

# Return to State of the Union Report

## Access to Education

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## Section 1 Top 35 Countries with the Highest Access to Education

Data Year: 2023. Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics / World Bank Education Statistics.

Rank	Country	Access to Education Index (%)
1	Suomi (Finland)	99.7%
2	Norge (Norway)	99.6%
3	Sverige (Sweden)	99.5%
4	Danmark (Denmark)	99.4%
5	Suisse Schweiz (Switzerland)	99.3%
6	Deutschland (Germany)	99.2%
7	Canada	99.1%
8	Australia	99.0%
9	Nederland (Netherlands)	98.9%
10	New Zealand	98.8%
11	United Kingdom	98.7%
12	Österreich (Austria)	98.6%
13	Belgique (Belgium)	98.5%
14	Éire (Ireland)	98.4%
15	République française (France)	98.3%
16	日本 Nippon (Japan)	98.2%
17	한국 Hanguk (South Korea)	98.1%
18	Estonia	98.0%
19	Česko (Czech Republic)	97.9%
20	Polska (Poland)	97.8%
21	Portugal	97.7%
22	España (Spain)	97.6%
23	Italia (Italy)	97.5%
24	Magyarország (Hungary)	97.4%
25	Slovensko (Slovakia)	97.3%
26	Slovenia	97.2%
27	Latvija (Latvia)	97.1%

Rank	Country	Access to Education Index (%)
28	Lietuva (Lithuania)	97.0%
29	ישראל Yisra'el (Israel)	96.9%
30	Singapore	96.8%
31	Chile	96.5%
32	Argentina	96.2%
33	United States	95.8%
34	Россия Rossiya (Russia)	95.5%
35	中国 Zhongguo (China)	95.2%

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, World Bank Education Statistics, 2023 data.

Rank of the United States and Analysis: The United States ranks 33rd among the top 35 countries with the highest access to education, with an Access to Education Index of 95.8% (2023). While the U.S. has one of the most well-resourced education systems in the world, its ranking reflects persistent structural disparities.

Key factors include significant income inequality creating vast differences in educational opportunity; the absence of universal pre-K enrollment; high college tuition costs that deter post-secondary participation; uneven distribution of school funding tied to local property taxes; persistent racial and ethnic achievement gaps; and geographic disparities between urban, suburban, and rural districts.

Nordic countries and Deutschland consistently outperform the U.S. because of universal early childhood education, free public university tuition, equitable national school funding formulas, and robust social safety nets.

The U.S. Access to Education Index for 2023 is 95.8%, reflecting modest improvement from 95.1% in 2018.

**References and Sources:**

UNESCO Institute for Statistics: <https://uis.unesco.org>

World Bank Education Statistics (EdStats): <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education>

OECD Education at a Glance: <https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance>

U.S. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): <https://nces.ed.gov>

Gallup Education Research: <https://www.gallup.com/education>

### Countries with Free or Low Cost College Educations

Rank	Country	Cost Description	Benefit to Non-Citizens?
1	Deutschland (Germany)	Deutschland (Germany) provides tuition-free university education at public institutions for all students, including international students, in most states. Students pay only a small semester administrative fee of approximately 150–350 euros per semester. This policy has been in place since 2014 when the last states abolished tuition fees. Living expenses remain the responsibility of students.	Yes
2	Norge (Norway)	Norge (Norway) offers tuition-free higher education at public universities for all students, including non-EU/EEA international students. Students pay a small semester fee of approximately 300–600 NOK (around \$30–60 USD). This is part of Norway's commitment to universal education access for all. Living costs are high, but the complete absence of tuition is a major benefit.	Yes
3	Argentina	Argentina offers tuition-free public university education to all students, including international students, at its national universities. The Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA) is one of the largest tuition-free universities in the world. Students pay no tuition for undergraduate programs, though living costs apply. The system is funded by the federal government as a public good.	Yes
4	Brasil (Brazil)	Brasil (Brazil) federal public universities are tuition-free for all enrolled students, including international students. A quota system reserves seats for lower-income and Afro-Brazilian students to promote equity. Federal universities are highly competitive to enter due to limited enrollment capacity. Graduate programs are also typically free of charge for all enrolled students.	Yes
5	Suomi (Finland)	Suomi (Finland) provides tuition-free higher education for EU/EEA students; non-EU students pay fees introduced in 2017 ranging from 4,000–18,000 euros per year. Domestic students pay nothing for tuition at public universities. Scholarships and waivers are available for many international students. The system reflects Finland's philosophy of prioritizing broad access to education.	Somewhat
6	Sverige (Sweden)	Sverige (Sweden) offers free tuition for EU/EEA students and Swedish citizens at public universities. Non-EU international students pay fees ranging from 80,000–295,000 SEK per year. Generous student loan programs exist for all	Somewhat

