Education Drives America

How *you* can help create a culture of academic success in your community

U.S. Department of Education

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U.S. Department of Education
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Secretary of Education

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There is simply no more important work in our society than education. The president understands that, parents understand that, America understands that. Now we—all of us together—must act on that understanding and move forward.

—U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

You may ask... Can I really help?

Do you believe education is important?

Do you believe every child deserves a quality education?

Do you have ideas on how to improve the education experience?

Have you ever wondered, "What can I do?"

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, why not step up to make a difference? This pamphlet contains ideas on how you can help and stories of others who have led the way.

Ask

The first step in helping support public education is to ask the right questions.

How are education decisions made? Education decisions are made on three different levels—federal, state, and local. Education is primarily a state and local responsibility. School boards, administrators, teachers, and elected officials make most decisions. Understand where they stand on key topics.

What is the state of education in your community? Every community is different. Contact your local school or community center, and talk to your friends and neighbors to determine your community's strengths and weaknesses.

Driving Success: GED Prep Classes

With a keen awareness of the high dropout rate in Baltimore, Md., and the increasing number of residents without a high school diploma, Mark Atkinson presented a plan to teach community GED prep classes at no cost. Because of Mark's dedication, he is changing the lives of many families.

Remember the ABCs –

Attendance, Behavior, Course Performance, and College Access. Those factors are clearly linked to student success, they are easily measurable, and community service activities can positively affect them.

What are students' rights? Students have the right to receive an education free from discrimination. Learn about these rights by reaching out to your state department of education, or visit the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights' website at www.ED.gov/OCR.

What resources are available to keep you updated on the latest education news? Stay current through social media, newspapers, magazines, and websites. The U.S. Department of Education, for example, offers news and resources by email at www.ED.gov/emailupdates, free publications at www.edpubs.gov, and live help by phone in English and Spanish at 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327).

What are challenges that youths in your neighborhood face? It is especially important to understand the situations of at-risk students. Visit FindYouthInfo.gov.

Join the Conversation

Plan a discussion. Invite neighbors, friends, and colleagues to gather for a discussion to help solve a school-based problem.

Connect with education groups. Reach out to groups that focus on education. Find out when the school board, school or district advisory boards, and chamber of commerce meet. Other organizations that may have local chapters near you include parent associations, civil rights advocates and mayors' youth councils.

Speak up. Your voice can be a powerful tool for making changes in your community. If you feel comfortable writing, express your opinions and concerns through articles, blogs, and tweets, or speak up at a community, town, or school board meeting. Voting is another way to express yourself.

Driving Success: School Makeover

Deirdre Pierce, a DeKalb County, Ga., PTA mom, noticed how neglected her local high school had become. She succeeded in assembling dedicated and fearless parents, and others, who advocated for a total upgrade of the building. She formed partnerships with local community and faith groups, and a member of the local school board. The effort took time and sweat equity but it happened, and the students saw adults committing to their education.

Support Students

Help with FAFSA. Completing the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) is the first step toward getting federal aid for college, career training, or graduate school. The U.S. Department of Education provides more than $150 billion in grants, loans, and work-study funds each year, but students must fill out the FAFSA to determine their eligibility. Visit StudentAid.ed.gov/FAFSA.

Focus on attendance. Chronic absenteeism in school — 10 percent or more of the school year — can significantly affect a student's future. Find ways to play a role in promoting good attendance in your community. AttendanceWorks.org is one of several resources for ideas.

Driving Success: Tutoring and Extra Help

Nestor Pimienta, a student at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, found himself building relationships with facilities management and food service workers on campus who asked him if he could tutor their children. Growing up in a working-class neighborhood, Nestor understood it was difficult finding extra help. That's when he decided to found Tutoring Tomorrow Today, a student-run program to provide subject-based tutoring and mentoring for the families of the campus workers who inspired the idea.

Keep schools safe. Students who don't feel safe have a hard time learning. There are plenty of resources online that cover safety-in-school resources and school violence prevention.

Help academically. Students need to work on academic performance throughout the year, including the summer months. In order to be aligned with what is going on throughout the school day, seek out tutoring opportunities within a school.

