance to our grant funding and resources to our guidance. We are laser-focused on supporting the well-being of America's 65 million students through the opportunities that a quality education provides.

And in the higher education space, we are working hard with state leaders to help students better afford and enroll in college and earn valuable degrees. We're also implementing the most affordable student loan repayment plan under any administration in history and fixing the nation's broken student loan system. We've already made incredible progress.

To get an even better picture of our efforts, I hope you'll read the following pages, and if you're interested in learning more about our full plan, visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar.

Now, together, let's reimagine education and raise the bar for our students across America!

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

KEY FOCUS AREAS: **P-12 EDUCATION**

Over the next year and beyond, the Department will focus on providing tools, resources, and assistance to states, districts, and schools to advance the focus areas below, which are connected to strategies aimed at promoting academic excellence and wellness for every learner and supporting the teaching profession.

U.S. Department of Education



ACHIEVE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

- » Accelerate learning for every student
- » Deliver a comprehensive and rigorous education for every student

U.S. Department of Education



BOLDLY IMPROVE LEARNING CONDITIONS

- » Invest in every student's mental health and well-being
- » Eliminate the educator shortage for every school

KEY FOCUS AREAS: **P-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION**

Additionally, the Department will focus on strategies to better prepare our nation for global competitiveness and to improve access to and affordability in higher education, with an emphasis on advancing inclusive student success, fixing a broken student loan system, and making investments to scale what works.

U.S. Department of Education



CREATE PATHWAYS FOR GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

- » Ensure every student has a pathway to college and a career
- » Provide every student with a pathway to multilingualism

U.S. Department of Education



INCREASE COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY AND COMPLETION

- » Fix a broken student loan system
- » Invest in inclusive student success



U.S. Department of Education



ACHIEVE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

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Accelerate Learning for Every Student

We must raise the bar in education so our students have the potential to reach much higher academically. While the pandemic brought once-in-a-generation interruptions to all students' learning, it also made persistent gaps in opportunity and achievement worse for underserved students. Student achievement in America has had a history of decline in literacy and math, among other indicators. We can and must do better for our students. This focus on academic excellence is urgent for our youngest learners, too. Research shows students who do not read on grade level by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. While not exhaustive of our efforts, please read the following pages for strategies to accelerate learning for every student and progress toward that goal. And for even more information, please visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar/accelerate-learning.



Our Focus

Ensure more students participate in high-quality learning recovery activities, including tutoring and afterschool and summer learning.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Distribute \$130 billion in grants to assist in the learning recovery of students with a focus on the learning disruption in literacy and numeracy.
- ✓ Initiate the National Partnership for Student Success, a nationwide tutoring and mentoring network, aimed at providing academic intervention and student support.
- ✓ Mobilize technical assistance from the National Comprehensive Center and provide governors and chief state school officers with supports to sustain recovery efforts.

Give states and districts the supports they need to implement high-quality learning recovery.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Establish a “Raise the Bar: Best Practices Clearinghouse” with proven interventions and recovery strategies from the last three years. Make the clearinghouse publicly available to all.
- ✓ Develop field-ready guidance documents and implementation support to schools based on research done by the Institute of Education Sciences on the impacts of additional funding in large cities and states across the U.S.
- ✓ Direct \$230 million to high-needs districts to address disproportionate funding cuts through oversight of the Maintenance of Equity legislative provision.

ACCELERATE LEARNING

On average, students need **four months of additional instruction** in reading to catch up to pre-pandemic achievement levels.

Ensure communities, families, and the public are engaged in learning recovery efforts.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Collect and disseminate data on grant use and impact on student achievement to increase transparency of efforts.
- ✓ Share recovery effort analyses, descriptions, and examples with parent and family groups, educators, members of Congress, media, and other stakeholders to increase awareness of recovery impact.
- ✓ Conduct district-level interviews to increase awareness of how recovery dollars are improving student outcomes. These will serve as a resource to districts nationwide.
- ✓ Host a series of parent and family forums to continue to bring the perspectives and recommendations of parents and families to this work.





