

## FEBRUARY 2017 PUBLIC POLICY UPDATE

### Administration

#### Betsy DeVos: I'll Look for Unnecessary Programs to Cut at the Education Department

*(Courtesy of Andrew Ujjifusa, Education Week)*

For the third time since she was confirmed as education secretary, Betsy DeVos spoke with a Michigan media outlet to discuss her confirmation process and her priorities. And she made it clear she's looking for ways to reduce the size and scope of the U.S. Department of Education.

In a Tuesday interview on the Michael Patrick Shiels radio program, DeVos said the confirmation was an "interesting and protracted" process, and that she was glad to get started as secretary. Asked by Shiels about the education department's responsibilities, DeVos noted that it was only her fourth day on the job at the department. Then she said:



*"I can't tell you today what is being done that's unnecessary. But I can guarantee that there are things that the department has been doing that are probably not necessary or important for a federal agency to do. We'll be looking at that. We'll be examining and auditing and reviewing all of the programs of the department and really figuring out what is the core mission, and how can the federal department of education really support and enhance the role of the departments in the states. Because really, when it comes down to it, education and the provision of education is really a state and local responsibility to a large extent."*

DeVos did not specify which programs or policy areas at the department where she might explore or be potentially interested in cuts. Right now, the department has an approximately \$68 billion annual budget, and just under a third of that is taken up by discretionary Pell Grants for higher education.

Lawmakers and the Obama administration already cut a number of K-12 programs when they passed the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. That means there are fewer small programs for DeVos to target than there were just a few years ago.

Civil rights advocates are worried that DeVos won't vehemently enforce Title IX and other protections for students. Funding for the department's office for civil rights—which now stands at \$107 million, a fraction of overall spending at the agency—could be a key indicator to watch as DeVos provides input on the budget she wants at the department.

As a school choice advocate who's lobbied states to expand vouchers and tax-credit scholarships, and as a long-time major donor to Republican Party candidates and causes, it's not surprising that DeVos would highlight the power of states and districts. Her supporters say she's knowledgeable and an experienced advocate who will focus on creating more educational opportunities for students. Critics, however, say that she defers to state and local authority too

quickly and have questioned her commitment to using federal oversight to ensure robust accountability.

DeVos also told Shields that the biggest goal for education should be “continuing to stoke and enhance a child’s creative and curious nature.” “They are really entranced with education and learning more when that curiosity continues to be fed and continues to be engaged,” DeVos said.

### **More Money for Magnet Schools?**

*(Courtesy of Caitlin Emma, with help from Kimberly Hefling, Michael Stratford, and Benjamin Wermund, POLITICO)*

Education secretary Betsy DeVos spoke to members of Magnet Schools of America on February 15 in her first public address as secretary outside of the Education Department. There are more than 4,300 magnet schools in the U.S. serving nearly 3.5 million students, and often they offer theme-based curricula like STEM or career and technical education. DeVos and President Donald Trump have vowed to expand so-called school choice options for students, explicitly naming magnet schools as one of those options. MSA Executive Director Todd Mann said his organization plans to invite DeVos to visit some magnet schools. And he hopes that any momentum at the federal level translates into more federal funding.

Funding for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program has hovered around \$91 million for the last few years. The Obama administration, which saw magnet schools as a way to promote socioeconomic diversity, proposed \$115 million in federal funding in its FY 2017 budget request. Mann said that was a good start, but he’d like to see more. “In 2013, 70 percent of magnet schools receiving federal funding from the Magnet School Assistance Program reported having a wait list of students,” Magnet Schools of America says in a brief. “Despite this popularity, magnet schools receive less than half the federal support of charter schools. In fact, magnet school funding has been reduced by approximately 13 percent since 2002.”

**White House ‘Listening Session’ Blasted as Tone Deaf:** DeVos attended an education-focused White House event Tuesday during which President Trump decried “failing schools,” particularly in the African-American community, and said his administration wants “every child to have a choice about where they go to school.” But American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten questioned whether public school families—including African-American parents—were adequately represented in the event, which was billed as a “parent-teacher conference listening session” and held in the Roosevelt Room. “Trump talked about African-American children. Did he have black parents or educators at his photo op? Not that we saw,” she tweeted.

