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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**EDUCATION AND INCLUSION
IN THE UNITED STATES:
AN OVERVIEW**

U.S. Department of Education

Margaret Spellings
Secretary

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Tracy R. Justesen
Assistant Secretary

September 2008

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FOREWORD

Seven years ago, Americans united behind a revolutionary idea: Every child can learn. Promoting student achievement, fostering educational excellence, and ensuring equal access is a top priority for the United States. At the Department of Education we are committed to ensuring that all of America's youth, including individuals with disabilities, receive a quality education and graduate from high school with the skills they need to be successful in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Today, we educate more than 73.7 million students at every level¹ and produce some of the finest minds in the world. We are proud of our schools, our teachers, and administrators, and, most of all, we are proud of our students. Still, we are constantly working to improve educational access and ensure that all students gain the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in today's increasingly competitive world.

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* promises a quality education to every K-12 student, including students with disabilities, for the first time, and has made academic achievement of these students a national priority.

Students with disabilities have made great strides in the classroom over the past three decades, made possible by the passage of and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. This revolutionary law paved the way for children with disabilities to enjoy full access to educational opportunities. Now aligned, *NCLB* and *IDEA* are working together to ensure that high standards are set for all students with disabilities, and that every child receives a quality education.

As the barriers that divide us continue to break down and we seek to learn more about the cultures of other nations, sharing information on policy and best practice can only help to make our work more effective. In the end, we all want to educate our children so that the world of the 21st century is one of hope, prosperity, and peace. A successful outcome depends on partnering with the international community to understand and meet the needs of our students with disabilities. When all of our children are learning and each is reaching their highest potential, we will know we have done our job.

I applaud the staff of the International Bureau of Education for their hard work in convening this conference, and look forward to many future opportunities to participate in UNESCO's work.

Sincerely,

Margaret Spellings
U.S. Secretary of Education

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007) *2007 Digest of Education Statistics*. Retrieved Sept. 19, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_001.asp.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States Congress established the U.S. Department of Education on May 4, 1980. By statute, the mission of the Department of Education is to:

- Strengthen the federal commitment to assuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual;
- Supplement and complement the efforts of states, the local school systems and other instrumentalities of the states, the private sector, public and private nonprofit educational research institutions, community-based organizations, parents, and students to improve the quality of education;
- Encourage the increased involvement of the public, parents, and students in federal education programs;
- Promote improvements in the quality and usefulness of education through federally supported research, evaluation, and sharing of information;
- Improve the coordination of federal education programs;
- Improve the management of federal education activities; and
- Increase the accountability of federal education programs to the President, the Congress, and the public.

It should be noted, however, that the federal government, although playing an important role in education, does not establish or license schools or govern educational institutions at any level.² The Tenth Amendment (1791) of the U.S. Constitution (1787) states: “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” Therefore, the general authority to create and administer public schools is reserved for the states. There is no national school system nor are there national framework laws that prescribe curricula or control most other aspects of education.

The decentralized nature of U.S. education has its origins in the early history of the United States. In the 17th and early 18th centuries, what was to become the United States began as separate colonies established by settlers from several European countries. In the 13 British colonies that formed the original United States, the colonial governments or, in some colonies, local communities were responsible for education. It was customary for each locality to establish and support its own school(s) and to educate its children according to its own priorities, values, and needs. This history helps to explain why state and local governments today retain primary responsibility for administering elementary and secondary education in the United States.

In preparing a report for the 48th session of the International Conference on Education, “Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future,” we focused on the education of all students,

² The only exceptions are the following: schools which serve the children of military personnel stationed overseas, operated by the Department of Defense; and the five service academies of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine.

paying special attention to the inclusive education of students with disabilities. We acknowledge that UNESCO views inclusion to mean all students who have lacked access to basic education, including poor and disadvantaged children, children in rural, remote areas, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, children affected by conflict and natural disasters, children with HIV/AIDS, and children with special learning needs; however, for the purposes of this report, we will focus specifically on the inclusion of students with disabilities.

The emphasis on inclusion is long-standing in our education programs for children with disabilities. Inclusion in the U.S. education system refers to a commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing support services to the child, rather than moving the child to the support services. Most recently, two landmark education laws were enacted or reauthorized and are working together to ensure access to educational opportunities for all children. In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* which addresses the basic right to education for all children in the United States, and in 2004, Congress reauthorized the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, which more specifically ensures the basic education rights of children with disabilities and ensures that they receive a free and appropriate public education. While *IDEA* does not require inclusion, it does require that children with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment³ appropriate to meet their unique needs.

We also believe that having a highly qualified⁴ teacher in every classroom maximizes every child's potential to learn. In fact, our research shows that teachers are the single most important factor in raising students' educational achievements. Because of this, we have chosen to focus this report not only on the inclusion of children with disabilities in our system of education, but also on the preparation and continuing professional development of teachers. This is consistent with sub-theme (iv) of this Conference—to foster a learning environment where teachers are equipped to meet the learners' diverse expectations and needs.

Under *IDEA* and earlier related laws, the U.S. Congress recognized the need for quality teachers of special education and related services to ensure the appropriate education of students with disabilities, and has continually supported a broad system of training and professional development programs and activities geared to these teachers. This report will address the programs developed to assist teachers of children with special needs in becoming more highly qualified. In addition, *NCLB* recognizes the importance of overall teacher quality to improving the educational attainment of all children. As such, this report will also discuss initiatives to improve the quality of teachers in all schools.

In the report that follows, you will find six chapters, or Parts. Part I contains a general description of the organization and structure of U.S. education, Part II describes the roles played by all three levels of government in education policy, administration, and financing, with an

³ Under *NCLB*, the term *least restrictive environment (LRE)* means that a child's placement in the classroom must be as close as possible to the child's home, and the child is educated in the school he or she would attend if not disabled.

⁴ Under *NCLB*, the term *highly qualified* is defined as holding a minimum of a bachelor's degree, possessing full state certification or licensure, and demonstrating subject area competence in each of the academic subjects that the teacher teaches.

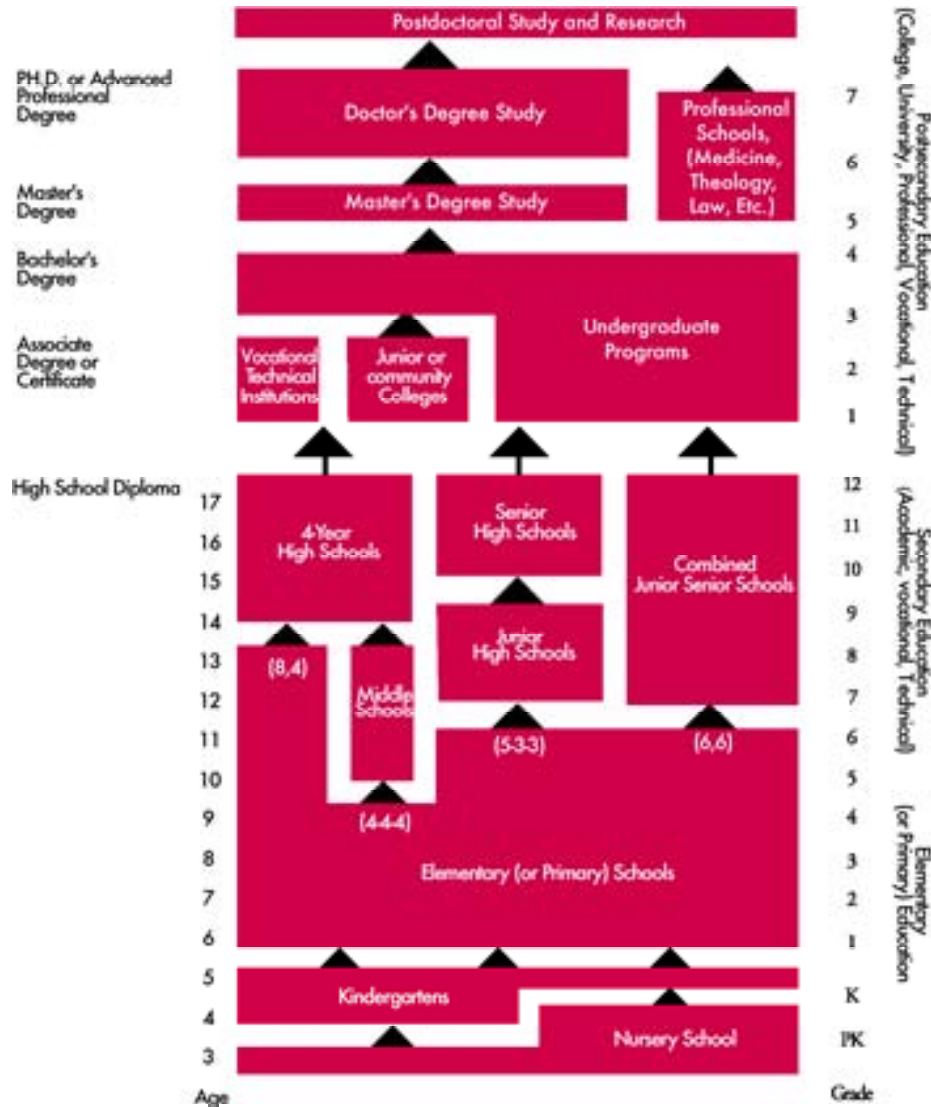
emphasis on elementary and secondary education, Part III provides a description of the historic *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Part IV focuses on teacher quality initiatives and the United States' efforts to improve them, Part V contains a general description of the U.S. Department of Education's Personnel Preparation Program, and Part VI contains a description of the U.S. Department of Education's *American Competitive Initiative* to improve our education system so that our youth can better compete in the global marketplace.

It is important to note that, due to the highly decentralized nature of education in the United States, policies and practices can vary considerably from state to state and from school district to school district. This publication cites national averages and general patterns of education practice. To learn about specific policies and practices, readers are encouraged to contact local or state education agencies. Internet addresses have been inserted throughout the document for additional information on specific topics.

PART I: ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE OF U.S. EDUCATION

The structure of education in the United States provides different paths to graduation from high school or a postsecondary institution (see Figure 1 below), and it is common for students to move between different types of schools, or to leave the system and return later in life.

Figure 1: Structure of Education in the United States



Source: 2003 Digest of Education Statistics, Figure 1. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2004).

Note: Adult education programs, while not separately delineated above, may provide instruction at the elementary, secondary, or higher education levels. This chart reflects typical patterns of progression rather than all possible variations. Numbers in parentheses represent the number of years spent in elementary and secondary schools, depending on the path followed.

TABLE 1: U.S. EDUCATION SYSTEM AT A GLANCE

Total elementary and secondary school enrollment	55 million ^a
Percentage of population age 5-17 enrolled in school	96 percent ^b
Number of elementary and secondary school teachers (public and private)	3.6 million ^c
Number of public elementary and secondary schools	97,000 ^d
Number of private elementary and secondary schools	35,000 ^e
Percentage of elementary and secondary students attending private schools ^f	11 percent ^g
Average expenditure per pupil in public elementary/secondary school	\$8700 ^h
Number of public school districts	14,000 ⁱ
Number of higher education students	17.5 million ^j
Number of 2-year colleges	1,700 ^k
Number of 4-year colleges and universities	2,600 ^l
Percentage of adults over age 25 who have completed at least 5 years of elementary school	99 percent ^m
Percentage of adults over age 25 who have completed at least high school	86 percent ⁿ
Percentage of adults over age 25 who have completed 4 or more years of college	29 percent ^o

Sources: Data from: *2007 Digest of Education Statistics*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008-022); *2008 Condition of Education*. (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2008-031); and *Findings from the Condition of Education: 2002 Private Schools—A Brief Portrait*. (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2002). Figures have been slightly rounded.

(a) *Digest*, Table 2

(b) *Condition*, Table 1-1

(c) *Digest*, Table 4

(d) *Digest*, Table 5

(e) *Digest*, Table 5

(f) See page 18 for a description of private schools.