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ACHIEVE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

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for every student
- » Deliver a comprehensive
and rigorous education
for every student

Deliver a Comprehensive and Rigorous Education for Every Student

Let's make sure all students can thrive academically and compete for the jobs of today and tomorrow by providing them with a high-quality, comprehensive, and rigorous education. A comprehensive education provides students with rich learning opportunities across subject areas in a welcoming environment with excellent instruction. And schools that meaningfully engage families are better equipped to nurture student success. This isn't a "nice-to-have" for our students. It's a "must do" when about half of entering college students need extra help and extra coursework because their K-12 schools failed to adequately prepare them with core knowledge and skills across subjects. While not exhaustive of our efforts, please read the following pages for strategies to provide a well-rounded education for every student and progress toward that goal. And for even more information, please visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar/well-rounded.



Our Focus

Promote increased access to comprehensive and rigorous coursework.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Distribute \$180 million in new grants to support educational innovation, civics and history education, literacy learning, and increased access to the arts.
- ✓ Create and execute a nationwide science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) initiative (“You Belong in STEM”) in partnership with the White House, NASA, and financial literacy organizations to encourage participation in STEM fields for all students, including those who are underrepresented.
- ✓ Promote the use of innovative, transformational education practices through video profiles of best practices.

Expand access to high-quality preschool and ensure that kindergarten provides a sturdy bridge between the early years and early grades.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Develop the “Raise the Bar: Early School Success Policy Framework” to improve early childhood education practices nationwide.
- ✓ Create and disseminate federal guidance on best practices for supporting students with disabilities and English learners.
- ✓ Establish ongoing professional learning and early education roundtables with participants from throughout the U.S.
- ✓ Engage in ongoing partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on interagency efforts aimed at increasing accessibility and quality of early childhood programming and the transition to kindergarten.

*DELIVER A
COMPREHENSIVE
AND RIGOROUS
EDUCATION*

When students have access to rich learning experiences across the spectrum of education, they get **better grades, earn higher test scores, and attend school more.**

Drive and streamline evidence-based supports in teaching and learning.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Provide technical assistance and more than 150 resources on best practices.
- ✓ Provide historic levels of funding to support Full-Service Community Schools that provide wrap-around, holistic supports for students and their families.
- ✓ Create a handbook to share best practices that promote a well-rounded education for every learner, including a repository of Department of Education resources and math and literacy summits.
- ✓ Organize a summit to promote nationwide innovation in education.

Help ensure all students have equitable, supportive, and inclusive school environments that allow them to learn and thrive.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Investigate complaints of students' civil rights violations through the Office for Civil Rights.
- ✓ Implement the Civil Rights Data Collection and report data to highlight disparities in outcomes, provide oversight, and offer technical assistance to states and districts.
- ✓ Publish resources on promoting inclusion and supporting English learners, LGBTQ+ students, migratory students, and unaccompanied children.
- ✓ Provide \$10 million to promote socioeconomic diversity in preschool through twelfth grade.
- ✓ Promote 50-state participation in the Interstate Compact for Military Children, ensuring consistency in education for students who may be transient.



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**BOLDLY IMPROVE
LEARNING CONDITIONS**

- » Invest in every student's mental health and well-being
- » Eliminate the educator shortage for every school



Invest in Every Student's Mental Health and Well-Being

For students to reach their potential, we must nurture their overall well-being. And in the face of an unprecedented national youth mental health crisis worsened by the pandemic, America's young people need support now. The U.S. Surgeon General issued a warning, declaring that mental health challenges are having devastating effects on youth. We see this when suicide is now the second leading cause of death for young people ages 10 to 24 and when more than 11% of youth are experiencing major depression. In conversations the Department of Education has led with thousands of students, mental health support consistently ranks first as the area students identify needing attention. We must listen to our students and act. While not exhaustive of our efforts, please read the following pages for strategies to support students' mental health and overall well-being and progress toward that goal. And for even more information, please visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar/mental-health-supports.



Our Focus

Increase the supply of school-based mental health professionals.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Award more than \$1 billion through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and annual funding to hire more mental health professionals in schools and to strengthen the pipeline for these professionals, resulting in more than 14,000 new mental health services providers in schools.
- ✓ Initiate a new technical assistance center to support states, school districts, and institutions of higher education in increasing the number of school-based mental health professionals.

Increase access to school-based mental health services.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Collaborate with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to increase the number of community health centers with school-based services.
- ✓ Award new grants to create additional Full-Service Community Schools and release a toolkit describing other resources across federal agencies that are available to support community schools.
- ✓ Create partnerships with the U.S. Surgeon General, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, artists, athletes, and others to elevate the importance of addressing the youth mental health crisis and the role of schools in this work.