### **Influential Conservative Group: Trump, DeVos Should Dismantle Education Department and Bring God into Classrooms**

*(Courtesy of Emma Brown, Washington Post)*

A policy manifesto from an influential conservative group with ties to the Trump administration, including Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, urges the dismantling of the Education Department and bringing God into American classrooms.

The five-page document produced by the Council for National Policy calls for a “restoration of education in America” that would minimize the federal role, promote religious schools and home schooling and enshrine “historic Judeo-Christian principles” as a basis for instruction.

Names of the council’s members are closely held. But the Southern Poverty Law Center published a 2014 membership directory showing that Stephen K. Bannon—now chief White

House strategist for President Trump—was a member and that Kellyanne Conway—now counselor to the president—served on the council’s executive committee.

DeVos was not listed as a member, but her mother, Elsa Prince Broekhuizen, was named on the council’s board of governors. Her father-in-law, Amway founder Richard DeVos Sr., twice served as president, most recently from 1990 to 1993. And she and her husband have given money to the council as recently as 2007 through their family foundation, according to federal tax records.

The council’s “Education Reform Report” says it is intended to help DeVos and Trump map a path toward change. The proposal to abolish the department dovetails with the long-held views of many Republicans, and President Trump suggested during the 2016 campaign that the agency could be “largely eliminated.” But Trump has given no sign since taking office that he aims to act on that idea, and DeVos embraced the mission of the department when she took office last week.



Still, the council’s views carry weight in the conservative movement. Its hundreds of members are a who’s who of prominent figures on the Christian right, including former lawmakers and leaders in social activism, business and think tanks. Their thrice-yearly meetings are held in undisclosed locations, and every four years GOP presidential candidates show up to address the crowd and seek their favor.

A version of the council’s report, created by an 11-member education committee, was posted on the council’s website, but the document was no longer available online as of Wednesday afternoon, after The Washington Post reported on it. Three committee members confirmed its authenticity.

The document proposes demoting the department to a presidential “Advisory Council on Public Education Reform,” a sub-Cabinet-level agency that would serve as a consultant to states. New employees should subscribe to the educational worldview of the Trump administration, it says, “from assistant secretaries to the mailroom.”

It also says states should encourage K-12 public schools to post the Ten Commandments, teach Bible classes and recognize holidays such as Easter and Christmas; promote instruction “from a Judeo-Christian perspective”; and remove “secular-based sex education materials from school facilities.”

It calls for the termination of the Common Core academic standards and an end to the government collection of student data, which has generated concerns among activists on the right and the left.

The goal, it says, is a “gradual, voluntary return at all levels to free-market private schools, church schools and home schools as the normative American practice.”

Think tanks routinely seek to influence new administrations. But the council’s vision would be a dramatic departure for education in America. Nearly 9 in 10 students attend public schools, and the Supreme Court has ruled repeatedly that the First Amendment prohibits public schools from establishing or promoting any particular religion.

The department administers and manages student loans for tens of millions of borrowers, gives K-12 schools billions of dollars a year to bolster education for children who are poor or have disabilities and enforces civil rights laws in schools and colleges nationwide.

A department spokesman said Wednesday that DeVos had not received the document and therefore had no reaction. DeVos “fully supports the mission of the department and applauds the decision by the president of the United States to continue to keep the Department of Education at Cabinet level,” the spokesman said.

Trump, as a candidate, endorsed eliminating the Common Core. But as president he cannot do that on his own because standards are decided by states.

Trump has said nothing since taking office about dismantling or downsizing the department. Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.) this month introduced a one-sentence bill to eliminate the agency by the end of 2018.

DeVos has long advocated for taxpayer-supported vouchers to help parents pay tuition for private and religious schools. Before her confirmation and since taking office Feb. 7 as secretary she has sought to allay concerns about how she would lead the department, though she has also made clear that she is looking for ways to shrink it.

“I can’t tell you today what’s being done that’s unnecessary, but I can guarantee that there are things that the department has been doing that are probably not necessary or important for a federal agency to do,” she told Michael Patrick Shiels, a Michigan radio host, this week. “Really, when it comes down to it, education and the provision of education is really a state and local responsibility to a large extent.”