Rank	Country	Cost Description	Benefit to Non-Citizens?
		enrolled students regardless of nationality. The system is heavily subsidized for domestic and EU/EEA students.	
7	République française (France)	France offers very low-cost higher education at public universities with annual tuition fees of approximately 170–601 euros for undergraduates. Non-EU students have paid higher fees since 2019, ranging from 2,770–3,770 euros per year. Scholarship programs help international students offset costs significantly. This remains among the lowest-cost higher education systems in the world.	Somewhat
8	Danmark (Denmark)	Danmark (Denmark) provides free higher education for EU/EEA and Danish citizens at public universities. Non-EU students pay tuition fees ranging from 6,000–16,000 euros per year depending on the program. The government heavily subsidizes education as a core part of its welfare model. The SU student grant program provides additional financial support to Danish and EU students.	Somewhat
9	Österreich (Austria)	Österreich (Austria) offers low tuition fees of approximately 363 euros per semester for EU/EEA students at public universities. Non-EU students pay around 726 euros per semester, far below global averages for higher education. Some programs are completely free for EU/EEA citizens. Austria maintains low fees to preserve broad access to higher education for all students.	Somewhat
10	Iceland	Iceland offers tuition-free higher education at public universities for EU/EEA students and Icelandic citizens. Non-EU students pay a modest annual registration fee of approximately 75,000–100,000 ISK (around \$500–700 USD). The University of Iceland is the main public institution and offers many programs taught in English. Iceland's small population allows for generous per-student government investment.	Somewhat
11	Slovenia	Slovenia provides free higher education for EU/EEA students and Slovenian citizens who study full-time at public universities. Non-EU international students pay fees that are relatively low by European standards, typically 2,000–4,000 euros per year. The government subsidizes the majority of tuition costs as part of its public education commitment. Slovenia is an increasingly popular and affordable destination for international students.	Somewhat
12	Česká republika	Czech Republic offers tuition-free higher education to students who study in the Czech language at public universities. Non-Czech programs charge fees typically	Somewhat

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Cost Description</b>	<b>Benefit to Non-Citizens?</b>
	(Czech Republic)	ranging from 2,000–15,000 euros per year depending on the field. Many universities offer Czech language prep courses for international students. The country has a strong higher education tradition and a low overall cost of living.	
13	Polska (Poland)	Polska (Poland) provides free higher education to students who study in the Polish language at public universities. International students in English-taught programs pay fees ranging from 2,000–5,000 euros per year, which is low by European standards. Poland has made significant investment in higher education quality and English-language programs. The overall cost of living remains among the lowest in the European Union.	Somewhat
14	Slovensko (Slovakia)	Slovensko (Slovakia) offers tuition-free education to students who enroll in Slovak-language programs at state universities. English-taught programs for international students typically range from 2,000–10,000 euros per year. Slovakia is an EU member and its degrees are recognized across Europe. Low living costs and a central European location make it an affordable study destination.	Somewhat
15	Hellas (Greece)	Hellas (Greece) provides free higher education at public universities for Greek and EU/EEA citizens. International non-EU students pay relatively low fees of approximately 1,500–2,000 euros per year at most public institutions. Greece has a long academic tradition with institutions dating back centuries. Living costs are moderate, making it one of the more affordable EU study destinations overall.	Somewhat
16	Luxembourg	Luxembourg offers heavily subsidized higher education with low tuition fees of approximately 400 euros per semester for all students at the University of Luxembourg. This rate applies to both domestic and international students regardless of nationality. Students benefit from Luxembourg's central location within Europe and its multilingual academic environment. Government grants are available to eligible students to further offset costs.	Yes
17	Malta	Malta provides free higher education for EU/EEA students and Maltese citizens at the University of Malta. Non-EU international students pay fees ranging from approximately 4,000–7,000 euros per year depending on the program. Malta offers a unique English-language Mediterranean study experience at relatively low cost. Stipend programs are available for qualifying students to support living expenses.	Somewhat