*INVEST
IN STUDENTS'
MENTAL HEALTH*

Students are
six times more likely
to get the mental
health supports they
need when services are
provided in school.

Increase funding for school-based mental health services through Medicaid.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Publish guidance on how states and school districts can increase their use of Medicaid funding for school-based services.
- ✓ Launch a new technical assistance center to support collaboration between state educational agencies and state Medicaid agencies and promote greater access to Medicaid funding for school-based services.
- ✓ Finalize regulations that will make it easier for school districts to bill Medicaid for school-based services for students with disabilities by eliminating unnecessary and burdensome paperwork barriers.
- ✓ Conduct a public awareness campaign to ensure that students and families re-enroll in Medicaid following the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency.



U.S. Department of Education



**BOLDLY IMPROVE
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Eliminate the Educator Shortage for Every School

Every student should have access to outstanding, well-prepared, well-supported educators who reflect the diversity of the students they serve. Unfortunately, in recent years, we have seen disturbing teacher workforce trends. In just three months in early 2020, communities lost 9% of all local public education jobs due to the pandemic. Even before the pandemic, schools with high percentages of students of color had teachers who were three times more likely to be uncertified, and about 70% more likely to be inexperienced. Our nation's educator workforce also doesn't reflect the diversity of students in our schools—while students of color represent more than half of students, only about 20% of teachers are people of color. Teachers also are vastly underpaid for the vital work they do. Teachers make an estimated \$445 less per week than other similarly educated professionals. Teaching is the profession that makes all others possible, and teachers are second only to parents in their influence on student success. That's why investing in the teaching profession is critical to raising the bar in education. While not exhaustive of our efforts, please read the following pages for strategies to eliminate the educator shortage and uplift the teaching profession and progress toward those goals. And for even more information, please visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar/educators.



Our Focus

Expand high-quality and affordable educator preparation and job-embedded professional learning.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Support states and districts in expanding registered apprenticeship programs for teachers, residencies, and grow-your-own programs.
- ✓ Provide guidance and technical assistance on how states and districts can use more than \$2 billion in federal funds annually to improve professional learning for educators.
- ✓ Reduce student debt for educators by fixing Public Service Loan Forgiveness and making income-driven student loan repayment more affordable.

Improve compensation and educator working conditions.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Release data and policy guidance highlighting successful state efforts to increase teacher compensation, and how federal funds can support these efforts.
- ✓ Prioritize teacher compensation and teacher leadership opportunities within Department of Education grants.
- ✓ Challenge governors to raise teacher pay to at least the level of other college-educated professionals in their state.

*ELIMINATE
THE EDUCATOR
SHORTAGE*

Teachers are the **most important in-school factor** contributing to student success.

Increase educator diversity.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Launch a national campaign to attract young people to the teaching profession.
- ✓ Award first-ever grants—totaling more than \$18 million—to help Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Minority-Serving Institutions to strengthen their teacher preparation programs.
- ✓ Collaborate with private and nonprofit partners, such as ZipRecruiter, Indeed, and Beyond 100K, to encourage job-seekers to consider careers in education and to support states and districts in recruiting and hiring.





U.S. Department of Education



**CREATE PATHWAYS FOR
GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT**

- » Ensure every student has a pathway to college and a career
- » Provide every student with a pathway to multilingualism



Ensure Every Student Has a Pathway to College and a Career

Raising the bar for our students means that we must improve how we prepare all young people for successful, rewarding, and joyful futures after high school. Their prosperity, the strength of our workforce, the vibrancy of our nation, and our global economic competitiveness depend on it. To meet this moment, our plan boldly transforms how our nation's high schools prepare students to thrive by connecting our education and workforce systems, unlocking pathways to in-demand postsecondary credentials, and advancing social and economic mobility. We want all high school students to have four keys to unlock their potential and supercharge their career success: 1.) earning college credit through dual enrollment, 2.) experiencing paid work-based learning, 3.) earning industry-sought credentials, and 4.) receiving personalized and ongoing career advising and navigation. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to blur the lines between our elementary and secondary schools, postsecondary education, and business and industry. While not exhaustive of our efforts, please read the following pages for strategies to expand access to career and college pathways and progress toward that goal. And for even more information, please visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar/postsecondary-pathways.