In Washington, she told career employees last week that they are “professionals” to whom she will listen, and she said she thought that despite disagreements, “we can — and must — come together, find common ground and put the needs of our students first.”

DeVos grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and graduated from Calvin College, which is affiliated with that church. Her support for vouchers appears to be motivated by faith: She once said she believed her education-reform efforts could “advance God’s Kingdom” and lead to “greater Kingdom gain in the long run.”

In light of those comments, Sen. Al Franken (D-Minn.) asked DeVos before her confirmation to clarify her beliefs about the role of religion in public education.

“My faith is very important to me and informs my work. In education, it teaches me that every child is special and deserves the best we can offer them,” she wrote in response to Franken’s question. “That said, I do not believe in imposing my faith on others and, if confirmed, I will implement the laws as intended by Congress. That includes the provisions about the prohibition against religious instruction in schools.”

E. Ray Moore Jr., a member of the council’s education committee, said he thinks that Trump’s election shifted the education debate toward the right, away from a focus on how to fix public schools and toward how to create alternatives. And that’s what is needed, Moore said, to strengthen education.

“The system can’t be fixed,” Moore said. “You don’t hear Republicans and free-market people talking about fixing Obamacare. They talk about repeal and replace. We think the same argument should apply to education.”

*Moore is the founder of the Exodus Mandate Project, which encourages Christian families to pull their children out of public schools. He said that he was speaking for himself, not the committee, and that he does not know whether DeVos will adopt any of the committee’s ideas.*

## Labor Department Updates WIOA Reporting

(Courtesy of Rachel Zinn, Workforce Data Quality Campaign)

For the first time, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) plans to collect detailed information about Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) training provider programs, including the specific credentials that participants can receive.

This week, DOL proposed an amended [information collection request](#) that specifies additional data for states to report about training programs eligible to receive funding under WIOA Title I. It includes about a dozen new data points about training providers, including cost information, program length, occupations for which the program prepares students, and the “specific name of certificate, certification, license, or degree participants can receive (e.g., Certified Welding Inspector [CWI]).”

The information request also requires a narrative performance report from states of up to 25 pages about best practices and lessons learned, including implementation of sector strategies and career pathways.

Information about WIOA implementation will help DOL assess how well the program is working to help participants earn credentials and obtain good jobs. The new requirements for credential reporting also will add to the growing body of knowledge how different types of credentials connect with occupations and have value in the labor market.

[WDQC recommendations](#) call for a national credentials directory that captures information about credentials earned by participants in federally-funded workforce programs, including the data that DOL is now requesting.



While we appreciate the additional data fields for eligible training provider reporting, the information request could be more clear about the process for calculating employment outcomes. States can collect much of the required information from aggregate data reported by each training provider, but it will be difficult for many providers to accurately calculate employment outcomes on their own. Instead, we recommend that states develop processes to collect individual-level data from eligible training providers for wage record matching.

Public comments on the new information collection are **due March 20**.

DOL also issued [guidance](#) recently that builds on [WIOA performance rules](#). The guidance:

- Confirms that data sources other than Unemployment Insurance (UI) wage records may be used for employment reporting when necessary, such as for self-employment. Future guidance will elaborate on how to report data from supplemental sources.

- Clarifies the definition of recognized postsecondary credentials, which include degrees, certificates, licenses, and certifications “awarded in recognition of an individual’s attainment of technical or industry/occupational skills.” Work readiness certificates do not qualify.
- Explains that skill gains may be measured through five different methods for WIOA core programs, except Title II adult education programs, which may only use two of the five methods. National Skills Coalition comments previously objected to Title II having more limited measures of skill gains than other WIOA programs, because it may inhibit program cooperation.
- Requires states to track co-enrollment and give unduplicated participant counts for each program, which may require reporting system modifications.
- Clarifies that incumbent worker training participants are not included in performance measures, but some data will be reported.
- Provides details on how to report data on participants who exit and re-enter programs.
- Offers examples for calculating performance indicators for each program and then calculating an average indicator score across programs.
- Confirms that states must choose two of three employer service indicators: worker retention with the same employer, repeat employer customers, or employer penetration rate (portion of all state employers using services).

