

EducationCounsel’s Summary of Secretary Cardona’s Speech on a “Vision for Education in America”

On January 27, U.S. Department of Education (USED) Secretary Miguel Cardona delivered a speech outlining his priorities for the Department, as well as his priorities for “continued recovery through the pandemic and improving America’s education system more broadly.” A press release from the Department is [here](#). The full text of the Secretary’s speech is [here](#).

Key to Know:

- **Reimagining Education Systems.** In his speech, Secretary Cardona highlighted the moment as a time to “reimagine education” and “to address the inequities that have existed in our education system” to create “one where all children can succeed.” The Secretary emphasized that during this critical time, “simply reopening schools is just the baseline,” as students need to make up for lost time. Secretary Cardona urged the field to “turn crisis into opportunity” by leveraging the ongoing pandemic response and recovery as a chance to “reset” and “level up” our education systems from pre-kindergarten through adult education.
- **Priority Areas for the Department.** To both support students’ immediate needs resulting from the pandemic and realize a vision of America’s education system as one that “ensure[s] all students can succeed and thrive,” the Secretary outlined four priority areas that will “guide the Department’s work over the coming months and years,” including: (1) supporting students through pandemic response and recovery; (2) boldly addressing opportunity and achievement gaps; (3) making higher education more inclusive and affordable; and (4) ensuring pathways through higher education lead to successful careers (See below for specific policy proposals and initiatives under each priority area).
- **Investments in Education.** Secretary Cardona’s speech likely provides a preview for federal education investments that will be proposed in the fiscal year (FY) 2023 President’s budget request. The priorities and initiatives identified by the Secretary in his speech as critical to achieving his vision for education are likely to align to proposed program increases for FY2023. For instance, the Secretary identified as a priority the need to increase funding for Title I for the education of disadvantaged students and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Priorities for USED Secretary Cardona

Support students through pandemic response and recovery. During his remarks, Secretary Cardona highlighted the tools and resources currently available to states and school districts to respond to the urgent needs of the pandemic and keep schools open for in-person instruction. The Secretary noted that American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds can be used by school districts to implement several proposals, including hiring mental health professionals and providing tutoring. Specific proposals include:

- Increasing access to “embedded” mental health supports for students, including meeting the President’s goal of doubling the number of school counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals in schools;
- “Reimagining” of holistic supports for students, including wrap-around programs;
- Providing meaningful and authentic parent and family engagement;
- Addressing missed instruction by supporting interventions for those students who felt the impact of the pandemic more bluntly than others;
- Ensuring all high school students participate in at least one extracurricular activity in their school;

- Providing targeted, intensive tutoring, including a “challenge” to district leaders to give every student that fell behind during the pandemic at least 30 minutes per day, three days a week, with a “well-trained tutor who is providing that child with consistent, intensive support”; and
- Providing after-school and summer programming.

Boldly address opportunity and achievement gaps. The Secretary noted that to “improve and elevate our education system” that we must “acknowledg[e] that many of the students who have been most underserved during the pandemic are the same ones who have had to deal with barriers to a high-quality education since well before COVID-19.” Specific proposals include:

- Increasing Title I and IDEA funding;
- Rejecting a “culture of low standards and low expectations” for certain students and families;
- Providing free universal pre-kindergarten and affordable, high-quality inclusive child care;
- Using ARP funds to ensure all children can read by third grade;
- Engaging all parents’ voices in this process of recovery;
- Honoring native languages and cultures, as well as gifts and talents students bring;
- Investing in educators and paraprofessionals, including special education teachers;
- Improving the teaching profession by providing a livable wage, ongoing professional learning and development, and supportive working conditions for educators; and
- Encouraging states and districts to “take a hard look at their own ways of funding schools,” and addressing “broken systems” that perpetuate inequities.

Make higher education more inclusive and affordable. The Secretary expressed his concern that “too many talented Americans are choosing against enrolling in higher education due to the fear of debt and the feeling that college is out of reach.” Secretary Cardona then highlighted that the Biden Administration has already cancelled \$15 billion in student loan debt and overhauled the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, but he noted that there is more to do. Specific proposals include:

- Ensuring students are not “burdened with unmanageable loan debt”;
- Supporting every student loan borrower when they transition back into repayment;
- Working with Congress to make “long-term” improvements to the PSLF program;
- Holding colleges and universities accountable, particularly those that defraud students; and
- Undertaking the process to create a “strong” Gainful Employment Rule to ensure that schools focusing on career programs don’t leave students “with mountains of debt and without good job opportunities”.

Ensure pathways through higher education lead to successful careers. Secretary Cardona noted that the Department should be “student centered” meaning that “as we work to make colleges more affordable and accountable, we must also make them more accessible.” Specific proposals include:

- Creating stronger college and career pathways between pre-kindergarten through grade 12 systems, 2 and 4 year colleges, and workforce partners;
- Ensuring all high schools have at least one career counselor;
- Developing career preparation programs with the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Labor that will run through our community colleges;
- Investing in colleges that serve underrepresented groups; and
- Prioritizing and increasing grants that increase access to higher education for all Americans.

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