Our Focus

Support schools, colleges, and employers to increase the number of students who are prepared for college and careers.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Build a suite of practical tools and user-friendly resources so that stakeholders can take the next steps to accelerate pathways to postsecondary education and good jobs.
- ✓ Invite key decision-makers to regional “Unlocking Career Success” convenings, held jointly with federal agencies, to share learning across state lines and highlight exemplars to ease replication of promising practices.

Increase the number of career-connected high schools.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Invest \$25 million in grant funds to blur the lines between high school, college, and careers by providing dual enrollment, workforce credentials, work-based learning, and career advising and navigation that put students on pathways to bright futures.
- ✓ Expand access to dual enrollment opportunities so that every young person can earn college credit in high school and get a head start in earning a postsecondary credential.
- ✓ Scale learning and engagement opportunities in rural and urban communities to expand the number of career-connected high schools.

UNLOCK COLLEGE AND CAREER SUCCESS

In a recent survey, half of high school students reported that **their school has not done enough to help them identify careers of interest** or understand what steps to take for the career they want.

Increase the number of states that connect their education and workforce systems and invest in America.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Launch a \$2.5 million ecosystem through the Career Z Challenge, which is an open innovation prize competition to create, enhance, and expand high-quality work-based learning opportunities for students.
- ✓ Partner with the U.S. Departments of Labor, Commerce, Transportation, and Energy to engage and mobilize employers and build strong education-to-employment strategies, policies, and programs aligned to regional economic needs.





U.S. Department of Education



**CREATE PATHWAYS FOR
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Provide Every Student with a Pathway to Multilingualism

Multilingualism is a superpower that provides our students with advantages in our global society and economy. 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. The need to invest in multilingual education is clear. There is a high demand for foreign language skills among U.S. employers (90%) with projections that this need will only continue to grow. But only 20% of Americans can converse in two or more languages. If we expect our students to compete in the global marketplace, we must act. While not exhaustive of our efforts, please read the following pages for strategies to increase access to multilingual educational opportunities and progress toward that goal. And for even more information, please visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar/multilingualism-pathways.





Our Focus

Increase equitable access to a high-quality education for English learners.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Award more than \$890 million in Title III state grants to improve the education of English learners.
- ✓ Provide toolkits and technical assistance to states and districts so they can better meet their obligations to robustly serve English learners in public schools.
- ✓ Propose a new \$25 million competitive grant for states and districts to scale up dual language immersion opportunities in schools.

PROVIDE MULTILINGUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

People who develop strong language skills in a home language as well as in English earn, on average, **\$5,000 more every year** than those who lose their native language and speak exclusively English as adults.

Increase pathways for a bilingual and multilingual educator workforce.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Elevate the need for a diverse and multilingual educator workforce through \$18 million in first-time funding for August F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Grants to increase high-quality teacher preparation programs for teachers of color at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and Minority-Serving Institutions.
- ✓ Promote grow-your-own programs for students who graduate with state seals of biliteracy.

Increase the number of high-quality bilingual education programs for all students.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Highlight states and districts that are implementing evidence-based dual language programs and seals of biliteracy.
- ✓ Host learning sessions through the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition to highlight research-based practices and resources to serve multilingual learners.
- ✓ Launch “leader-to-leader” roundtables that convene leading practitioners and focus on how to support developmentally appropriate dual-language practices for effective kindergarten programs and transitions to kindergarten.
- ✓ Conduct listening sessions with educators, families, students, and community stakeholders about strategies to highlight the importance and benefits of multilingualism.





U.S. Department of Education



**INCREASE COLLEGE
AFFORDABILITY AND COMPLETION**

- » Fix a broken student loan system
- » Invest in inclusive student success



Fix a Broken Student Loan System

Higher education should be a valuable investment that helps students climb the economic ladder and build rewarding careers. But too many students are left worse off financially for pursuing postsecondary education. Some students are driven into unaffordable debt by dishonest colleges peddling worthless degrees. Others have struggled to repay their loans due to a broken, unaffordable student loan system. The Biden-Harris administration is fixing these problems head-on. We are fixing our broken student loan system, making repayment more affordable than ever, delivering historic debt relief to borrowers, and protecting students from abusive conduct and unaffordable debt. Our policies aim to hold colleges accountable for high costs and poor outcomes, transform how families finance college education in this country, and ensure that postsecondary education delivers real value to students in the form of higher wages and brighter futures. While not exhaustive of our efforts, please read the following pages for strategies to fix the nation's broken student loan system and progress toward that goal. And for even more information, please visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar/college-excellence-equity.