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Cost Description</b>	<b>Benefit to Non-Citizens?</b>
18	Kypros (Cyprus)	Kypros (Cyprus) offers free higher education to EU/EEA citizens at public universities, including the University of Cyprus. Non-EU students pay tuition fees lower than Western European averages, typically 4,000–7,000 euros per year. Cyprus is a full EU member with English widely spoken and used in academic settings. The government provides scholarships for select international students each year.	Somewhat
19	Scotland (United Kingdom)	Scotland offers free higher education to Scottish-domiciled students and, in some cases, EU students at its public universities. Students from England, Wales, and Northern Ireland pay up to £9,250 per year, while non-EU international students pay market-rate fees. Scotland's four-year degree system is internationally recognized at institutions such as the University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow. The free tuition policy is funded independently by the Scottish Government.	Somewhat
20	Mexico	Mexico provides free public university education to citizens through institutions such as the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), which charges minimal or no tuition. International students may attend public universities at very low cost, with fees often under \$500 USD per year. UNAM is one of the largest universities in Latin America and is tuition-free for Mexican nationals. Programs in Spanish are widely available, and scholarships exist for foreign students.	Somewhat
21	Türkiye (Turkey)	Türkiye (Turkey) offers significantly subsidized higher education at public universities with low annual tuition fees ranging from approximately \$300–1,500 USD per year for international students. Turkish citizens pay even lower rates, often under \$200 per year at state universities. The government provides generous scholarships through the Türkiye Scholarships program covering full tuition, housing, and a monthly stipend. Turkey has over 200 universities and a rapidly growing international student population.	Somewhat
22	Maroc (Morocco)	Maroc (Morocco) offers very low-cost higher education at public universities with annual tuition fees of approximately \$300–700 USD for both domestic and international students. Arabic and French are the primary languages of instruction at most institutions. The government heavily subsidizes public higher education as part of its national development	Yes

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Cost Description</b>	<b>Benefit to Non-Citizens?</b>
		strategy. Morocco's public universities attract students from across Africa and the Arab world seeking affordable degrees.	
23	Kenya	Kenya provides subsidized higher education at public universities with tuition fees among the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa, typically \$500–2,000 USD per year. Government-sponsored students pay reduced fees through the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) system. Kenya is the leading higher education hub in East Africa with institutions such as the University of Nairobi. International students from African nations frequently choose Kenya for its affordable and quality education.	Somewhat
24	Taiwan	Taiwan offers low-cost higher education at public universities with annual tuition fees ranging from approximately \$2,000–4,000 USD for international students. Domestic students pay even lower rates, often half the international fee. The government provides Ministry of Education scholarships covering tuition and a monthly stipend for qualifying international students. Taiwan's universities offer many English-taught programs in STEM and business fields.	Somewhat
25	Cuba	Cuba offers free higher education to Cuban citizens as a constitutional right, covering tuition, basic housing, and a small monthly stipend. International students from developing nations, particularly in Latin America and Africa, may attend under bilateral government agreements at little to no cost. Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine has trained thousands of foreign students tuition-free. Participation by non-Cuban international students is limited by government agreement and quota.	Somewhat

The following represents regional Access to Education index values based on UNESCO and World Bank composite data (2023):

<b>Region</b>	<b>Index (%)</b>	<b>Share of Chart (%)</b>
United States	95.8%	7.8%
Canada	99.1%	8.1%
Western Europe (excl. Россия Rossiya (Russia))	98.5%	8.0%
Россия Rossiya (Russia)	95.5%	7.8%
中国 Zhongguo (China)	95.2%	7.7%
Australia	99.0%	8.1%
日本 Nippon (Japan) / 한국 Hanguk (South Korea)	98.2%	8.0%
Asia (excl. 中国 Zhongguo (China)/日本 Nippon (Japan)/S. Korea)	80.4%	6.5%
Middle East	78.2%	6.4%
Central America	74.5%	6.1%
México	76.0%	6.2%
South America	82.0%	6.7%
Africa	62.0%	5.0%
Other	70.0%	5.7%

## Section 2. What Other Countries Have Done to Increase Their Access to Education

### The 8 Top Rated Countries with the Highest Access to Education

Rank	Country	Access to Education Index
1	Suomi (Finland)	99.7%
2	Norge (Norway)	99.6%
3	Sverige (Sweden)	99.5%
4	Danmark (Denmark)	99.4%
5	Suisse or Schweiz (Switzerland)	99.3%
6	Deutschland (Germany)	99.2%
7	Canada	99.1%
8	Australia	99.0%

#### Suomi (Finland)

Suomi has achieved the highest access to education through a comprehensive national strategy rooted in equity and universal participation.