(g) *Digest*, Table 2

(h) *Digest*, Table 2 and Table 166

(i) *Digest*, Table 83

(j) *Digest*, Table 2

(k) *Digest*, Table 5

(l) *Digest*, Table 5

(m) *Digest*, Table 8

(n) *Digest*, Table 8

(o) *Digest*, Table 8

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early childhood education (preprimary) in the United States comes in a variety of forms, including nursery school, preschool, day care centers, prekindergarten, and kindergarten. It also includes Head Start, a federally funded child development program that serves low-income children. Head Start programs provide comprehensive child development services to 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old children from low-income families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school. In fiscal year

1995, the Early Head Start program was established to serve children from birth to three years of age in recognition of the mounting evidence that the earliest years matter a great deal to children's growth and development.⁵

The Early Reading First program provides federal funds to enhance instructional content in early childhood education settings, thus helping to ensure that children start kindergarten with the necessary language, cognitive, and early reading skills needed for continued academic success. Overall, 57 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds are enrolled in center-based early childhood education and most spend over 25 hours per week in non-parental care settings.⁶

The majority of 5-year-olds attend free public kindergartens.⁷ Most public elementary schools offer free kindergarten education, and the average class size is 20 students.⁸ Almost all public school kindergartens report that teachers read stories aloud to the children each day. The majority also arrange for the students to engage each day in running, climbing and other motor skill activities; language development, dramatic play, arts, crafts, and music; and free play.

For more information on Head Start, see <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc> or <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/>.

For more information on the Early Reading First program, see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/earlyreading/index.html>.

ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

BASIC INFORMATION

Elementary (primary) and secondary education spans twelve academic years, or grades. However, the organization of elementary and secondary education varies among school districts and states. Generally students spend from six to eight years in elementary education. Elementary education is followed by four to six years of secondary education. The last four years of secondary school are generally referred to as "high school." Students normally complete high school by age 18. High school graduates who decide to continue their education may enter a technical or vocational institution, a two-year community college, or a four-year college or university. Each of these educational levels is described in further detail later.

All states⁹ require students to attend school, but the ages of compulsory attendance vary. Compulsory schooling ends by law at age 16 in 30 states, at age 17 in nine states, and at age 18

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 19, 2008 from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/index.html#prog_desc.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007) *2007 Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 42 and Table 43.

⁷ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2004) *2004 Digest*, Table 43.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2000) *Condition of Education*, p. 67. (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2000).

⁹ For purposes of this report, states include, in addition to each of the 50 states of the United States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

in 11 states, plus the District of Columbia. U.S. public schools are tax-supported and free to students and their families.

Students borrow free textbooks from the school for the year, but they must bring their own supplies, including paper and pencils, from home. In most public schools, students are allowed to wear whatever clothing they like within broad guidelines, while a small but growing number of public schools require uniforms. Boys and girls generally attend class together, although a small number of public schools do provide single-sex classes.

SCHOOL CALENDAR AND DAILY ROUTINE

In most states, the school year lasts 180 days.¹⁰ School begins in most districts in late August or early September and continues until May or June, and most school districts have a two-week break at the end of December and a one-week break in March or April. Generally, the school day runs from about 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.; however, daily schedules vary significantly from school to school.

Students generally eat lunch in the school cafeteria. Some students bring their lunch from home, and others purchase their meals at school. About a third of students in the United States—those from low-income families—receive free or reduced-price breakfast, lunch, or both each day, paid for by the federal government.¹¹ For more information on federal programs that provide school meals, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd>.

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION

For students attending schools located beyond walking distance from their homes, transportation via school bus is generally provided free of charge by the school district. More than half of U.S. public elementary and secondary students use this service to travel to and from school each day.¹² Many parents drive their children to school, while many students age 16 and older drive themselves.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Most schools, especially at the secondary level, sponsor activities such as sports, clubs, performing arts, and community service opportunities. In some school districts, prospective graduates are encouraged or required to perform a prescribed number of hours of community service.

In addition to attending school, many high school students work limited hours at part-time jobs during the academic year. For example, 68 percent of 12th-grade students work during the academic year, with 77 percent of students working fewer than 20 hours per week.¹³ Food service, grocery clerk, and retail sales are the most common types of work for high school students.¹⁴ Individuals under the age of 18 are considered minors under U.S. law, and federal and

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 126.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000*, Table 1.07. (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2000).

¹² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 167.

¹³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 381.

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 381.

state child labor laws strictly govern the types of work minors can perform, how it is supervised, and how long they can work for pay.

Most students graduate from high school at the age of 17 or 18.¹⁵ Some students graduate from school later because they have been retained in grade. Others drop out and return to school a year or two later, or drop out and decide to complete the General Educational Development (GED) certificate program, which is recognized in all states as the equivalent of a high school diploma.¹⁶

For more information on the GED certificate program, see <http://www.ed.gov/students/prep/college/thinkcollege/return/edlite-index.html>.

CURRICULUM

States set broad curriculum guidelines for what students should know and be able to do. School districts or schools generally select textbooks, adhering to state guidelines. Within these guidelines, schools, and even individual teachers, are generally expected to determine content details and the pace of instruction so that it is suited to the characteristics of students. Elementary schools do not generally assign students to specific teachers or classes based on their ability. However, within classes, teachers often set up reading or mathematics groups based on student achievement levels. Students in different achievement groups may receive differentiated assignments so that they can progress at an appropriate pace in mastering the class curriculum.

At the secondary school level, each student's coursework is generally composed of courses required for graduation—with requirements varying by district and state—and elective courses. As a statistical average, public high school students complete the following one-year-long courses between 9th and 12th grades: four years of English; four years of history or social studies; three years of mathematics; three years of science; two years of foreign language; two years of the arts; four years of vocational, technical, or business education; one year of computer science; and two to three years of other subjects.¹⁷

Most students graduate from high school at the age of 17 or 18. Some students graduate from school later because they have been retained in grade. Others drop out and return to school a year or two later, or drop out and decide to complete the General Educational Development (GED) certificate program, which is recognized in all states as the equivalent of a high school diploma.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Standards. During the 1990s, most states made significant gains in the use of standards to define educational inputs and desired outcomes. By 2001, almost all states, plus the District of Columbia, had developed and put in place academic standards that described what students should know and be able to do in mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. Most states also now have content standards that describe the body of knowledge that all students should know, and achievement standards that describe what level of performance is considered basic, proficient, and advanced. (The exact terms used vary by school system.)

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 102.

¹⁶ *Higher Education Act*, Title IV, Parts A & B, Section 418A (Title 20, Chapter 28, United States Code).

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 137.

Grading. Students receive classroom grades to describe their academic performance in each subject area. The grading system used is generally on a letter scale, with “A” being the highest and “F” being the lowest and representing failure. Letter grades often are converted into numeric “grade point averages,” or “GPAs,”—especially at the secondary school level—to describe a student’s overall performance. In this case, A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, and F=0, with a 4.0 grade point average indicating a perfect grade record. Grading generally assumes a starting point of 100, or perfect, and subtracts points for mistakes or poor-quality reasoning, rather than assuming a starting point of zero and adding points, as in some other grading systems. Typically, classroom teachers are entirely responsible for determining grades, basing their decisions on the quality of a student’s work, classroom test scores, and level of participation.

Promotion. A student’s promotion to the next year of schooling is based primarily on his or her classroom grades. If a student’s grades are poor and the teacher believes that the student is not ready to be promoted to the next grade, the student may be retained. Parents also generally play an important role in making such a decision. Students are most likely to be retained during the early grades of elementary school. Some states require students to pass an examination in order to graduate from secondary school.¹⁸ These examinations vary in content, format, and rigor.

Student Achievement Testing. States administer tests on a regular basis to assess student performance at designated grade levels. One of the key factors determining the relevance of a state’s testing regimen is its alignment with the state’s academic content and achievement standards. Achieving this alignment often is challenging due to the time and expense required. Some states use tests purchased from commercial test developers, while others develop original test instruments that are specifically designed to measure state standards.

The federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* requires states to test all students in reading and mathematics in grades 3–8 and at least once in high school. Starting in the 2007–08 school year, science assessments were required at least once during grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12. Each state, school district, and school is expected to make adequate yearly progress toward meeting state standards in these subject areas and to measure this progress for all students. Special focus is placed on the progress of students who are economically disadvantaged, are from racial or ethnic minority groups, have disabilities, or have limited English proficiency.

As a nation, we’ve made important strides. Most fundamentally, all states now have accountability systems and annual student assessments. This is a change from before 2005-06 when only about half of all states had yearly assessments, and before 2001 when only 11 states had approved assessment systems. All states are now collecting better information to:

- Help the parents of 50 million students make the best decisions for their children;
- Help educators focus their efforts in the areas that need the most attention;
- Help students who lag behind their peers get help right away; and
- Help policymakers know what’s working and what is not.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 154.

We've given parents, teachers, and schools more and better tools to help students improve and achieve their potential.¹⁹

The results of state-level tests do not generally affect an individual student's grades or promotion but instead are used to assess the educational quality in a school, a district, or the entire state. In many communities, the media report the results of districts' or schools' performance on standardized measures.

National-level student assessment takes place through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which includes a random sample of U.S. schools and is designed to provide the public with information on the nation's progress in a number of subjects. NAEP does not provide scores for individual students or schools; instead, it offers results regarding subject-matter achievement, instructional experiences, and school environment for populations of students (e.g., fourth-graders), and subgroups of those populations (e.g., female students, Hispanic students).

In 1988, Congress passed legislation enabling NAEP to assess student performance also at the state level, and in 2002, *NCLB* added a requirement for state-level NAEP testing as a benchmark for the rigor of state assessment systems. Many schools also participate in international assessments to measure how well U.S. students perform in comparison to students in other countries.

For more information on NAEP, see <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>. For information on international assessments, see <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/international>.

SCHOOL CHOICE

Public school districts generally assign students to particular schools based on place of residence, and those schools generally accept all students assigned to them. Nonetheless, in an effort to provide parents with more options for their children, many state governments and public school systems expand school choice through options such as open enrollment programs, magnet schools, charter schools, virtual schools, dual enrollment programs, scholarship programs ("vouchers"), and tax credit/deduction programs.

- *Open enrollment programs* allow parents the opportunity to choose from among all schools in their district, or even from among schools in other districts in their state.
- *Magnet schools* are public elementary or secondary schools that offer a special curriculum capable of attracting substantial numbers of students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- *Charter schools* are public schools that provide enhanced parental choice and are exempt from many statutory and regulatory requirements. In exchange for increased flexibility, charter schools are held accountable for improving student academic achievement. The objective is to replace rules-based governance with performance-based accountability.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of the Secretary, Press Office. (2008) Speech *Secretary Spellings Testifies Before a Joint Committee Session in Tallahassee, Florida*. Retrieved Sept. 15, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/2008/01/01082008.html>.

- *Virtual schools* are education organizations that provide online learning opportunities and access to a broad range of students.
- *Dual enrollment programs* give high school students the opportunity to attend college classes and receive both high school and postsecondary credit.
- *Scholarship programs*, also known as “vouchers,” direct public education funding to parents in order to pay all or part of their child’s tuition at a school of their choice. Depending on the program, parents can choose from private schools—either secular or religious—or public schools.
- *Tax credit/deduction programs* reimburse education expenses fully or partially via tax relief. Tax credits or deductions may be available to individual or corporate taxpayers who contribute to scholarship-granting organizations, or to parent taxpayers to help pay for education-related costs, including private school tuition.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Public school choice programs provide parents with additional options as to where to enroll their children. Although such programs have not been available everywhere, the proportion of public school children attending a chosen school (rather than the school assigned by their place of residence) has increased in recent years.

