Every child in America deserves a world-class education.

Today, more than ever, a world-class education is a prerequisite for success. America was once the best educated nation in the world. A generation ago, we led all nations in college completion, but today, 10 countries have passed us. It is not that their students are smarter than ours. It is that these countries are being smarter about how to educate their students. And the countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow.

We must do better. Together, we must achieve a new goal, that by 2020, the United States will once again lead the world in college completion. We must raise the expectations for our students, for our schools, and for ourselves—this must be a national priority. We must ensure that every student graduates from high school well prepared for college and a career.

A world-class education is also a moral imperative—the key to securing a more equal, fair, and just society. We will not remain true to our highest ideals unless we do a far better job of educating each one of our sons and daughters. We will not be able to keep the American promise of equal opportunity if we fail to provide a world-class education to every child.

This effort will require the skills and talents of many, but especially our nation’s teachers, principals, and other school leaders. Our goal must be to have a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school. We know that from the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents—it is the teacher standing at the front of the classroom. To ensure the success of our children, we must do better to recruit, develop, support, retain, and reward outstanding teachers in America’s classrooms.

Reforming our schools to deliver a world-class education is a shared responsibility—the task cannot be shouldered by our nation’s teachers and principals alone. We must foster school environments where teachers have the time to collaborate, the opportunities to lead, and the respect that all professionals deserve. We must recognize the importance of communities and families in supporting their children’s education, because a parent is a child’s first teacher. We must support families, communities, and schools working in partnership to deliver services and supports that address the full range of student needs.

This effort will also require our best thinking and resources—to support innovative approaches to teaching and learning; to bring lasting change to our lowest-performing schools; and to investigate and evaluate what works and what can work better in America’s schools. Instead of labeling failures, we will reward success. Instead of a single snapshot, we will recognize progress and growth. And instead of investing in the status quo, we must reform our schools to accelerate student achievement, close achievement gaps, inspire our children to excel, and turn around those schools that for too many young Americans aren’t providing them with the education they need to succeed in college and a career.

My Administration’s blueprint for reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is not only a plan to renovate a flawed law, but also an outline for a re-envisioned federal role in education. This is a framework to guide our deliberations and shared work—with parents, students, educators, business and community leaders, elected officials, and other partners—to strengthen America’s public education system.
I look forward to working with the Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act so that it will help to provide America’s students with the worldclass education they need and deserve.