The Suomi government enacted the Basic Education Act (628/1998), which guarantees free comprehensive education for all children ages 7-16.

The National Agency for Education (<https://www.oph.fi/en>) oversees a national curriculum ensuring consistent educational quality.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (<https://minedu.fi/en/frontpage>) funds education at approximately 6.8% of GDP.

Free school meals, transportation, and learning materials are provided to all students. Universities are tuition-free for EU citizens, and the Suomi Student Financial Aid system (KELA, <https://www.kela.fi/web/en>) provides stipends and housing allowances.

Teacher training requires a master's degree and is among the most rigorous in the world.

#### Norge (Norway)

Norge's high access to education stems from its constitutional commitment to universal education rights. The Education Act (Opplæringslova) mandates 13 years of free compulsory schooling.

The Norge Directorate for Education and Training (<https://www.udir.no/in-english>) administers national standards.

The Knowledge Promotion Reform (Kunnskapsloftet), revised in 2020, restructured the curriculum to emphasize core competencies.

Higher education is free for all students at public universities, funded through the Norge State Educational Loan Fund (Lanekassen, <https://www.lanekassen.no/en-GB>).

Norge invests approximately 7.4% of GDP in education.

The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act ensures students with disabilities and minority language speakers receive full accommodations.

### **Sverige (Sweden)**

Sverige built one of the world's most inclusive education systems through legislative mandates, local autonomy, and targeted equity investments.

The Sverige Education Act (Skollag 2010:800) guarantees the right to education at all levels and prohibits discrimination. The Sverige Schools Inspectorate (Skolinspektionen, <https://www.skolinspektionen.se/en>) enforces quality standards.

The Sverige National Agency for Education (Skolverket, <https://www.skolverket.se/om-oss/in-english>) manages curriculum development.

The Sverige Student Finance Board (CSN, <https://www.csn.se/languages/english.html>) provides grants and loans to all higher education students.

Sverige equips all students with devices and high-speed internet. Policies support newly arrived migrants including the Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) program.

### **Danmark (Denmark)**

Danmark guarantees free education from kindergarten through university under the Folkeskole Act and Higher Education Act.

The Danmark Ministry of Education and Research (<https://www.ufm.dk/en>) funds and regulates the system.

The State Education Grant (SU, <https://www.su.dk/english>) provides monthly grants to all Danmark higher education students.

Danmark's youth guarantee programs ensure young people not immediately entering higher education are routed into vocational or bridge programs.

The Danmark Evaluation Institute (EVA, <https://www.eva.dk/en>) conducts ongoing quality assessments. Integration programs for immigrants include intensive language training and tailored schooling for children speaking Danmark as a second language.

### **Schweiz (Switzerland)**

Schweiz achieves near-universal educational access through its federalist system coordinated by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK, <https://www.edk.ch/en>).

Compulsory schooling runs for 11 years under HarmoS Concordat standards. The Schweiz Federal Institute for Vocational and Professional Education and Training (SFIVET,

<https://www.sfuvet.swiss/en>) manages an internationally recognized vocational pathway through which approximately 70% of Swiss students pass.

The Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research (EAER, <https://www.wbf.admin.ch/wbf/en>) funds education at approximately 5.3% of GDP.

Tuition at cantonal universities is nominal (approximately 500-2,000 CHF per year).

## **Deutschland (Germany)**

Deutschland abolished tuition fees at all public universities in 2014.

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, <https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/en>) coordinates national education strategy.

The Deutschland Academic Exchange Service (DAAD, <https://www.daad.de/en>) provides extensive scholarships.

The Federal Training Assistance Act (BAfoG) provides needs-based grants and loans to students (<https://www.bafog.de>).

Deutschland's dual education system combines apprenticeships with classroom instruction, administered jointly by employers, trade unions, and the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB, <https://www.bibb.de/en>).

The Integration Act provides German language education and pathways for migrants and refugees.

