



To our Nation's Parents and Students:

I write first, as your new Secretary of Education, to acknowledge the extraordinarily challenging year you've endured. Between the health crisis, economic hardship, staunch national division, and the struggle to make progress in learning while apart from teachers and peers, the impact of the pandemic is still very real and will be felt for years to come.

And yet, you've kept going. As a parent of two who experienced these same concerns and uncertainties, and an educator who has been moved by the resilience of the students and families I've met, let me say: you deserve recognition and you have my deepest thanks.

Brighter days are ahead. We *are* making progress. More schools across the country are reopening for in-person learning, and they're doing so with the help of clear, science-based guidance from experts in the field. The Department has released part one of a [COVID-19 Handbook](#) to help schools implement [guidance](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and we're working on the second volume. Together, these guides will provide more evidence-based strategies for schools to minimize disruptions caused by school closures, especially for our most vulnerable students and communities and address the impact of COVID-19 on educational opportunity across communities. The most pressing challenges we face aren't new. Since I began teaching more than 20 years ago, opportunity gaps remain. There are still unacceptable disparities in high school graduation rates and higher education is still out of reach for too many students, including learners of color, those from low-income families, and those, as I was, who would be the first in their families to attend.

These inequities aren't just holding our children back from achieving their full potential – they're holding our nation back, too. We *all* benefit when our children have high-quality opportunities to develop their skills and build their knowledge – and then, share their gifts and talents with the world.

Our first priority is to return students to the classroom for in-person learning, but we know there's more work to be done once we've achieved that goal. We're also working toward building better career pathways, making college more affordable, ensuring all students have access to high quality schools with a balance of quality coursework that include the arts and sciences, supporting teacher quality and improving teacher diversity, ensure teachers receive the support and respect they need and deserve, expanding access to high-quality preschool, and supporting high-quality career and technical education.

President Biden's plans are bold, but they match the urgency that the challenges before us demand. And as Secretary, I will always keep students and their success at the heart of the Department's work.

We know that, given the right support, resources and opportunities, our potential is boundless. Despite our worries as parents, this year we've seen new proofs of our children's ingenuity, optimism, and ability to overcome the toughest of circumstances.

If we all commit to approaching the remainder of this school year – and the years to come – with this same mindset of possibility, dedication, and innovation, we can and will make good on our promise to America's students. As an educator and as a parent, I commit to safeguarding and advancing the dreams of your children, as I commit to the dreams of my own son and daughter.

Our nation's students deserve – and they will get – our very best efforts, our most collaborative thinking, and our deepest belief in their abilities. Together, we can build a future of promise and opportunity that makes no exceptions. (Here's a [video](#) about the path ahead.)

Sincerely,

Secretary Miguel Cardona

3/5/2021