With the enactment of *NCLB* in 2002, public school choice has taken on a new dimension. Now all children who attend Title I schools identified by their states as in need of improvement must be offered the option of transferring to another school in the same district that is not identified for improvement.²⁰

NCLB also provides eligible parents with the option to enroll their children in free tutoring programs through the supplemental educational services provisions of Title I. Low-income families whose children attend Title I schools in year two of improvement or later are eligible for supplemental educational services, which are extra academic enrichment services offered outside of the regular school day. The services must be research-based and aligned with state standards and local curriculum, and their goal is to help students improve their academic achievement while also offering parents the option of selecting the education program that best meets their children’s needs.

For additional information on school choice, see <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice>.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Private schools were the original schools in the United States and continue to provide parents a variety of options for educating their children. Private schools account for about 24 percent of all elementary and secondary schools, 10 percent of all students, and 12 percent of all teachers in the United States. Seventy-seven percent of all private schools have a religious affiliation while the

²⁰ Title I schools are those schools that receive federal funds under Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged*. Title I supports programs to improve the academic achievement of children of low-income families.

remainder are nonsectarian.²¹ Private schools are owned and governed by entities that are independent of any government—typically religious bodies or independent boards of trustees. Choice is a defining characteristic of private schools as families may choose private education, and private schools may generally choose which students to accept. Although nonpublic governance and enrollment choices are features that all private schools share, there is wide variation within the private sector on many measures.

Private schools receive funding primarily from nonpublic sources: tuition payments and other private sources, such as foundations, religious bodies, alumni, or other private donors. Average annual tuition costs at private elementary and secondary schools are \$4,689 per pupil,²² although tuition rates for individual schools can be less or significantly more than this average.

In addition, a growing number (about 2 percent) of U.S. students ages 5 to 17 receive their education through homeschooling. Parents cite several primary motivations for selecting homeschooling for their children. These include, among others, concerns about the environment of other schools (including safety, drugs, and negative peer pressure); religious and moral beliefs; and dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools.²³

For more information on private schools, see <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oii/nonpublic>.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

A number of federal laws govern the provision of educational services to students with disabilities and specifically prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities or institutions that are recipients of federal financial assistance. The primary federal governing legislation for special education is the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, as amended in 2004.

About 96 percent of students with disabilities attend regular schools, while only 4 percent attend separate institutions dedicated to education for students with disabilities.²⁴ Among those students attending local public schools, most are educated in regular classes with appropriate aids and supports, such as designated periods of time meeting with a qualified special education teacher. The amount of time spent outside the regular classroom varies and depends on the needs of the student. About half of all students with disabilities spend 80 percent or more of their day in regular classrooms.²⁵

For more information about special education, including federal laws prohibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities, see the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep> and the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/aboutocr.html>.

²¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Characteristics of Private School in the United States: Results from the 2001-02 Private School Universe Survey* (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2004).

²² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 60.

²³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *1.1 Million Homeschooled Students in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2004).

²⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Twenty-third Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (2001), Table III-1. (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

²⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 53.

GIFTED AND TALENTED EDUCATION

Special services are often also provided for students that are specially gifted or talented. Gifted and talented students are usually served via special programs in regular school settings. About 6 percent of U.S. students benefit from these services.²⁶ In some states, special services for gifted and talented students are included under the state's special education law.

TEACHERS AND TEACHING

U.S. elementary and secondary school teachers receive their preservice training at colleges and universities. Although the requirements for coursework and practice teaching vary by university and state, most prospective teachers must complete an undergraduate degree and pass one or more examinations in order to be licensed. A growing number of states and some school districts have developed alternative certification programs or routes to train prospective teachers.

The majority of public school teachers earn master's degrees and complete additional training during their careers.²⁷ In general, public school teachers are required to be licensed by the teacher certification authority of the state in which they teach. *NCLB* also addresses the issue of teacher quality and establishes certain requirements designed to ensure that all students have high-quality teachers. Further details on teacher preparation and teacher quality will be discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow.

Each state administers its own teacher certification exam. Teachers certified in one state are not certified to teach in another state, unless there is a special reciprocity agreement between the states. Since reciprocity is rare, teachers moving to another state are usually required to complete additional coursework and another exam. To obtain employment, prospective teachers apply to and are hired by the public school district in which they wish to teach or the individual private school. Most teachers teach the same grade and subject for several years, and rarely teach the same students for more than a year. Due to teacher retirements, attrition, increased student enrollments, and other factors, teacher recruitment, retention, and quality are currently important issues in the United States.

OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Religion and Schools. The U.S. Constitution calls for a separation between government and religion; therefore, public schools are not allowed to have a religious affiliation or teach religious doctrine (they may, however, teach about religions as part of academic studies such as history, social studies, or literature). Parents who desire a religiously oriented education for their children may send them to private religious schools instead of public schools or may homeschool their children, as described above.

Student Diversity. Students in U.S. schools represent nearly every ethnic background and nationality in the world. The most diverse school districts are those in major metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., and Chicago, but diverse student populations are increasingly found even in smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. As a national average, U.S. students

²⁶ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 55.

²⁷ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 69.

in public schools are 60 percent white, 17 percent black, 18 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native.²⁸ However, the population characteristics of a given local school or district often vary from the national average.

In the United States, English is clearly the predominant language for government, business, society, and instruction. English is taught to all students in U.S. schools, but more than 350 native languages other than English are represented in these same schools.²⁹ In some schools, especially at the elementary level, students with limited English proficiency receive content instruction in their native language while they learn English. More than nine percent of public school students (prekindergarten through 12th grade) are considered to have limited English proficiency.³⁰

For more information, see the Web site for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OELA>.

English Language Proficiency. There are more than five million non-English speaking or limited English proficient (LEP) students who attend U.S. public schools,³¹ and LEP students who receive special education services represent nine percent of all students in public schools. According to data from the National Clearinghouse on English Language Acquisition (NCELA), the number of LEP students has more than doubled over the past fifteen years. To date, it is the fastest-growing student group in the country with an increase of LEP enrollment at nearly seven times the rate of total student enrollment. Although there are more than 350 languages spoken by children throughout the United States, approximately 80 percent of LEP children are Spanish speakers. About 52 percent of the children are born in the U.S., while the other 48 percent come to U.S. schools from other countries at different times and enter at different grade levels throughout the year. Currently, one in every nine students in the classroom is LEP and the numbers are projected to increase to one in five by the year 2030.

Of special note in public education legislation, *NCLB* specifically addresses English language proficiency and academic achievement of LEP students and parent and community participation in language instruction educational programs. Title III of *NCLB* annually distributes formula grant funds to states for limited English proficient students who are identified by the state through a language assessment. In addition, Title III requires the state to develop a system within the state that focuses on two legislated goals: 1) that all limited English proficient children learn English, and 2) that they achieve at the same high academic level established by the state for all students. Currently, all states are actively engaged in including LEP students in their

²⁸ Characteristics of Schools, Districts, Teachers, Principals, and School Libraries in the United States. 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey. Table 2. Retrieved Sept. 12, 2008 from <http://www.nccrest.org>.

²⁹ U.S. Department of Education, *Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services*, 2000-01 Summary Report. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

³⁰ U.S. Department of Education, *Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Educational Programs and Services*, 2000-01 Summary Report. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

³¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, *The Growing Numbers of Limited English Proficient Students*. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 10, 2008 from http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/policy/states/reports/statedata/2005LEP/GrowingLEP_0506.pdf.

accountability systems and measuring and reporting their language acquisition progress and academic success.

Parental Involvement. Parents' involvement in the schools and in their children's education is generally encouraged by principals and teachers. Most parents attend general school meetings and parent-teacher conferences each year, and many volunteer at their children's school by tutoring, presenting special programs of interest, supervising students on field trips, or assisting with special events.³² Parents of children with disabilities must be involved in the development of their child's specially designed instruction, which is referred to as the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). There are also organizations—such as parent-teacher associations—that work to support schools and increase the involvement of families in the educational progress of their children.

Technology. The use of technology is widespread in U.S. elementary and secondary schools, as well as in colleges and universities. Students use computers to write reports, collaborate with classmates, conduct research on the Internet, and engage in many other activities. Nearly all schools had access to the Internet in 2005, while 94 percent of public school instructional rooms had Internet access.³³ While technology in schools has become increasingly common, several related challenges have presented themselves. These challenges include providing adequate training to teachers on how to effectively integrate technology into the curriculum and ensuring that the benefits of educational technology are available to students of all socioeconomic backgrounds. For more information on current activities in applying technology to U.S. classrooms, see the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/Technology>.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Historically, the purpose of vocational education has been to prepare students for entry-level jobs in occupations requiring less than an undergraduate degree. However, this traditional focus has now shifted toward broader preparation that develops the academic, vocational, and technical skills of students in vocational education programs. Vocational and technical education is offered at the secondary, postsecondary, and adult education levels.

At the secondary school level, most public schools and many private and charter schools, offer vocational education. Many states fund area vocational centers where students can enroll in vocational education programs on a part-time basis. Some states have well-developed vocational education programs with apprenticeships or work-based learning opportunities. In these states, most public high school students in vocational education programs work in part-time situations jointly supervised by teachers and employers during their senior year (grade 12) of high school. These work experiences may be provided by the school or obtained independently by the student. Different types of work-based learning experiences can be offered, including internships, apprenticeships, and mentoring. U.S. child labor laws, previously mentioned, limit the level and intensity of vocational instruction that can be provided to students who are under

³² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 25.

³³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007) *2007 Digest*.

18 years of age. As a consequence, most occupationally specific vocational education programs—especially for licensed occupations—are at the postsecondary level.

At the postsecondary and adult education levels, thousands of institutions and other providers offer degree and non-degree vocational and technical training. These institutions include public community colleges and vocational or technical institutes, as well as private trade and technical schools, employers, unions, professional associations, and independent training services. Postsecondary vocational education generally prepares students for occupational fields and yields a certificate, diploma, or associate degree. Such fields include the craft and industrial trades, certain areas of health care, equipment operation, and personal services. Given the need in many career fields for individuals with some education beyond high school, an increasing number of vocational education programs are preparing students for entry into higher education programs. This is generally true for fields such as nursing and engineering technology, courses which are often available at both the community college and university levels.

For more information, see the Web site for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/grntprgm.html>.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Postsecondary education in the United States is pervasive and diverse. There are approximately 9,000 postsecondary institutions in the United States.³⁴ This total includes over 4,000 degree-granting institutions,³⁵ such as colleges, universities,³⁶ and community colleges, and over 5,000 non-degree-granting institutions that provide specific vocational, technical, and career training.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

There are more than 600 public and 1,700 private, four-year colleges and universities in the United States.³⁷ The academic titles awarded by these institutions include undergraduate degrees such as a bachelor’s degree and graduate degrees such as a master’s degree and a doctorate. U.S. degree titles are not governed by national laws; therefore, colleges and universities exercise wide discretion in the nomenclature they use for degrees and program requirements for graduation. Accrediting associations, described below, may exert some influence on degree titles, as do the labor market and the professional academic community.

Undergraduate Degrees. The basic undergraduate degree in the United States is the bachelor’s degree. It generally requires four or more years of full-time study. The associate degree, which is offered at community colleges, typically requires two years of full-time study.