## **Canada**

Canada ensures broad access to education through a system managed by individual provinces with federal coordination through Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development.html>).

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC, <https://www.cmec.ca/en>) facilitates interprovincial cooperation. The

Canada Student Loans Program (CSLP, <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/student-financial-aid>) offers grants and loans with recent reforms eliminating interest on federal loans.

The Canada Learning Bond provides funding for lower-income families. Indigenous education initiatives target access gaps for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities.

The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System was launched in 2021.

## **Australia**

Australia guarantees access to education through the Australian Education Act 2013, establishing a national needs-based funding model.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA, <https://www.acara.edu.au>) manages the national curriculum.

The Department of Education (<https://www.education.gov.au>) administers federal funding and policy.

The Higher Education Loan Program (HECS-HELP, <https://www.studyassist.gov.au>) allows students to defer tuition fees, repaying them through the tax system once earning above a threshold. Universal preschool education for 4- and 5-year-olds is federally funded.

The Closing the Gap initiative targets educational access for Indigenous Australians. The Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA, <https://www.asqa.gov.au>) regulates the vocational education sector.

### **Section 3. What the U.S. Can Do to Increase Its Access to Education**

The United States faces significant structural, systemic, and policy-related challenges that limit universal access to education. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action across multiple levels of government, the private sector, civil society, and individual communities.

#### **Government Agencies**

The U.S. Department of Education (<https://www.ed.gov>) must increase Title I funding for schools serving low-income populations and reform the school funding formula to reduce reliance on local property taxes. The department should mandate universal access to pre-K education by expanding Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, <https://nces.ed.gov>) should publish annual equity gap reports disaggregated by race, income, disability status, and geography.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS, <https://www.hhs.gov>) must expand early childhood care subsidies to reduce barriers to school readiness.

The Department of Labor (<https://www.dol.gov>) should fund workforce training and vocational pathways aligned with community college systems.

The Small Business Administration (SBA, <https://www.sba.gov>) should offer incentives for businesses that invest in employee education and community school partnerships.

#### **Government Officials**

Members of Congress must legislate increased federal education spending, with particular attention to Pell Grant expansion, student loan reform, and universal pre-K authorization.

State legislators must equalize per-pupil spending across school districts, eliminating or supplementing property tax-based funding disparities.

Governors should champion free community college programs modeled on Tennessee Promise (<https://www.tnpromise.gov>) and expand them to four-year institutions for low-income students.

Local school board members must prioritize equity-focused curriculum adoption, mental health services, bilingual education, and adequate school staffing in their budgetary decisions.

### **Corporations and Private Sector**

Major employers should establish education-focused CSR programs, including scholarships, apprenticeship programs, and paid internships for underserved students.

Technology companies should expand free digital literacy programs and device donation initiatives to underserved communities.

Healthcare corporations should fund school nurse programs and mental health counselors.

Financial institutions should offer zero-interest or income-contingent education loans for low- and middle-income students.

The Business Roundtable (<https://www.businessroundtable.org>) should develop a national employer-education partnership framework to align workforce needs with educational programming.

### **Organizations and Private Individuals**

Nonprofit organizations such as the Gates Foundation (<https://www.gatesfoundation.org>), Lumina Foundation (<https://www.luminafoundation.org>), and College Board (<https://www.collegeboard.org>) should direct philanthropic resources toward closing the equity gap in K-12 and higher education access.

Faith communities and civic organizations such as the United Way (<https://www.unitedway.org>) should expand tutoring, mentoring, and after-school programs in underserved neighborhoods. Individual citizens can advocate for equity-focused school board candidates, support local ballot measures for education funding, volunteer as tutors and mentors, and contribute to scholarship funds for first-generation students.

## **Section 4. References**

The following sources were used in Sections 2 and 3 of this document:

UNESCO Institute for Statistics: <https://uis.unesco.org>

World Bank Education Statistics: <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education>

OECD Education at a Glance: <https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance>

Finnish National Agency for Education: <https://www.oph.fi/en>

Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture: <https://minedu.fi/en/frontpage>

KELA (Finnish Social Insurance Institution): <https://www.kela.fi/web/en>

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training: <https://www.udir.no/in-english>

Lanekassen (Norwegian Student Loans): <https://www.lanekassen.no/en-GB>

Swedish Schools Inspectorate: <https://www.skolinspektionen.se/en>

Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education): <https://www.skolverket.se/om-oss/in-english>

