

Secretary Cardona Lays Out Vision for Education in America

In major address, Secretary Cardona discusses his priorities for continued recovery through the pandemic and improving America's education system more broadly

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In a major address at the Department of Education, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona laid out his vision for continued recovery through the pandemic and his priorities for broader investments in America's education system to ensure all students can succeed and thrive. During the address, Secretary Cardona discussed key strategies the Department, schools, and colleges and universities must take to help students, educators, and school communities – from preschool through postsecondary education – continue to recover from the pandemic and address inequities that have long existed in our education system.

"Reopening schools—and keeping them open—while critical, is insufficient. Our hardest and most important work lies ahead," said Secretary Cardona in the address. "Our students' success is at stake. Not just the students we serve today, but for those who have yet to be born. Our task is not only to improve our education system from where it was before the pandemic, but also to take bolder action to elevate it to lead the world."

During his remarks, Secretary Cardona underscored the work the Biden-Harris Administration has done to help nearly all schools reopen for in-person learning over the last year. When President Biden assumed office, just 46% of America's schools were open full-time in person. Today, 96% are open. Because of the American Rescue Plan, guidance from the Department of Education and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, expanded access to tests and testing resources, and the hard work of educators, families, district leaders, and school communities, America's students have returned to classrooms across the country. And while the Department continues to focus on keeping schools open, it is also focused on strategies to help students make up for lost instructional time, access the mental health supports they need, invest in our educators, and make improvements in our education system to address inequities that existed long before the pandemic. Secretary Cardona laid out how the American Rescue Plan is supporting these efforts now, and how additional investments in our education system can make even greater improvements in our schools and communities. The Secretary also discussed strategies to improve America's postsecondary education system, including creating stronger through-lines between P12 and higher education systems, making postsecondary education more affordable, and putting students and families first in all the Department of Education's work.

Secretary Cardona laid out key actions in four priority areas that will guide the Department's work over the coming months and years:

- Support students through pandemic response and recovery.
 - Engaging families as core partners to educators
 - Addressing missed instruction through intensive tutoring, extended learning time, and other evidence-based practices
 - Increasing access to social, emotional, and mental health supports for all students
 - Encouraging every student to participate in at least one extracurricular activity

- Boldly address opportunity and achievement gaps.
 - Increasing funding for Title I schools and for IDEA in order to close gaps in access to educational opportunity
 - Providing every family the opportunity to start on a level playing field through free, universal pre-K and affordable high-quality child care
 - Investing in, recruiting, and supporting the professional development of a diverse educator workforce, including special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and bilingual educators so education jobs are ones that people from all backgrounds want to pursue
 - Challenging states and districts to fix broken systems that may perpetuate inequities in our schools
- Make higher education more inclusive and affordable.
 - Providing targeted loan relief to student borrowers
 - Holding colleges and universities accountable for taking advantage of borrowers
 - Ensuring borrowers have loan payment options that reflect their economic circumstances
 - Making long term improvements to programs like Public Service Loan Forgiveness and creating a strong Gainful Employment Rule so career programs aren't leaving students with mountains of debt and without good job opportunities
- Ensure pathways through higher education lead to successful careers.
 - Reimagining the connection between p-12, higher education, and workforce
 - Collaborating with the Department of Labor and Department of Commerce to invest in career preparation programs that meet the needs of today's economy
 - Prioritizing grant programs that allow students to return to higher education or pursue career and technical education programs at any point in their lives and careers
 - Investing in colleges and universities that serve underrepresented groups and increase access to and funding for programs like Pell Grants

To view a transcript of Secretary Cardona's remarks, visit <https://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/priorities-speech>