Our Focus

Implement the most affordable student loan payment plan under any administration.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Implement the new SAVE plan, which reduces undergraduate loan payments by half.
- ✓ Reduce loan payments to \$0 per month for any borrower who earns less than about \$32,000 a year.
- ✓ Create a national public-private partnership campaign to promote enrollment in the plan, so students can save money on their loan repayments.

FIX A BROKEN STUDENT LOAN SYSTEM

The Biden-Harris administration has **forgiven more student loan debt** than any administration in U.S. history.

Help borrowers get loan forgiveness by fixing Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Approve more than 660,000 borrowers for loan forgiveness through fixes made to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.
- ✓ Partner with military and veteran groups to increase awareness of this benefit for our service members and their families.
- ✓ Work with state and local government leaders to expand the participation of public servants in the program, and as a strategy to encourage public service.

Provide targeted student loan debt relief.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Utilize the authorities under the Higher Education Act to provide debt relief for borrowers.
- ✓ Increase debt relief efforts to borrowers who have since become permanently disabled, had their colleges close, or were cheated by their colleges.
- ✓ Provide accurate accounting of loan payments for those who have been paying for decades and discharge remaining balances for more than 800,000 borrowers who qualify for forgiveness as a result.





U.S. Department of Education



**INCREASE COLLEGE
AFFORDABILITY AND COMPLETION**

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Invest in Inclusive Student Success

In today's globally competitive world, most well-paying jobs—around 70%—require education beyond high school, whether that is an industry credential, certificate, or two-year or four-year college degree. And we know that individuals with a postsecondary degree, on average, earn \$1 million more over the course of their lifetimes than individuals with only a high school diploma. The problem is that our higher education system leaves too many people behind, with millions of students from diverse and underserved communities dropping out of college before completing their degrees every year. America urgently needs colleges and universities that are committed to welcoming students of all backgrounds and income levels and investing in their successful attainment of college degrees and credentials. That's why we are investing in our nation's most inclusive and accessible colleges and universities, increasing financial aid for students from low-income families, helping colleges adopt data-driven strategies for improving degree completion rates, and fighting to make two years of community college programs free. By investing in inclusive college excellence, we can achieve more equitable outcomes; propel more students to graduate into well-paying jobs and rewarding careers; and build stronger, more prosperous communities. While not exhaustive of our efforts, please read the following pages for strategies to invest in inclusive student success and progress toward that goal. And for even more information, please visit www.ed.gov/raisethebar/college-excellence-equity.



Our Focus

Support inclusive colleges to raise completion rates, close gaps by race and income, and help all students earn valuable degrees.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Host summits and release playbooks to elevate best practices in using data, ensuring the success of transfer students, and providing wrap-around supports to students.
- ✓ Award \$50 million in new Postsecondary Success Grants to better establish and promote evidence-based practices for student completion.
- ✓ Expand the College Scorecard to provide better information to students, families, institutions, and states to highlight inclusive colleges with strong student outcomes.

Protect students and taxpayers against illegal conduct and unacceptable poor college quality.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Finalize the gainful employment rule to ensure career programs provide value for students.
- ✓ Identify all types of programs that produce unaffordable debts, require student warnings, and request improvement plans for the worst offending institutions.
- ✓ Hold institutions and executives accountable when they cheat students and taxpayers, including through a new borrower defense rule.

INVEST IN INCLUSIVE STUDENT SUCCESS

While college remains the surest ticket to the middle class and a bright future, just **3 in 5 first-time college students and less than half of students of color earn a credential within six years.**

Increase access and opportunity in higher education to drive college completion for more Americans.

OUR STRATEGY:

- ✓ Provide up to \$7,395 in Pell Grants—\$900 more than two years ago—and work to double Pell Grants by 2029.
- ✓ Provide historic levels of funding to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges, and Minority-Serving Institutions.
- ✓ Simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to make aid easier for students to access and afford higher education, resulting in more than 600,000 additional students from low-income backgrounds receiving Pell Grants.
- ✓ Work with states and institutions of higher education to make college more affordable, including by expanding free community college programs and helping college students to meet their basic needs.



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