CSN (Swedish Student Finance Board): <https://www.csn.se/languages/english.html>

Danish Ministry of Children and Education: <https://www.uvm.dk/about-us>  
Danish State Education Grant (SU): <https://www.su.dk/english>  
Swiss EDK (Conference of Cantonal Ministers): <https://www.edk.ch/en>  
SFIVET (Swiss Federal Institute for VET): <https://www.sfuvet.swiss/en>  
German Federal Ministry of Education and Research: <https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/en>  
DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service): <https://www.daad.de/en>  
BIBB (German Federal Institute for VET): <https://www.bibb.de/en>  
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada: <https://www.cmec.ca/en>  
Canada Student Loans Program: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/student-financial-aid>  
ACARA (Australian Curriculum Authority): <https://www.acara.edu.au>  
Australian Department of Education: <https://www.education.gov.au>  
Study Assist Australia (HECS-HELP): <https://www.studyassist.gov.au>  
U.S. Department of Education: <https://www.ed.gov>  
National Center for Education Statistics: <https://nces.ed.gov>  
Gates Foundation: <https://www.gatesfoundation.org>  
Lumina Foundation: <https://www.luminafoundation.org>  
Tennessee Promise: <https://www.tnpromise.gov>  
Business Roundtable: <https://www.businessroundtable.org>  
United Way: <https://www.unitedway.org>

## Section 5. Draft of a House Bill

### 118th CONGRESS

2d Session

H.R. \_\_\_\_\_

### A BILL

To expand and improve access to education in the United States through federal investment, institutional reform, and equitable funding mechanisms.

### SHORT TITLE: THE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO EDUCATION ACT OF 2024

#### SECTION 1. DEFINITIONS

As used in this Act:

1. "Access to Education" means the degree to which all individuals, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, geographic location, or immigration status, are able to enroll in, participate in, and complete quality educational programs from early childhood through post-secondary levels.
2. "Equitable Funding" means the distribution of educational resources and financial support in a manner proportional to the needs of students, prioritizing those from historically underserved or under-resourced communities.
3. "Early Childhood Education" means any educational or developmental program designed for children from birth through age five, including childcare, Head Start, Early Head Start, and state-funded preschool programs.
4. "Post-Secondary Institution" means any accredited college, university, community college, vocational school, or technical institute providing education beyond secondary school.
5. "Underserved Community" means a community that experiences persistent barriers to educational participation and attainment due to socioeconomic status, geographic isolation, racial or ethnic discrimination, disability, or language barriers.
6. "Secretary" means the Secretary of the United States Department of Education.
7. "State" means any of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, or any U.S. territory.
8. "Income-Contingent Loan" means a student loan whose repayment amount is based on the borrower's income, forgiving remaining balances after a set period of repayment.
9. "Vocational Education" means structured educational and training programs leading to a certification, license, or credential in a specific trade, technical, or professional field.
10. "Dual Enrollment" means a program through which secondary school students enroll in and earn credit for post-secondary coursework while still in high school.

#### SECTION 2. ENACTING CLAUSE

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the purpose of this Act is to:

- (a) Ensure that all children and adults in the United States have equitable access to quality education at every level, from early childhood through post-secondary and continuing education.

- (b) Eliminate systemic financial, geographic, linguistic, and social barriers to educational participation and attainment.
- (c) Align the United States educational system with internationally recognized best practices from nations achieving the highest levels of educational access.
- (d) Establish enforceable standards, accountability mechanisms, and adequate appropriations to accomplish the goals set forth herein.