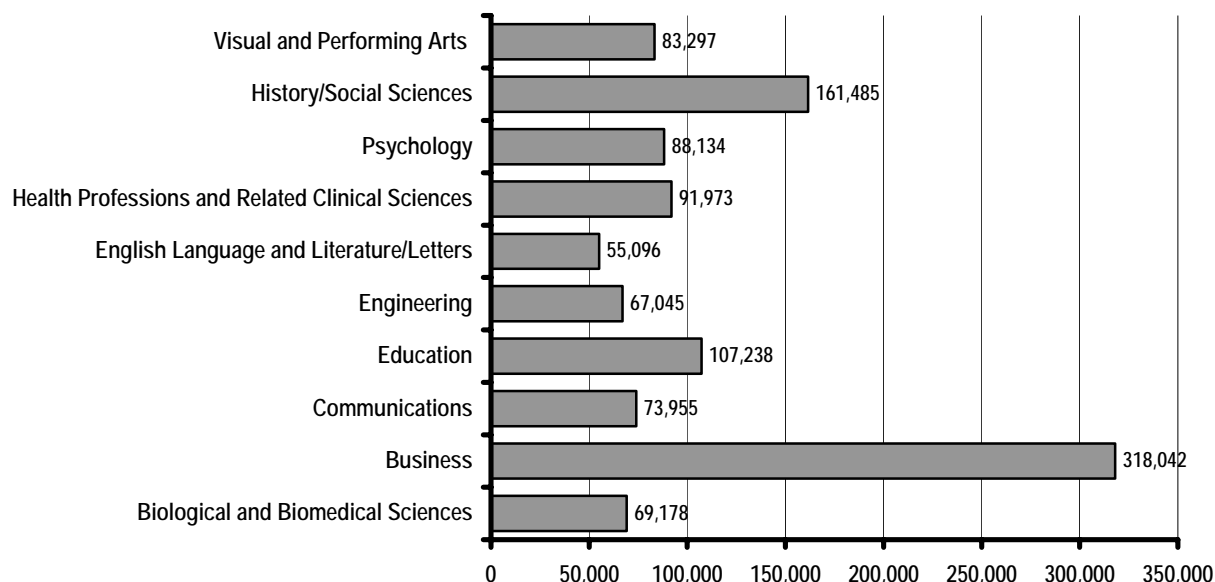
³⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 5.

³⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 5.

³⁶ The terms *college* and *university* are used interchangeably, as are sometimes the terms *academy*, *institute*, *school*, and *conservatory*. U.S. law and practice does not protect these terms or distinguish among types of institutions at the postsecondary level. Instead, the level of an institution is indicated by the highest degree it awards and the type is indicated by the variety of subjects offered for study. The most commonly used classification of U.S. higher education institutions is the Carnegie Classification. See <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/Classification>.

³⁷ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 247.

Figure 2: Top 10 Bachelor's Degrees



Source: 2007 Digest of Education Statistics, Table 261. (Washington, D.C.: NCES, 2007).

Graduate Degrees. The basic graduate degree is the master's degree, which usually requires one to two years of full-time study beyond the bachelor's degree. The research doctorate degree (Ph.D. or equivalent) usually requires a minimum of five to seven years beyond the bachelor's. However, the total time required can vary significantly depending on the institution, student, and field of study.

Education and training for professional occupations can take place at the undergraduate or graduate level. For example, engineering, the engineering technology fields, nursing, and accounting generally require an undergraduate degree. Architecture and teacher education require a bachelor's or a master's degree depending on the entry point, and a first professional degree following a prior undergraduate degree is required to become a physician, dentist, or attorney.

ADMISSIONS

Regardless of place of residence, all students are free to apply for admission to higher education institutions located anywhere in the country; however, tuition and fees at public universities are generally higher for out-of-state residents. Although a number of factors are weighed when institutions consider students for admission, decisions generally take into account the following:

- Success in appropriate secondary school coursework (e.g., types of courses taken and grade point average);
- Scores on standardized tests, which are designed to determine a student's aptitude for success in postsecondary education (e.g., Scholastic Aptitude Test [SAT]);
- Recommendation letters from teachers and others;
- Student-written essays; and

- Demonstration of leadership potential and participation in extracurricular activities (e.g. student government, school newspapers, sports teams, clubs, artistic activities, and volunteering in the community).

For a searchable list of accredited colleges and universities in the United States, see <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation>.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The community college system originated in the United States in the early 20th century. Community colleges fulfill several key missions, including: 1) forming a transitional academic link between high school and the university; 2) offering vocational and technical training; 3) providing adult and community education services; and 4) serving the education and training needs of local employers. Community colleges generally offer two-year degree programs leading to the associate degree, as well as short certificate and diploma programs in a variety of academic and vocational fields. In the 2006-07 school year, there were approximately 1,685 community colleges in the United States, consisting of 1,045 public community colleges, 533 private, for profit community colleges, and 107 private, not for profit community colleges.³⁸

Many students enroll in a community college to acquire or update specific job skills, attain basic skills, and pursue personal interests, while others complete one or two years of study at a community college before transferring to a four-year college or university to complete the remainder of a bachelor's degree program. Most community colleges also offer GED programs and adult literacy programs, and generally attempt to be responsive to the community in which they operate, offering coursework that addresses the needs of local citizens and employers.

For additional information on community colleges, see <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Template.cfm?section=AboutCommunityColleges>.

GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

Most private and public institutions at the postsecondary level are chartered or licensed as corporations under U.S. law and are legally independent and self-governing in terms of academic affairs, administration, fund-raising, resource allocation, and public relations. A board of citizens, often called a "Board of Trustees" or "Board of Regents," generally governs institutions. This governing board is the highest authority for institutional policy, although other lesser boards—such as those composed by faculty or students—also generally participate in governance to varying degrees. The Board of Trustees (or Regents) is generally responsible for hiring the institution's chief executive officer (president).

Administrative staff, including the president or chief executive officer, deals primarily with non-academic matters and delegates academic concerns to the academic deans, department chairs, and faculty. Oversight boards have the ultimate responsibility to vote on hiring staff and faculty, and to approve decisions on hiring, promotion, tenure, discipline, and the granting of degrees.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, *Higher Education General Information Survey*. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 11, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2008/analysis/sa_table.asp?tableID=1053.

However, in practice, they rarely go against the decisions of the faculty and deans unless there is compelling reason to do so, such as the violation of institutional regulations or civil rights.

Degree-granting institutions generally depend on the following sources of income: student tuition and fees, government funding, institutional investments and holdings, private gifts and grants, and auxiliary enterprises.³⁹ Research institutions also receive money from grants and contracts with government and the private sector, and teaching institutions may earn money from providing instructional services to employers. Almost all institutions, public or private, charge tuition, with tuition being relatively lower at public institutions than at private institutions.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

Many college students obtain part-time employment to help pay for their studies, while others also receive grants, scholarships and loans to help meet expenses. More than half of all U.S. undergraduate students—63.2 percent—receive some form of financial aid to help pay education costs, over 65 percent of all graduate students.⁴⁰ Scholarships and grants are generally awarded by a variety of nongovernmental organizations, as well as by states. However, the largest single source of such student financial aid is the federal government, which provides more than \$91 billion of financial aid a year to college students.⁴¹ The 1998 reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act (HEA)* established a performance-based organization to administer the Federal Student Aid programs at the U.S. Department of Education. These programs include Pell grants, Stafford loans, PLUS loans, and the “campus-based” programs: Federal Work Study, Perkins loans, and Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity grants.

For more information on student financial aid, see <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/fsa>.

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION

The United States has no centralized authority exercising national control over postsecondary educational institutions. The states assume varying degrees of control over education, but, in general, institutions of higher education are permitted to operate with considerable independence and autonomy. As a consequence, U.S. educational institutions can vary widely in their missions and the quality of their programs.

In order to ensure a basic level of quality, the practice of voluntary accreditation arose in the United States as a means of conducting nongovernmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs. The entities that conduct accreditation are associations of higher education institutions and academic specialists. These associations define procedures for assessing the quality of institutions and programs and formally recognize those institutions meeting their standards while withholding or withdrawing recognition from those that do not. Institutions that have been accredited generally have an advantage over non-accredited institutions with regard to student recruitment, receipt of federal and state funds, and their general public image. All recognized accrediting associations are members of the Council on

³⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Tables 335 and 341.

⁴⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007) *2007 Digest*, Tables 324, 334, and 335.

⁴¹ U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 18, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/fsa>.

Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and a list of those entities recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education is published annually.

For more information on accreditation, see <http://www.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred> and <http://www.chea.org>.

STUDY ABROAD AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

During the 2005-06 school year, more than 223,000 U.S. college and university students earned academic credit through study at postsecondary institutions in other countries. The top five destinations for undergraduate students are the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, and Australia, and the most popular fields of study are the social sciences, business and management, and the humanities. The number of U.S. students going abroad has grown at the rate of approximately 8 to 10 percent per year over the past five years. If this rate of growth continues over the next decade, approximately 550,000 U.S. students would be studying abroad in 2017.⁴²

During the 2006-07 school year, the United States welcomed more than 582,000 international students to study at U.S. colleges and universities. The top five countries of origin for undergraduate students are India, China, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, and the most popular fields of study are business and management, engineering, and physical and life sciences, followed closely by social sciences and mathematics and computer sciences.⁴³

For more information, see <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>.

ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Adult education encompasses a wide variety of educational services for adult learners and extends across all educational levels, subjects, and purposes. Services are generally oriented to meet the needs of mature adults who have life, work, and family experience but who desire additional education in order to improve knowledge and skills for personal or work-related reasons.

Adult basic education provides instruction in reading, math, writing, and critical thinking skills at or below the level of secondary school completion. Adult basic education applies particularly to school dropouts and to immigrants whose prior educational opportunities were limited. Many of these foreign-born adults also require basic instruction in listening, speaking, reading, and writing to improve English language proficiency.

Adult secondary education programs are designed for students, 16 years and older, who did not complete high school. These credential programs include the General Educational Development (GED) program, the National External Diploma Program (EDP), and the Adult High School Credit Diploma Program.

⁴² Institute of International Education, *Exploring Host Country Capacity for Increasing U.S. Study Abroad*. (Washington, D.C.: Institute of International Education, 2008). Retrieved Sept. 14, 2008 from http://www.iie.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Research_and_Evaluation/Study_Abroad_White_Papers/StudyAbroad_WhitePaper2.pdf.

⁴³ Institute of International Education, *Open Doors 2007*. (Washington, D.C.: Institute of International Education, 2007). Retrieved Sept. 15, 2008 from <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=113743>.

For additional information, see the Web site for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae>.

Adult continuing education generally refers to education provided for adults who have already graduated with a secondary school diploma or a higher education degree. Continuing education may be at the undergraduate or graduate levels and usually consists of individual courses, certificate programs, or degree programs for students seeking improved work-related skills, new skills to change careers, or personal enrichment. In the United States, such programs are provided by postsecondary education institutions, employers, private training institutions, and adult education centers.

Continuing professional education (CPE) is a special type of adult continuing education provided to professionals working in licensed occupations. These professions generally require practitioners to complete refresher courses on a regular basis in order to have their licenses renewed.

PART II: EDUCATION POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

The United States is composed of 50 states, five territories and the District of Columbia. As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, education in the United States is highly decentralized. Each state has authority to make and implement education policy within its jurisdiction so long as such policy does not violate the provisions of the U.S. Constitution or federal law.

The following pages briefly explain the roles of the three levels of government in making and implementing education policy, beginning with the state level and subsequently addressing the local and federal levels. Part II ends with a short description of the roles played by nongovernmental organizations and the courts, as well as a brief section on the financing of education.

THE ROLE OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

In most states, the topic of education is addressed in the state constitution, with the state legislature having the ultimate authority over education matters. This authority includes enacting education-related legislation and appropriating state funds for education.

STATE LEGISLATURES

Generally, state legislatures delegate a significant amount of policy-making authority to the state board of education. State boards of education are bodies of citizens appointed by the legislature or governor, or popularly elected, depending on the state. The state board is responsible for approving statewide education policies and determining budget priorities. In some cases the state board is responsible for all levels of education, including vocational and postsecondary education, while in many states the board concentrates on education at the elementary and secondary levels.⁴⁴

STATE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION

Most states have a state department of education that serves as the executive agency for education. A chief state school officer is generally responsible for overseeing the state department of education and reporting periodically to the state board of education, the legislature, and the governor. Depending on the state, this person may be called a superintendent, commissioner, director, or secretary of education. Most chief state school officers are appointed by the state board of education or the governor, while some are popularly elected.