Mentor. Address the social needs of children by mentoring them through school-based programs and activities.

Research higher education options. When helping someone you know make a decision about postsecondary education — technical programs, community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities — consider the academic programs, classroom environment, costs, and federal student aid options. Visit StudentAid.gov.

Support Schools

Volunteer. Volunteers are always needed to help with day-to-day tasks or to help execute special projects. Reach out to your school principal, teacher, or community center, or visit Serve.gov, an online resource where you can find volunteer opportunities and recruit volunteers.

Plan an event. Events can help meet needs and raise awareness. Organize drives for food, clothing, books, or school supplies, as well as fundraisers and family nights.

Adopt a school. Adopting a school can take on a variety of forms, including remodeling and renovating a school, creating an after-school program, and making over a library, music room, or parent center.

Contribute financially. Schools are frequently in need of extra financial support. There are several tools to help you donate to a classroom in need such as AdoptAClassroom.org and DonorsChoose.org. They allow individuals to fund classroom projects designed by teachers in high-need schools. Local public education funds also raise money to support schools.

Challenge your community. Join with schools, national service programs, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations to improve our lowest-performing schools by participating in the U.S. Department of Education's *Together for Tomorrow Challenge* at TFT.Challenge.gov.

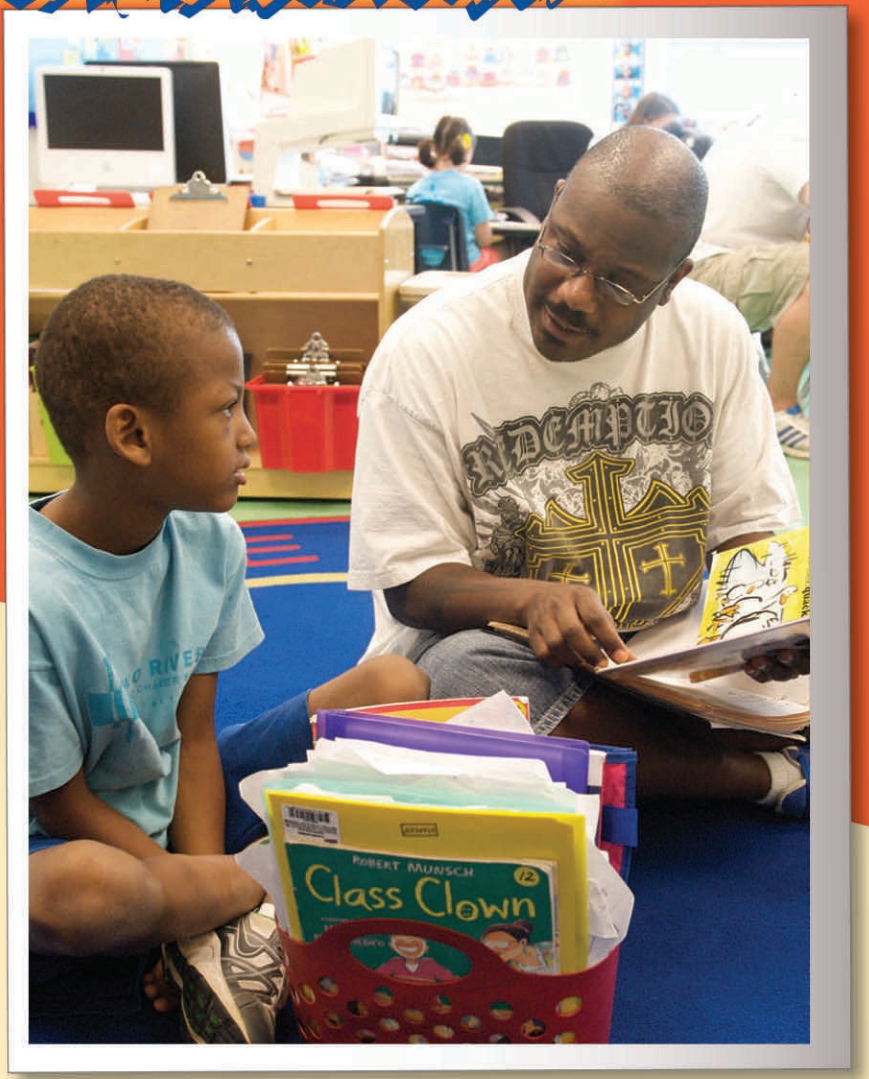
Don't forget to celebrate!