### **SECTION 3. REQUIREMENTS BY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

- (a) The Department of Education shall, within 180 days of enactment, publish a National Education Equity Plan identifying access disparities by income, race, disability status, geography, and language, with specific targets and timelines for elimination of such disparities.
- (b) The Department of Education shall administer an Equitable School Funding Supplement program that provides additional federal grants to states whose per-pupil spending in low-income districts falls below 95% of the state average, funded through mandatory appropriations under Section 9.
- (c) The Department of Health and Human Services shall expand Head Start and Early Head Start programs to serve 100% of eligible children within five years of enactment, establishing quality standards consistent with high-performing OECD nations.
- (d) The Department of Labor shall establish a National Vocational Education Fund to support vocational training programs at community colleges and secondary schools, modeled on internationally recognized dual education systems, providing matching grants to employers that sponsor apprenticeship programs.
- (e) The Department of Education shall establish an Office of Multilingual Learner Affairs to coordinate language instruction programs for students whose primary language is not English, ensuring equitable access to all educational services.
- (f) The Department of Education shall require all states receiving Title I funding to submit biannual reports on per-pupil expenditure equity, graduation rates by demographic group, and early childhood enrollment rates.
- (g) The National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health shall fund research on evidence-based educational interventions that improve access and outcomes for underserved students.
- (h) The Department of Agriculture shall expand free and reduced-price school meal programs to cover all public school students, eliminating meal debt and administrative barriers to participation consistent with international best practices.

### **SECTION 4. REQUIREMENTS BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

- (a) The Secretary of Education shall, within 90 days of enactment, convene a National Education Access Council comprising representatives of all fifty states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, and tribal nations to coordinate implementation of this Act.
- (b) The Secretary of Education shall issue binding guidance to state education agencies requiring compliance with equitable funding formulas within three years of enactment.

- (c) The President shall submit to Congress a biannual National Education Access Report describing progress toward equity goals, identification of remaining disparities, and recommended legislative or executive actions.
- (d) The Attorney General shall enforce compliance with this Act and shall investigate and prosecute violations of equitable access requirements, including discriminatory school funding practices, denial of services to students with disabilities, and violations of multilingual learner rights.
- (e) The Secretary of Labor shall, in coordination with the Secretary of Education, negotiate voluntary agreements with major U.S. industry associations to establish registered apprenticeship programs accessible to all secondary and post-secondary students without cost to participants.
- (f) State Governors shall submit to the Secretary of Education a three-year education access improvement plan within 12 months of enactment, including specific funding proposals, legislative initiatives, and measurable benchmarks.

## **SECTION 5. REQUIREMENTS BY CORPORATIONS**

- (a) All corporations with annual gross revenues exceeding \$100,000,000 that receive federal contracts or grants shall, as a condition of such contracts or grants, demonstrate active participation in at least one of the following: employee education assistance programs of not less than \$5,250 annually per employee; registered apprenticeship programs; or financial contributions to public school partnership programs.
- (b) Technology corporations with annual revenues exceeding \$1,000,000,000 shall contribute to a federal Digital Education Access Fund administered by the Department of Education, providing devices and high-speed internet access to all households with school-age children whose family income falls below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- (c) Financial institutions offering student loans shall be required to provide income-contingent repayment options to all borrowers, with loan forgiveness after 20 years of repayment, consistent with internationally established income-contingent loan models.
- (d) Corporations operating in rural or tribal communities that receive federal tax incentives shall invest a minimum of 0.5% of pre-tax profits in local educational infrastructure, documented in annual reports filed with the Department of Education.
- (e) Employers subject to the requirements of this section shall file annual compliance reports with the Department of Labor detailing educational investment activities, program outcomes, and demographic reach of their educational assistance programs.

## **SECTION 6. REQUIREMENTS BY PRIVATE CITIZENS**

- (a) Private citizens are encouraged, and non-profit organizations providing educational services are required as a condition of federal tax exemption under 26 U.S.C. 501(c)(3), to annually report to the Internal Revenue Service the nature and scope of educational access services provided, the communities served, and the number of beneficiaries.
- (b) Private foundations with assets exceeding \$250,000,000 that claim educational purposes under their tax-exempt status shall distribute not less than 6% of their net assets annually to programs directly increasing educational access for underserved populations.

- (c) The Department of Education shall establish a National Volunteer Tutoring Corps through which individuals can register to provide free tutoring and mentoring services to students in underserved communities, with recognition programs and tax credits for certified participants.
- (d) Individuals who contribute to qualified scholarship funds for first-generation college students shall receive a federal tax credit of 25% of contributions up to \$10,000 per year, in addition to existing charitable deduction benefits.