⁴⁴ States do not generally regulate postsecondary education as closely as they do elementary and secondary education. Although states exercise some control over higher education institutions through specialized boards or commissions, the autonomy of such entities is generally recognized in law and policy. Vocational and technical education, special education, and adult education are often associated with both the secondary and postsecondary levels of education and are sometimes administered by specialized state agencies. The state's postsecondary education authorities, its agencies responsible for professional services, specially appointed licensure boards, or some combination of these, usually oversee professional education and training for licensed occupations.

In most cases, state governments are responsible for:

- Developing curriculum guidelines and performance standards;
- Providing technical assistance to school districts and schools;
- Licensing private elementary and secondary schools to operate within their jurisdictions;
- Licensing or certifying school teachers and administrators;
- Administering statewide student achievement tests;
- Developing accountability plans and reporting on student performance to the U.S. Department of Education;
- Defining minimum requirements for high school graduation;
- Distributing state and federal funding to school districts; and
- Establishing the minimum number of school days per year.

For information on state education agencies and other state education authorities, see <http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/index.cfm>.

THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Although state governments have ultimate authority over education, most states delegate some decision-making powers and the operation of public elementary and secondary schools to local education agencies, or school districts. There are approximately 14,000 school districts in the United States, each overseeing its jurisdiction's public schools.⁴⁵

The amount of control exercised by local school districts varies by state. Most states give districts considerable authority to determine school budgets and to implement curriculum. In fact, many school districts further delegate decision-making and budgetary authority to individual schools, a practice known as site-based (or school-based) management.

LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

A local school board, whose policies must generally conform to the regulations of the state school board and the statutes of the state legislature, governs each school district. School board members are generally elected, although, in some districts they may be appointed by other government officials. The school board selects and hires the district superintendent, who is responsible for implementing policy and managing the day-to-day operations of the school district.

In most cases, school districts are responsible for:

- Determining the budget;

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Budget Service, *Overview*. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 12, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/index.html?src=gu>.

- Allocating money to individual schools and programs;
- Hiring teachers and other staff;
- Preparing and disseminating annual reports on student performance;
- Setting teacher and administrator salaries;
- Implementing the curriculum;
- Planning and administering teacher inservice training;
- Coordinating the transportation of students on school buses;
- Constructing and maintaining school buildings; and
- Purchasing equipment and supplies.

To search for school districts in the United States, see the National Public School District Locator Web site at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch>.

THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

As described above, education is primarily a state and local responsibility. Nevertheless, the federal government plays a limited but important role in affecting education policy and practice at all levels and throughout the nation.

U.S. CONGRESS

The Congress is the supreme lawmaking body of the country and has passed numerous laws directly and indirectly affecting education. For example, in late 2001, the Congress passed the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*, which reformed the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* to reflect key principles promoted by President George W. Bush, including stronger accountability for results, more choices for students and parents, greater flexibility and local control, and the use of research-based instruction.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The federal Department of Education is the primary agency of the federal government that implements the laws enacted by Congress to support education at the federal level. In doing so, the Department establishes policy for, administers, and coordinates much of the federal financial assistance for education, in accordance with these laws. In 2008, the Department had 4,169⁴⁶ employees and a budget of more than \$68.6 billion.⁴⁷ Its stated mission is “to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.”

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Education, *The Federal Role in Education*. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 17, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>.

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of Education, Budget Service, *Overview*. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 12, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/index.html?src=gu>.

The Department carries out its mission in two major ways. First, the Secretary and the Department play a leadership role in the ongoing national dialogue over how to improve education for all students. This involves such activities as raising national and community awareness of the education challenges confronting the nation, disseminating the latest discoveries on what works in teaching and learning, and helping communities work out solutions to difficult educational issues. Second, the Department pursues its twin goals of access and excellence through the administration of programs that cover every area of education and range from preschool education through postdoctoral research.

Specifically, the Department's major activities⁴⁸ include:

Establishing policies on federal financial assistance for education, and distributing as well as monitoring those funds. The Department distributes financial assistance to eligible applicants throughout the nation for elementary, secondary, and college education; for the education of individuals with disabilities and individuals who are illiterate, disadvantaged, or gifted; and for the education of immigrants, American Indians, and people with limited English proficiency.

Collecting data on America's schools and disseminating research. The Department oversees research on most aspects of education; collects data on trends; and gathers information to help identify approaches, ideas, and successful teaching techniques. Employees of the Department, as well as contractors and grant recipients, conduct the research. Research findings and statistics are disseminated to educators, policymakers, parents, and the general public in the form of reports and publications—both printed and online.

Focusing national attention on key educational issues. The Secretary of Education advises the President and leads the Department in implementing the President's education policies—from the preparation of legislative proposals for Congress to decisions about education research priorities. In addition, the Secretary brings national attention to education issues through speeches, publications, the media, and personal appearances. The Department further highlights education issues by sponsoring and participating in national conferences and other activities.

Prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education. The mission of the Department's Office for Civil Rights is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation through vigorous enforcement of civil rights.

OCR serves student populations facing discrimination and the advocates and institutions promoting systemic solutions to civil rights problems. An important responsibility is resolving complaints of discrimination. Agency-initiated cases, typically called compliance reviews, permit OCR to target resources on compliance problems that appear particularly acute. OCR also provides technical assistance to help institutions achieve voluntary compliance with the civil rights laws that OCR enforces. An important part of OCR's technical assistance are partnerships designed to develop creative approaches to preventing and addressing discrimination.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Education, *An Overview of the U.S. Department of Education: What Does the Department of Education Do?* (2007) Retrieved Sept. 17, 2008 from http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/focus/what_pg2.html#whatdoes.

The Office for Civil Rights enforces several federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin is prohibited by Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*; sex discrimination is prohibited by Title IX of the *Education Amendments of 1972*; discrimination on the basis of disability is prohibited by Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*; and age discrimination is prohibited by the *Age Discrimination Act of 1975*. These civil rights laws enforced by OCR 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 that receive U.S. Department of Education funds. Areas covered may include, but are not limited to: admissions, recruitment, financial aid, academic programs, student treatment and services, counseling and guidance, discipline, classroom assignment, grading, vocational education, recreation, physical education, athletics, housing, and employment. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* (prohibiting disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance). In addition, as of January 8, 2002, OCR enforces the *Boy Scouts of American Equal Access Act* (Section 9525 of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, as amended by *NCLB*).

A complaint of discrimination can be filed by anyone who believes that an education institution that receives federal financial assistance has discriminated against someone on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age. The person or organization filing the complaint need not be a victim of the alleged discrimination, but may complain on behalf of another person or group.

Most of OCR's activities are conducted by its 12 enforcement offices throughout the country. These enforcement offices are organized into four divisions carrying out OCR's core work—preventing, identifying, ending, and remedying discrimination against America's students. Two Enforcement Directors in the office of the Assistant Secretary oversee the work of, respectively, the Eastern and Southern and the Midwestern and Western divisions. OCR administrative offices in Washington, D.C., provide additional administrative support, coordination, policy development, and overall leadership.

For more information about the Office for Civil Rights, see <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr>.

OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES

While the Department of Education is the lead federal agency in matters of education, a number of other federal agencies provide funding and other support for educational activities in areas related to their missions. Among these agencies are the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Interior, Labor, and State; the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities; the National Institute of Museum and Library Services; and the National Science Foundation.

For more information on the federal government's role, see <http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>.

For more information on *NCLB*, see <http://www.ed.gov/nclb>.

To learn more about U.S. Department of Education programs, see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/find/title/index.html?src=ov>.

To access the Web site for Federal Resources for Educational Excellence (FREE), go to <http://www.ed.gov/free>.

OTHERS WHO INFLUENCE EDUCATION POLICY AND PRACTICE

As noted above, legislative bodies, school boards and government agencies all play an important role with regard to education in the United States. However, other sectors and entities can also influence education policy and practice.

COURTS OF LAW

The courts—both at the federal and state level—have historically played a crucial role in providing direction and settling public policy debates that are directly and indirectly related to education, including subjects as varied as educational quality, school funding, equal access, and religion in the schools. One notable example is the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).⁴⁹ In that case, the court unanimously ruled that racial segregation in public schools was inherently unequal, thus reversing the position it had held since 1896. As a result of this ruling, federal courts succeeded over time in eliminating a system of legalized racial segregation in southern schools.

NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Many nongovernmental organizations also play an important role in influencing policy at all three levels of government and educational practice in the schools. Such organizations include charitable foundations, teacher unions, parent-teacher associations, and many others interested in education. The missions and functions of these entities vary considerably and can include supporting or carrying out research, providing education-related services, disseminating information, or working to influence legislation and public opinion. Representatives of nongovernmental organizations often participate on advisory boards that work with policymakers at all levels of government.

BUSINESS SECTOR

The business community is also often involved in supporting education and influencing education policy in a variety of ways. Private businesses often donate resources to nearby schools or encourage employees to volunteer at schools as tutors or in other capacities. Many business representatives also participate in education-related conferences and serve on education-related advisory boards.

⁴⁹ Volume 347, p. 483, *United States Reports* (Supreme Court decisions).

FINANCING OF EDUCATION

The financing of education in the United States is highly decentralized, and funding sources include the federal, state, and local governments, as well as private and nongovernmental contributors. Of the approximately \$972 billion spent nationwide on education at all levels during the 2006-07 school year, approximately 62 percent of total education expenditures occur at the elementary and secondary levels, while 38 percent are at the postsecondary level. These expenditures altogether represent about 7.4 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product.⁵⁰

Public elementary and secondary schools receive most of their funding from state and local governments, although additional funds are provided by the federal government and, in some cases, through grants or donations from corporations and foundations and parent- or student-initiated fundraising activities. State governments are generally the largest source of education funding. As a national average, state and local governments contributed 90.8 percent of education funding at this level during the 2004-05 school year, while the federal government, nongovernmental entities, and private contributors together provided 9.2 percent of all funding.⁵¹

While state and local governments together provide most funding, the proportion of funding coming from each of these two levels of government can vary significantly by state. In general, state governments generate the revenue necessary for educational expenditures from income taxes, corporate taxes, and sales taxes, while local school districts rely heavily on property taxes. Due to this reliance on property tax revenue, the amount of funding available for education at the local level can vary considerably depending on a community's property values. To mitigate the funding inequalities that may result, some states have "equalization of funding" laws that require them to ensure that all schools have a specified amount of funds available per student. The federal government likewise provides supplemental funding to schools with limited resources through compensatory education programs such as Title I, described earlier.

Most postsecondary institutions rely on a variety of sources to generate revenue. These resources typically include student tuition and fees, with private institutions generally charging more than public institutions. Other revenue sources often include government funds, sales and services, private donations, grants and contracts, and endowment income.⁵² Sources of funding can differ significantly when comparing public and private institutions, and even among individual institutions of the same category.

For additional information on federal expenditures for education, see <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/digest2001/ch4.asp>.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007) *2007 Digest*, Table 25. Retrieved Sept. 17, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_025.asp.

⁵¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007) *2007 Digest*, Table 162. Retrieved Sept. 17, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_162.asp.

⁵² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2003) *2003 Digest*, Table 333.

PART III: THE *NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT OF 2001*

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of U.S. schools. The law was passed by Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support and signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002.

NCLB reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*—the principal federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. In amending *ESEA*, the new law overhauled federal efforts to support elementary and secondary education in the United States. In exchange for federal aid for education, states must establish systems of accountability that ensure that funds are used to improve the quality of education offered to every child in the state.

THE FOUR PILLARS OF THE *NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT*

NCLB is built on four common-sense pillars: accountability for results, an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research, expanded parental options, and increased local control and flexibility.