It is important to celebrate student achievement. Build an environment where everyone recognizes they have an important role to play in creating a community culture of education success.

Offer Opportunities. At your place of business, consider offering discounts or incentives for students, teachers, or school staff, or internships for teachers and students to educate them about your industry; help school districts align their programs with your industry's needs; or provide career shadowing to students to help connect their education to potential careers.

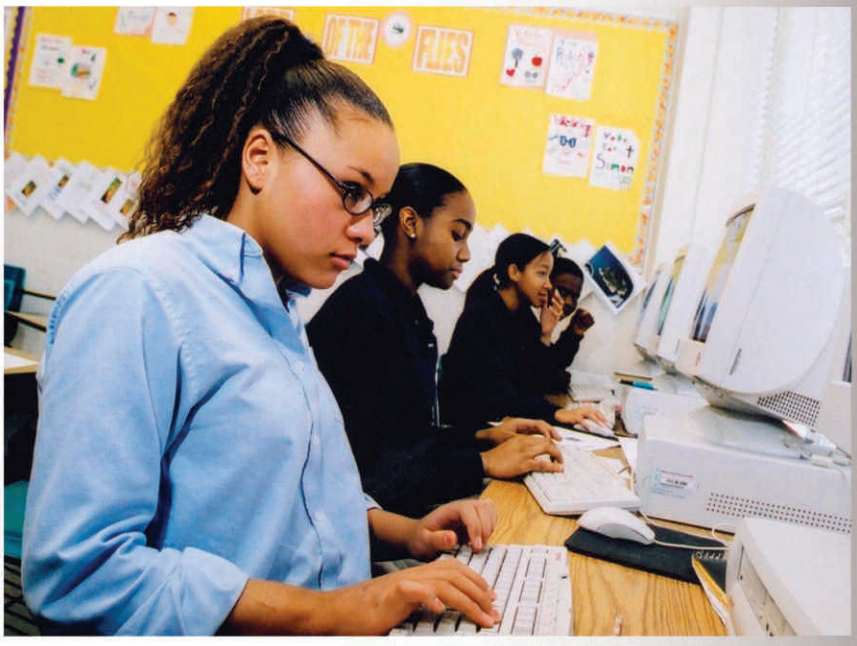
Focus on Priority Schools

The school closest to you may not be the one that needs the most attention. Focus on improving Priority Schools and their feeder schools. Priority Schools are the lowest-achieving schools in a state. Talk to the school's administration or go online and visit district websites or websites such as GreatSchools.org or LocalSchoolDirectory.com for information on school performance.



Driving Success: Education Seminars

Understanding the confusion that new immigrants face about how best to enter the mainstream U.S. economy, Liberty Tax Service created the Una Familia Sin Fronteras *Foundation to offer financial and fiscal education seminars free of charge throughout the year. Through Spanish radio programs and partnerships with more than 400 nonprofits, school districts, churches, libraries, GED programs, schools for English language learners, universities, Hispanic consulates, and governmental institutions, more than 1,000 Liberty offices have, together, assisted hundreds of thousands of Latinos.*



Driving Success: Fundraising for Classroom Projects

Debby Guardino, a Virginia special education teacher, wanted to do something to help Joplin, Mo., teachers whose classroom resources were completely destroyed by the devastating tornado that hit the area in 2011. She single-handedly raised more than $400,000 in classroom supplies before traveling to Missouri. Over 12 days, Debby instructed teachers on how to raise money for their classroom projects using DonorsChoose.org. By the time of her departure from Joplin, she had overseen the distribution of all donated supplies and conducted more than 20 computer classes. Under her guidance, teachers posted more than 200 projects. Within a month, 800 teachers' projects were posted on DonorsChoose.org. To date, more than 5,000 members have raised over $580,000 in donations reaching some 96,000 Joplin students.

For more resources and ideas on how you can support students and schools in your community, go to www.ed.gov/get involved.

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