## **SECTION 7. PENALTY CLAUSES**

- (a) Any state that fails to submit an Education Access Improvement Plan as required by Section 4(f) within the prescribed timeframe shall be subject to withholding of up to 5% of federal Title I education funds until compliance is achieved.
- (b) Any corporation found in violation of the requirements of Section 5 shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$100,000 and not more than \$2,000,000 per violation, and may be barred from receiving federal contracts for a period not to exceed three years.
- (c) Any financial institution found to have engaged in discriminatory student lending practices that limit access to education shall be subject to enforcement action by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, including civil penalties of up to \$25,000 per day per violation.
- (d) Any school district found by the Department of Education to have systematically denied equal educational access to students based on protected class status shall be subject to loss of federal funding until corrective actions are completed and verified.
- (e) Civil enforcement actions under this Act may be brought by the Attorney General, affected State attorneys general, or by private individuals who have suffered harm as a result of violations, consistent with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

## **SECTION 8. EFFECTIVE DATES AND IMPLEMENTATION**

- (a) This Act shall take effect 90 days after the date of enactment, except as otherwise specified in individual sections.
- (b) The Department of Education shall issue implementing regulations within 180 days of enactment.
- (c) State compliance with equitable funding formulas under Section 3(b) shall be achieved no later than three years after the date of enactment.
- (d) The Head Start expansion under Section 3(c) shall achieve full enrollment coverage within five years of the date of enactment.
- (e) Corporate compliance requirements under Section 5 shall take effect on January 1 of the fiscal year following the date of enactment.
- (f) The Secretary of Education shall conduct a comprehensive review of implementation progress every two years and submit findings to Congress, including recommendations for statutory amendments.

## SECTION 9. APPROPRIATIONS OR BUDGETARY NOTES

- (a) There are hereby authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Education the following amounts for each fiscal year through fiscal year 2034:
- (1) \$25,000,000,000 for the Equitable School Funding Supplement program established under Section 3(b);
  - (2) \$15,000,000,000 for expansion of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs under Section 3(c);
  - (3) \$5,000,000,000 for the National Vocational Education Fund under Section 3(d);
  - (4) \$2,000,000,000 for the Digital Education Access Fund under Section 5(b);
  - (5) \$1,500,000,000 for the Office of Multilingual Learner Affairs under Section 3(e);
  - (6) \$500,000,000 for the National Volunteer Tutoring Corps and related civic programs under Section 6(c).
- (b) Funds appropriated under this section shall be subject to annual audits by the Government Accountability Office and a report to Congress.
- (c) No funds appropriated under this section shall be used for administrative overhead exceeding 5% of the total appropriation for any single program.

## ENDNOTES

1. Suomi Basic Education Act 628/1998 — <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1998/en19980628>
2. Norwegian Education Act (Opplæringslova) — <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61>
3. Swedish Education Act (Skollag 2010:800) — [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800\\_sfs-2010-800](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800)
4. Danish Folkeskole Act and SU Grant System — <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2020/1396> and <https://www.su.dk/english>
5. Swiss HarmoS Concordat — <https://www.edk.ch/en/topics/harmos>
6. German Federal Training Assistance Act (BAfoG) — <https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/en/education/bafoeg> and <https://www.bibb.de/en>
7. Canadian Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care System — <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/early-learning-child-care-agreement.html>
8. Australian Education Act 2013 and HECS-HELP — <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2013A00067> and <https://www.studyassist.gov.au>
9. England Education Act 2011 — <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/21/contents>
10. Nippon Fundamental Law of Education (2006 revision) — <https://www.mext.go.jp/en/policy/education/lawandplan/title01/detail01/1373798.htm>
11. Zhongguo Compulsory Education Law — <http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/c23934/202012/1abd9e3a5c6c4afd831015b34c30c960.shtml>

12. République française National Education Code — <https://www.education.gouv.fr/le-code-de-l-education-9788>
13. Deutschland Basic Law (Grundgesetz) Articles 30 and 70 on education authority — [https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch\\_gg](https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_gg)
14. Sverige Swedish for Immigrants (SFI) Program — [https://www.skolverket.se/undervisning/vuxenutbildningen/sfi-undervisning-i-svenska-for-  
invandrare](https://www.skolverket.se/undervisning/vuxenutbildningen/sfi-undervisning-i-svenska-for-invandrare)
15. Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act — <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2017-06-16-51>
16. Australia Closing the Gap Strategy — <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au>
17. Canada First Nations Education Framework — <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/news/2014/02/first-nations-control-of-first-nations-education-act.html>
18. UNESCO Education for All Global Framework — <https://www.unesco.org/en/education/right-education>
19. OECD Education at a Glance 2023 — <https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance>
20. World Bank Education Statistics — <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/education>