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

Identifies Schools and Districts in Need of Improvement. As part of the accountability provisions set forth in the law, *NCLB* has set the goal of having every child achieving proficiency according to state-defined educational standards by the end of the 2013–14 school year. To reach that goal, every state has developed benchmarks to measure progress and make sure every child is learning. States are required to conduct annual assessments in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3–8, and to report results disaggregated by various subgroups so that overall averages do not mask a failure to meet the educational needs of key student groups. Data is analyzed separately for students of different racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, students from economically disadvantaged homes and students who are learning English as a second language. This analysis enables schools to identify groups of students who need additional assistance to meet the state’s academic expectations.

Under *NCLB*, schools that do not meet the state’s definition of “adequate yearly progress” for two straight years (schoolwide or in any major subgroup) are identified as “in need of improvement,” and they are given assistance to improve. Annual assessment data help schools identify subject areas and teaching methods that need improvement. For example, if reading scores do not reach the state’s benchmark, the school knows it needs to improve its reading program.

In the past, these schools might not have received the attention and the help they needed to improve. Through *NCLB*, every state has made a commitment that it will no longer ignore when schools are not meeting the needs of every student in their care.

Provides Help to Schools in Need of Improvement. Title I of *ESEA: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged* awards grants to states and local school districts and schools with the highest concentrations of economically disadvantaged students to help them improve the education of disadvantaged students, turn around low-performing schools, improve teacher quality, and increase choices for parents. When a Title I school is found to be “in need of improvement,” school officials are required to work with parents, school staff, the district, and outside experts to develop a plan to improve the academic achievement of all the students who attend the school.

The school’s improvement plan must incorporate strategies, relying on scientifically based research, that will strengthen the teaching of core academic subjects, especially in the subject areas that resulted in the school being designated as in need of improvement. Schools in need of improvement are also expected to develop strategies to promote effective parental involvement in the school and to incorporate a teacher-mentoring program.

Improves Teaching and Learning by Providing Better Information to Teachers and Principals. Annual assessments to measure children’s progress provide teachers with independent information about each child’s strengths and weaknesses. With this knowledge, teachers can develop lessons to meet the academic needs of each student and meet or exceed the states’ approved content standards and targets. In addition, principals can use the data to assess where the school should invest resources, such as in professional development.

Ensures That Teacher Quality is a High Priority. *NCLB* outlines the minimum qualifications needed by teachers and paraprofessionals who work on any facet of classroom instruction. At the time *NCLB* was passed, it required that states develop plans to ensure that all teachers of core academic subjects were highly qualified by the end of the 2005–06 school year.

Gives More Resources to Schools. In the 2004-05 school year, local, state, and federal taxpayers spent \$8,701 per pupil on average.⁵³ States and local school districts are now receiving more federal funding than ever before for all programs under *NCLB*: \$24.4 billion for the 2008–09 school year. This represents an increase of 46 percent from 2001 to 2008.⁵⁴ Nearly half of these funds are for grants under Title I of *ESEA: Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged* to ensure that schools in need of improvement have the funds needed to improve instruction for their students.

SCIENTIFICALLY BASED RESEARCH

Focuses on What Works. *NCLB* puts a special emphasis on implementing educational programs and practices that have been clearly demonstrated to be effective through rigorous scientific research. Federal funding is targeted to support such programs, and schools are expected to use research and evidence of effectiveness to identify and select instructional resources, instructional practices, and professional development strategies. For example, in fiscal year 2008, the Reading First program made \$393,012,000 in federal funds available to help reading teachers in the early

⁵³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007) *2007 Digest*, Table 171. Retrieved Sept. 17, 2008 from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d07/tables/dt07_171.asp.

⁵⁴ U.S. Department of Education. Fiscal Year 2008 Budget Summary.

grades strengthen old skills and gain new ones in instructional techniques that scientifically based research has shown to be effective.⁵⁵

EXPANDED PARENTAL OPTIONS

Provides More Information for Parents About Their Child's Progress. Under *NCLB*, each state must measure every public school student's progress in reading and math in each of grades 3 through 8 and at least once during grades 10 through 12. In school year 2007-08, assessments in science were added. These assessments must be aligned with state academic content and achievement standards. They provide parents with objective data about their child's academic strengths and weaknesses.

Alerts Parents to Important Information on the Performance of Their Child's School. *NCLB* requires states and school districts to give parents easy-to-read, detailed report cards on schools and districts, telling them which ones are succeeding and why, and the progress they are making. Included in the report cards are student achievement data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, English language proficiency, migrant status, disability status, and low-income status, as well as important information about the professional qualifications of teachers. With these provisions, *NCLB* ensures that parents have important, timely information about the performance of the schools their children attend.

Gives Parents Whose Children Attend Schools in Need of Improvement New Options. In the first year that a Title I school is identified as in need of improvement, parents receive the option to transfer their child to another public school, including a charter school, in the same school district. Transportation must be provided to the new school, subject to certain cost limitations. If a Title I school is identified for improvement for two or more years, it must provide public school choice and offer students from low-income families who remain in the school the option of obtaining free supplemental educational services (tutoring).

EXPANDED FLEXIBILITY AND LOCAL CONTROL

Allows More Flexibility. In exchange for strong accountability, *NCLB* gives states and local school districts more flexibility in the use of their federal funding. As a result, principals and administrators spend less time filling out forms and have more time to devote to students' needs. They have more freedom to implement innovations and allocate resources as policymakers at the state and local levels see fit, thereby giving local people a greater opportunity to affect decisions regarding their schools' programs.

Encourages Teacher Development. *NCLB* gives states and districts the flexibility to find innovative ways to improve teacher quality, including alternative certification, merit pay for master teachers, and bonuses for people who teach in high-need schools and core subject areas like math and science.

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Reading First*. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 17, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/gtreadingfirst.pdf>.

The Improving Teacher Quality State Grants program (from Title II of the reauthorized *ESEA*) gives states and districts flexibility to choose the teacher professional development strategies that best meet their needs to help raise student achievement.

PART IV: IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY INITIATIVES

One of the most important factors in raising student achievement is a highly qualified teacher. Research shows that teacher subject-matter knowledge is greatly associated with student learning. In this era of high standards and high expectations, having a highly qualified teacher has never been more important. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* recognizes this. The law requires that all classes in core academic subjects be taught by a highly qualified teacher. To be considered highly qualified, teachers must meet three essential criteria: 1) they must hold a bachelor's degree or better in the subject taught; 2) they must have full state teacher certification; and 3) they must demonstrate content knowledge in the subjects they teach.

NCLB ensures that teacher quality is a high priority. It outlines the minimum qualifications needed by teachers and paraprofessionals who work on any facet of classroom instruction. *NCLB* required states to develop plans to ensure that all teachers of core academic subjects were highly qualified by the end of the 2005–06 school year. No states met this goal, so in 2006, the Department asked states to submit revised plans detailing what they would do to meet the highly qualified teacher goal in the coming years. All states have approved highly qualified teacher plans, and the Department is monitoring how those plans are carried out.

The most recent data available on highly qualified teachers is from the 2006-07 school year. This data shows that most states are improving the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers every year. Nationally, 94 percent of core subject classes were taught by a highly qualified teacher in 2006-07, up from 92 percent the previous year. Thirty-three states reported that highly qualified teachers taught at least 95 percent of core subject classes. Forty-two states reported that highly qualified teachers taught 90 percent or more of core academic classes.⁵⁶

FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

The U.S. Department of Education recognizes that having a highly qualified teacher in every classroom is one of the most important factors in raising student achievement and *NCLB* ensures that teacher quality is a priority. The Department continues to work with states to improve the percentage of classes taught by highly qualified teachers.

To encourage teacher development, *NCLB* gives states and districts the flexibility to find innovative ways to improve teacher quality: it supports alternative certification, performance pay for master teachers, and bonuses for teachers who teach in high-need schools and core subject areas like math and science.

The Improving Teacher Quality State Grants program (from Title II, Part A of the reauthorized *ESEA*) provides states and districts with approximately \$3 billion annually for initiatives to improve the quality of classroom teaching. The program provides states and districts with a great deal of

⁵⁶ Additional information about highly qualified teacher data from the 2006-07 school year can be found at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/briefing-on-2006-07-hqt-data.doc>.

flexibility in choosing how they expend program funds to improve teaching in schools, including a variety of types of professional development to assist educators in improving student achievement. In the 2007-08 school year, districts reported that they spent half of available program funds on professional development activities for teachers, paraprofessionals, and principals. An additional 27 percent of funds were spent on hiring highly qualified teachers to reduce class size.⁵⁷

To further encourage teacher development, the Department of Education has created incentives for highly qualified teachers who improve student achievement in challenging circumstances. Two of the most recent incentives include the Teacher Incentive Fund and the Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative, both of which are discussed in further detail below.

TEACHER INCENTIVE FUND⁵⁸

The Teacher Incentive Fund provides support to school districts that provide financial incentives for teachers and principals in high-need schools who have succeeded at raising student achievement levels. Consideration is also given to educators who take on additional responsibilities and receive strong individual performance evaluations. The Teacher Incentive Fund is designed to:

- Enable teachers and principals to be more effective at improving student achievement toward meeting yearly progress goals;
- Reform compensation systems to reward teachers and principals for improvements in student achievement;
- Increase the number of dedicated and effective teachers in high-poverty classrooms who teach disadvantaged and minority students in certain subjects; and
- Create sustainable, performance-based compensation systems.

Projects under this Fund must develop and implement performance-based teacher and principal compensation systems in high-need schools. The performance-based compensation systems must consider gains in student academic achievement as well as classroom evaluations conducted multiple times during each school year among other factors and must provide educators with incentives to take on additional responsibilities and leadership roles.

TEACHER-TO-TEACHER INITIATIVE

The Department of Education started the Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative (T2T) in 2004 to support teachers in implementing *NCLB* at the school and classroom levels. This project required identifying the needs of classroom teachers and supporting teachers to achieve the goals of the new law.

⁵⁷ For more information on how districts spend Title II, Part A funds, see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/findings2008.doc>.

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, *Teacher Incentive Fund*. (2008) Retrieved Sept. 18, 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherincentive>.

At the beginning of the initiative, representatives from the Department met with over 500 teachers in three months in informal roundtable discussions. It became apparent that many teachers shared similar concerns:

- They wanted information directly from the Department of Education about federal policy, classroom resources, and professional opportunities;
- They wanted professional development from their peers; and
- They felt underappreciated.

In response to these concerns, the T2T initiative now includes many projects to support teachers, including:

American Stars of Teaching. Over 11,000 teachers have been nominated and over 200 have been honored as American Stars of Teaching. These teachers are nominated by their peers, students, supervisors, parents, and community members. A team of 40 former teachers at the Department of Education review the nominations and vote for a teacher from each state. The Star is honored by a senior Department of Education official during a surprise assembly.

Workshops. Over 20,000 teachers have been trained at 75 regional and district workshops since the inception of T2T. Prominent teachers, principals, and district officials provide training sessions and share research-based practices they have successfully applied in their classrooms and schools. Attendees include teachers and administrators from all 50 states who work in urban, suburban, and rural schools. Summer 2008 Featured 12 Teacher-to-Teacher Workshops. Partners for these workshops included the National Park Service, NASA, the Office of Charter Schools, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Department of Energy, the Department of Defense Education Agency, and the U.S. Mint.

E-mail Listserv. Over 50,000 teachers have signed up to receive regular updates from the Department of Education. Information is sent on *NCLB*, new initiatives, professional opportunities, and free federal classroom resources.

Innovative Training. In response to Congressional and Administration concerns about the unique needs of Native American schools, T2T created a training series for teachers of Native American students using digital technology. These trainings provide research-based strategies and include culturally based activities. Training is provided to Native American teachers in reading, children's literature, family and community involvement, math, and science.

Doing What Works. The Department of Education is collaborating with the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to identify strong research in particular content areas and determine effective classroom practices. Digital workshops are offered on working with limited English proficient students and girls in Math and Science.

National Math Panel. T2T has developed a short informational movie that teachers can share with parents and members of their communities about this important project. A digital workshop for teachers is also available on the Web site.

For more information on the Teacher-to-Teacher Initiative, see <http://www.ed.gov/teachers/how/tools/initiative> or <https://www.t2tweb.us/default.asp>.

PART V: PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) administers a Personnel Development Program at the Department of Education. The purpose of the Personnel Development Program is two fold: First, it is aimed at helping address state-identified needs for highly qualified personnel in special education, related services, early intervention, and regular education to work with children with disabilities and second, the program is designed to ensure that those personnel have the skills and knowledge, derived from practices that have been determined through research and experience to be successful, and needed to serve these children.

PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM: TEACHERS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Personnel Development Program (formerly called the personnel preparation program) is one of the United States' oldest and most visible federal programs. The purpose of the Personnel Development Program is to prepare a sufficient quantity of quality special educators and other personnel to deliver services to students with disabilities. The personnel preparation program began in 1958 with the enactment of the *Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act*. This program was initiated in response to a concern about the lack of education professionals trained in mental retardation. The law authorized grants to institutions of higher education to train leadership personnel in mental retardation and to state education agencies for training classroom teachers of children with mental retardation.

Initially, the federal government's intention was that the funding of personnel preparation programs would continue for only five years. The belief was that those individuals who were trained under federally funded programs would ultimately train others, thereby eliminating the need for continued federal support. Eventually other laws were enacted that broadened the mandates in the *Education of Mentally Retarded Children Act* to include the training of personnel to work not only with children with mental retardation but also children who were "hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, crippled, or other health impaired children who require special education." Further legislation in 1965 extended federal support to include the training of researchers in the field.

The training of special education personnel continued to expand in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Under the *Education Professions Development Act*, funding was authorized to train general educators to work with children with disabilities. In the same year, the 1967 Amendments to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* provided for regional resource centers, recruitment programs, the development and dissemination of information, an expanded media program, centers and services for deaf-blind children, program set-asides, and an expanded research program. In 1970, Congress established the original *Education of the*

Handicapped Act (EHA) as the revised title IV of *ESEA*. Part D of this law authorized federal appropriations for personnel preparation for the first time.

In 1975, the *Education of All Handicapped Children Act* was enacted and “expanded the provisions of previous legislation with the purpose of ensuring a free appropriate public education for all handicapped children between the ages of 3 and 21.” Subsequent reauthorization of this act continued to fund personnel preparation programs. In 1990, the name of this legislation changed to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* but maintained personnel preparation as the sole focus of Part D of the act.

FOUR PURPOSES OF *IDEA*

The four purposes of *IDEA* are:

- To assure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs;
- To assure that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected;
- To assist states and localities to provide for the education of all children with disabilities; and
- To assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities.

The United States has been concerned over the past 30 years with expanding the opportunities for educating children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Section 612(a)(5) of *IDEA* requires that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, be educated with children who are not disabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. For example, in the early 1980s, *IDEA* supported several Severely Handicapped Institutes to develop and validate effective approaches for integrating children with significant disabilities with their nondisabled family members at home and their nondisabled classmates at school. Model projects in this area have demonstrated an effective system to teach such children the skills they need to lead independent and productive lives. Through such efforts, millions of children with significant disabilities are attending their neighborhood schools and learning the life skills they will need for full, active participation in integrated activities with their family members, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

IDEA has supported the provision of culturally relevant instruction for diverse learners in regular classroom environments. Throughout the 1980s, *IDEA*-supported Minority Handicapped Research Institutes documented that culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities make, at best, limited progress in school programs that employ “watered-down” instruction in segregated environments. Building on and extending the work of these institutes, *IDEA* has supported the development and validation of culturally relevant assessment and intervention practices.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT INSTRUCTION PRINCIPLES

Culturally relevant instruction principles:

- Link assessments of student progress directly to the instructional curricula rather than to abstract norms for standardized tests;
- Examine not only the individual child but also his or her instructional environment, using direct observational data;
- Create classroom environments that reflect different cultural heritages and accommodate different styles of communication and learning; and
- Develop and implement family-friendly practices to establish collaborative partnerships with parents and other caregivers, including those individuals who do not speak English.

IDEA was first reauthorized in 1997. With this reauthorization, all discretionary grant programs were consolidated under an expanded Part D. The personnel development program maintained identify as Section 673, Personnel Preparation to Improve Services and Results for Children With Disabilities. Section 673 focused on supporting the development of leadership personnel and personnel preparation that benefits children with low-incidence or high-incidence disabilities. Section 673 also supported activities that “are of national significance and have broad applicability,” such as professional development institutes, model demonstration projects, and evaluation.

The latest reauthorization of *IDEA* was signed into law on December 3, 2004, by President George W. Bush. The provisions of the act became effective on July 1, 2005, with the exception of some of the elements pertaining to the definition of a “highly qualified teacher” that took effect upon the signing of the act. Efforts were made by the U.S. Congress to align the tenets of *IDEA* to the tenets of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*, especially with regard to “highly qualified teachers.” The final regulations implementing the certain provisions of this reauthorization were published on August 14, 2006.

OSEP GRANT PROGRAMS ON PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

STATE PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT GRANTS PROGRAM

This program assists state education agencies and their partners in reforming and improving their systems for personnel preparation and professional development in early intervention, education, and transition services in order to improve results for children with disabilities. To achieve this goal, the grants may be used to improve systems of professional development, technical assistance, and/or dissemination of knowledge about best practices. For a directory of all currently funded grants under this program, see <http://old.nichcy.org/directories/FY07-Vol%202-TAD.pdf>.

PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT TO IMPROVE SERVICES AND RESULTS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES PROGRAM

Since the enactment of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975*, the United States has faced the challenge of training enough teachers, paraprofessionals, and other service

providers to serve all children with disabilities who are eligible to receive special education and related services. The Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education reports that there is “a severe, chronic shortage of special education teachers in the U.S.,” as 98 percent of school districts report special education teacher shortages. Moreover, in 2004, states and outlying areas reported that 10.3 percent of their special education teachers serving students ages 6 through 21 were uncertified; for 3- through 5-year-olds, this proportion was 11.6 percent. Anecdotal evidence from state personnel indicates a similar shortage of personnel to serve infants and toddlers with disabilities.

OSEP is answering this teacher training challenge with a strong emphasis on preparing individuals to serve children with disabilities. OSEP uses discretionary personnel development grants funded under *IDEA*, Part D to support activities based on best practices and scientifically based research that provide teachers, principals, related services personnel, early intervention personnel, and leadership personnel with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively serve children with disabilities. These grants are awarded for projects to train personnel in:

- Serving infants, toddlers, and preschool age children with disabilities.
- Serving school-age children with low-incidence disabilities, including visual and hearing impairments, significant cognitive impairments (severe mental retardation), orthopedic impairments, autism, and traumatic brain injury.
- Providing related services, speech-language services, and adapted physical education to infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities.
- Training personnel in minority institutions to serve infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities.
- Preparing national leaders in special education at the doctoral level focusing on research, policy, or administration.

To ensure that it is meeting the needs of children with disabilities and their families, OSEP annually collects data from the grantees, including the number of scholars trained, their characteristics, prior employment history, focus of training, and employment on completing training. These data allow OSEP to assess program effectiveness and to meet the reporting requirements of the *Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA)* and the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART).

In fiscal year 2006, 472 grantees were funded under the OSEP Personnel Development Program and supported the training of 8,169 scholars at the doctoral, masters, bachelors, or other professional levels. For a directory of all currently funded grants under this program, see <http://old.nichcy.org/directories/FY07-Vol%201-Personnel.pdf>.

In addition to training grants, OSEP funds ten national centers that provide technical assistance and support to state and local education agencies and institutions of higher education that provide personnel development services to teachers of children with disabilities. The ten centers include:

The *National Outreach and Technical Assistance Center for Minority Institutions (MONARCH)*, located at the University of Illinois-Chicago. The mission of the Monarch Center is based on two related factors: 1) overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students receiving special education services; and 2) chronic personnel shortages in the fields of special education

and related services. The purposes of the Monarch Center are to enhance grantsmanship skills and provide program development services to faculty at Minority Institutions of Higher Education (MIHEs).

<http://www.monarchcenter.org>

The *National Center for Special Education Personnel and Related Service Providers: The Personnel Center*, located at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. The Personnel Center disseminates information on successful recruitment, preparation, and retention strategies for increasing the quantity and quality of practicing professionals, paraprofessionals and assistants who serve the needs of infants, young children, and youths with disabilities and their families. Focused technical assistance in five states per year provides targeted recruitment and retention services directly to those states and their local school districts, early intervention programs, and personnel preparation programs.

<http://www.personnelcenter.org>

The *Center for Improving Teacher Quality (CTQ)*, located in Washington, D.C. at the Council of Chief State School Officers. The CTQ provides technical assistance to states to improve the preparation, licensing, and professional development of both regular and special education teachers of students with disabilities and supports states in their efforts to systematically reform their professional development systems.

http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Center_for_Improving_Teacher_Quality

The *CONNECT: Center to Mobilize Early Childhood Knowledge*, located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. CONNECT works with the early childhood community to respond to challenges faced each day by those working with young children with disabilities and their families. This center is developing interactive, Web-based modules on effective practices to help professional development providers. Modules focus on both content related to young children with disabilities and on helping tomorrow's practitioners develop evidence-based decision-making skills. All modules will be in a format that allows them to be easily infused into existing professional development efforts.

<http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect>

The *IDEA and Research for Inclusive Settings (IRIS): The IRIS Center for Training Enhancements*, located at Vanderbilt University. The IRIS Center is a national center that aims to provide high-quality resources for college and university faculty and professional development providers about students with disabilities. IRIS provides free, online, interactive training enhancements that translate research about the education of students with disabilities into practice.

<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>

The *NIUSI Principal Leadership Academies (NIUSI-PLAN)*, located at Arizona State University. NIUSI-PLAN directly assists at least 400 principals across the country to develop and implement inclusive schools to ensure their students with and without disabilities meet or exceed academic standards set by their states and measured by state assessment systems.

<http://www.niusileadscape.org>

The *National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP)*, located at the University of Florida. The NCIPP identifies strategies for

policies and practices that provide beginning special education and regular education teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively support students with disabilities in different classroom settings, including collaborative practices. This center emphasizes the critical role of induction and mentoring, with a particular focus on high-needs urban and rural schools. Teams of scholars are synthesizing the literature on scientifically based research and evidence-based practices on induction and mentoring, collaborative teaching, and preservice preparation to inform the NCIPP's work.

<http://www.coe.ufl.edu/copsse> (temporary site)

The *National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI)*, located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The purpose of this national center is to increase the number of high-quality early childhood personnel in inclusive early care and education settings. Using a cross-sector approach, evidence-based resources, and other professional development products, the center works with states to ensure that early childhood teachers are prepared to educate and care for young children with disabilities in settings with their typically developing peers. The “cross-sector” approach means that diverse perspectives—agencies, organizations, higher education, and families—will be incorporated in all aspects of the system.

<http://community.fpg.unc.edu/npdci>

The *National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center)*, located at Learning Policy Associates with offices in Naperville, Illinois. The TQ Center is a national resource that provides technical assistance and dissemination activities to regional comprehensive centers, states, and other education stakeholders to strengthen the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools—and to ensure that highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs. The TQ Center is jointly funded by OSEP and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE).

<http://www.tqsource.org>

In addition to these ten centers and the training grants, OSEP has initiated a national effort to support the reform of personnel development programs in universities and has awarded, 42 grants beginning in fiscal year 2007 to institutions of higher education. The purpose of these grants is to improve the quality of K-12 special education teacher preparation programs to ensure that program graduates are able to meet the highly qualified teacher requirements under Sections 602(10) and 612(a)(14) of *IDEA*, and are well prepared to serve children with high-incidence disabilities. For purposes of these reform grants, the term “high-incidence disabilities” refers to learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, or mental retardation.

PART VI: THE AMERICAN COMPETITIVENESS INITIATIVE

Keeping America competitive is one of the United States' top priorities as a nation. We believe our success depends on making sure we have an educated citizenry and an educated workforce, and the Department of Education is committed to ensuring America's high school graduates are ready for the jobs of the 21st century.⁵⁹

America's rapidly changing economy requires an education system that ensures that all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, graduate from high school with the skills they need to be successful in postsecondary education and the workforce. The 2004 reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* called for states to set measurable targets for the progress of students with disabilities. Together with the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*, *IDEA* is holding schools accountable for making sure students with disabilities achieve to high standards.

THE AMERICAN COMPETITIVENESS INITIATIVE

The American Competitiveness Initiative, implemented by President George W. Bush in 2007, builds on the success of *NCLB* and *IDEA* by seeking to increase professional development for teachers, attracting new teachers to the classroom, developing research-based curricula, and providing access to flexible resources for worker training. As you can see, the American Competitiveness Initiative is far-reaching in scope; however, for the purposes of this report we will concentrate on the elements that relate to education and teacher development.

As noted earlier in this report, *NCLB* requires the presence of highly qualified teachers in every classroom and the use of research-based instruction to optimize student learning. "Teachers must have the mastery of content and instructional methods to be effective educators and mentors."⁶⁰ To meet the need for high-quality teachers, the American Competitiveness Initiative proposed a two-step approach that provides professional development for current teachers and attracts new teachers to the classroom. These two steps are the Advanced Placement Incentive Program and the Adjunct Teacher Corps.

THE ADVANCED PLACEMENT INCENTIVE PROGRAM

This program expands the United States' commitment to the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate (AP/IB) programs by increasing funding and placing a specific emphasis on math and science. The program targets school districts with a high concentration of low-income students by offering incentives and training to teachers to become highly qualified

⁵⁹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, *Disability Employment 101*, Washington, D.C., 2007. Retrieved Sept. 11 2008 from <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/products/employmentguide/disabilityemployment101.pdf>.

⁶⁰ The White House, American Competitiveness Initiative (2006). Retrieved Sept. 11, 2008 from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/aci>.

instructors of AP/IB math and science courses. The goal is to train 70,000 new teachers and to increase the number of students achieving passing AP/IB scores to 700,000 within five years.

THE ADJUNCT TEACHER CORPS

The Adjunct Teacher Corps focuses on developing professionals in high demand fields to become teachers in those fields. Through these grants, the Department of Education supports partnerships between school districts and public or private organizations that encourage and prepare science, mathematics, and engineering professionals to teach specific high school math, science, and technology courses as adjunct teachers. This initiative taps the skills of well-qualified individuals who reside outside of the U.S. public education system to meet the specialized needs in secondary schools.

For more information on the Advanced Placement Incentive Program or the Adjunct Teacher Corps, see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/aci/> or <http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/competitiveness/teachercorps.html>.

For more information on the American Competitiveness Initiative, see <http://www.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/competitiveness/index.html?src=pb>.

POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In addition to focusing on K-12 education, the American Competitiveness Initiative addresses post-high school education and training. Education, training, and retraining provide individuals with better career options, opportunities for promotion, and the ability to contribute to U.S. innovation. Data show that earnings increase and unemployment decreases with educational achievement and skills attained. As part of this initiative, the Department of Education has renewed its commitment to community colleges. Community colleges are great training providers and are affordable, accessible, and adaptable. Community colleges are able to track changing local labor conditions and partner with local employers to provide training geared toward the jobs that are in demand.

The Department has also implemented two grant programs that focus on four-year college and university students. First, the Academic Competitiveness Grants are available to students in their first and second academic years of college. Second, the National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) grant program is available to students in their third and fourth academic years of college. These new grant programs will encourage students to pursue college majors in high demand in the global economy, such as science, mathematics, technology, engineering, and critical foreign languages.

TRANSITION

The success of the American Competitiveness Initiative depends largely on the successful transition of students, including students with disabilities, from secondary school into higher education or employment. To ensure that students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living

in the community, President George W. Bush signed into law the reauthorized *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* on December 3, 2004.

The reauthorized *IDEA* defines a series of “transition services” that should be available to all students with disabilities. These transition services are a coordinated set of activities designed for the individual student within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievements of students with disabilities to facilitate the student’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The transition services must be based on the individual child’s needs and should take into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests. These services should include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment, and other post-school adult living objectives and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

At the point that a student with a disability leaves a special education situation due to graduation from secondary school or due to exceeding the age eligibility for FAPE under state law, the local education agency must provide the student with a summary of the student’s academic achievement and functional performance. This summary must include recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting the student’s postsecondary goals.

Each child served under *IDEA* must have in place an individualized education plan (IEP). Beginning when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team, the IEP must include transition-related measures and services. The IEP for student’s 16 and above must include measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills. The IEP must specify the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.

In addition, the student with a disability is invited to attend any IEP team meetings if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals for the student and the transition services needed to assist the student in reaching those goals. The local education agency should also invite a representative of any participating agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services to attend the student’s IEP team meeting. This would include relevant adult service agencies such as the State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agency funded under the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended*. Related services available through the state VR agency will be discussed later in this Part.

Within the Department, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) provides a great deal of resources and technical assistance to schools and teachers in the implementation of these transition requirements, a list of their secondary transition and post-school programs follow:

National Community of Practice on Transition

<http://www.ideapartnership.org>

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness

<http://www.nationaldb.org>

National Dropout Prevention Center for Students With Disabilities
<http://www.ndpc-sd.org>

National High School Center Postsecondary Education Programs Network
<http://www.pepnet.org>

Regional Resource and Federal Centers (RRFC) Network
<http://www.rrfcnetwork.org>

National ALLIANCE Technical Assistant Center
<http://www.taalliance.org>

Technical Assistance on Transition and Rehabilitation Act (funded by RSA)
<http://www.pacer.org/tatra>

EMPLOYMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

An important goal of effective education programs is to facilitate employment. This is especially important for individuals with disabilities who face many barriers in becoming employed. The federal interest and involvement in employment and policy for individuals with disabilities dated initially from the enactment of the *Smith-Fess Act of 1920*. The *Smith-Fess Act* marked the beginning of a federal and state partnership in the rehabilitation and employment of individuals with disabilities. Although the law was passed shortly after the end of World War I, its provisions were specifically directed at the rehabilitation needs of persons who were industrially disabled rather than those of disabled veterans.

A major event in the history of the federal rehabilitation program was passage of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (the act). The act, as amended, provides the legislative basis for programs and activities that assist individuals with disabilities in the pursuit of gainful employment, independence, self-sufficiency, and full integration into community life.

The Department of Education has primary responsibility for administering the act. The Department's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) is the administrative entity responsible for oversight of the programs under the act that are funded through the Department of Education. Within OSERS, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) share responsibility for carrying out the administration of those programs.

By far, the largest program administered by RSA is the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Program, also known as the Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants Program (hereinafter referred to as the VR program). This program funds state VR agencies to provide employment-related services for individuals with disabilities so that they may prepare for and engage in gainful employment that is consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

Since 1920, the VR program has helped individuals with disabilities prepare for and enter into the workforce. Nationwide, in FY 2007, the VR program served more than 980,000 individuals with disabilities. More than 92 percent of the individuals who use state VR services have significant

physical or mental disabilities that seriously limit one or more functional capacities. These individuals often require multiple services over an extended period of time. For them, VR services are indispensable to their becoming employed and reducing their reliance on public support.

The federal government covers 78.7 percent of the program's costs through financial assistance to the states for program services and administration. Federal funds are transferred to the states based on a statutory formula in Section 8 of the act. The formula takes into consideration a state's population and per capita income. To match the federal funds allotted to the states for the VR program, in FY 2007 states expended \$825,948,599 of their own funds.

Each state designates a state agency to administer the VR program. The act provides flexibility for a state to have two state VR agencies—one for individuals who are blind and one for individuals with other types of disabilities. All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 5 territories have VR agencies; additionally, 24 states also have separate agencies serving blind or visually impaired individuals, for a total of 80 state VR agencies.

The act also provides flexibility to the states with respect to the organizational positioning of the VR program within the state structure. The VR program can be located in one of two types of state agencies—one that is primarily concerned with VR or VR and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, or in an agency that is not primarily concerned with VR or VR and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities. For the latter, the act requires the agency to have a designated state VR unit that is primarily concerned with VR or VR and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities. Of the 80 VR agencies, 26 are primarily concerned with VR and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities. Of these, 10 are consumer-controlled agencies. Of the 55 agencies that are not primarily concerned with VR or VR and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the VR program is located in 15 education agencies, 13 labor/workforce agencies, and 27 human services or welfare agencies. For American Samoa, the act identifies the Governor's Office as the VR agency.

The VR program is committed to providing services to individuals with significant disabilities and assisting consumers to achieve high-quality employment outcomes. RSA, in its relationships with the states, has continued to emphasize the priorities of high-quality employment outcomes and increased services to individuals with significant disabilities. RSA emphasizes that:

- Individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, are capable of achieving high-quality, competitive employment in integrated settings and living full and productive lives in their communities.
- The low expectations and misunderstandings that society, some service providers, or consumers themselves have about their abilities, capacities, commitment, creativity, interests, and ingenuity are major barriers to the employment and independence of individuals with disabilities.
- Individuals with disabilities are able to make informed choices about their own lives—including their employment options, the types of services they need, the selection of service providers—and are able to assume responsibility for their decisions.
- The primary role of VR agencies is to provide individuals with disabilities with information, skills training, education, confidence, and support services so that the

individual is empowered to make informed choices about his or her professional and personal life.

- Services are best delivered within a framework of accountability, flexibility, and the least administrative burden necessary.
- Collaboration between rehabilitation service providers and community-based organizations comprised of individuals with disabilities enhances the quality of services and improves outcomes.

Employers know that hiring qualified, loyal employees is the cornerstone of sustained success. The United States is committed to preparing skilled youths and adults with disabilities to successfully attain, transition into, and sustain quality employment and become contributing members of their communities. Together with *NCLB*, *IDEA*, the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended*, and its VR program, the American Competitiveness Initiative is helping to achieve the United States' goals of gainful employment for all citizens and a leading position in the global marketplace.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, education in the United States relies on many people at many levels of government, but it is designed to lead to one outcome: A quality education for every single child. Achieving that goal is no simple matter. It depends on having a highly qualified teacher in each classroom and ensuring those teachers hold students to high standards. It depends on regular assessment to see what's working and what isn't. It depends on involved parents armed with choices and information. And, it depends on us.

The landmark American study *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983, concluded that the U.S. education system was unprepared for the demands of an increasingly competitive global economy. It took the United States years to agree on what to do on a national level, but today, we are seeing a renewed commitment to excellence sparked by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. For the first time in a long time, America is holding itself accountable for results.

The United States strongly supports UNESCO's goal of inclusive education and ensuring equal access to educational opportunities for all learners. We are making strides to fully implement the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, thus ensuring a quality education for all children with disabilities. At the federal level, we are funding grant programs and other initiatives to ensure that there are highly qualified teachers in all United States classrooms, including qualified teachers of special education and related services for students with disabilities.

Of course, there are new challenges. Student interest in science and technology is waning as other nations excel. Toward this end, we are moving forward with the American Competitiveness Initiative in order to align our education system with the skills and knowledge needed for the global marketplace.

With significant reforms at the federal level and innovations at the state and local levels, education in the United States is continually evolving and growing. We believe that education is the great equalizer, and that a high-quality education is the key to success and must be available to every student, including students with disabilities, and we are committed to helping all of our children reach their highest potential as individuals and citizens in a world where freedom is on the march.



The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

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