## **U.S. Education Secretary DeVos Issues Letter to Chief State School Officers)**

*(Courtesy of the U.S. Department of Education Press Office)*

In a letter delivered today to chief state school officers, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos provided clarity on Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) implementation, in light of the actions related to the postponement of the accountability regulations and the Congressional Review Act. The letter emphasizes that states should continue to move forward and that the Department will work to ensure that state education leaders have the state and local flexibility that Congress intended. States should continue to follow the timeline for developing and submitting their plans for review and approval, building on the work they have already completed. The Department will provide further guidance on the state plan requirements by March 13, 2017.

“States have been working diligently on ESSA plans,” says Secretary DeVos, “and today’s letter makes clear that the Department remains committed to faithfully implementing the law as Congress intended. I remain committed to working alongside local education leaders to ensure they have the flexibility to craft education plans that make the most sense for the parents and students they serve.” The full letter can be found [here](#).

## **U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos' Prepared Remarks at the Community College National Legislative Summit**

*Below are the prepared remarks delivered today, Feb. 16, by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos at the 2017 Community College National Legislative Summit, hosted by the Association of Community College Trustees and the American Association of Community Colleges.*

Good morning! Thank you, Dr. Phelan for the kind introduction and for your leadership at AACC [American Association of Community Colleges]. I have a special appreciation for the work that you, my friend Mary Kay Thayer, and all the representatives from community colleges in the Great Lakes State do each day.

My home state is rich in public institutions—more than 30 of them—that primarily award two-year degrees, certificates and other credentials. I'm proud of their record in helping Michiganders to achieve their dreams.

I'm also very pleased to note that over the years, I've hired many talented individuals who were graduates of GRCC—Grand Rapids Community College.

Supporting students in pursuit of reaching their boundless potential is the mission of every community college leader in this room.

I am grateful for the invitation from both your organizations to join you this morning. And, I am humbled and inspired by this opportunity to work together.

All of you—presidents, chancellors and trustees, as well as faculty, staff and students who are also attending this summit—have my deepest respect. I'll do my best to earn yours.

I've been on the job as Secretary of Education just over a week. While the title and office are new, the work is not all new.

My passion and actions have been to help improve educational opportunities for students and parents. And while some have characterized the flurry of attention around my confirmation in negative terms, I viewed it as expressions of passion... passionate parents and advocates who care deeply about their kids and about education.

I applaud it, and I know this same passion drives all of you.

Community colleges are a uniquely American national asset. You are nimble, inclusive and entrepreneurial. You provide important and valued pathways for students to prepare for success in this competitive economy. You equip students for high-demand fields and skilled jobs that help grow local economies and maintain communities.

And, you're absolutely essential engines of workforce and economic development – locally and regionally. You help identify and close the skills gap between employers and job-seekers, so U.S. businesses and industries can thrive and expand.

Thanks to you, millions of students have genuine opportunities for a solid education. You offer flexibility and extra support to learners who are balancing responsibilities at home, school, and work— including many who face the very highest obstacles to success.

Instead of insisting that students adjust to your schedules and traditions, you adjust to their needs—from employees who seek new skills and credentials to further their careers, to students who need some extra help preparing to do college-level work. With options like night and weekend classes, online courses, child care, academic and career counseling, and part- and full-time programs, community colleges are thoroughly student-centered.

And increasingly, you're helping high school students earn college credit and degrees through approaches that are accessible, faster and more affordable than ever. Early college programs are a great example of a unique role played by community colleges.

This visionary model allows students, starting as early as ninth grade, to take high school and college courses, and to graduate in five years with a no-cost associate's degree. Some, like Henry Ford Early College in Dearborn, Michigan, are among the state's top-performing high schools.

Not only are these students ready for well-paid jobs in fields like health care and advanced manufacturing, but they also can seamlessly continue their education by transferring to a four-year bachelor's degree program.

Your institutions, working hand in glove with your business partners, will play an important role in continuing to get Americans back to work. The President was elected to help bring back jobs and economic opportunity, in every region of this country. He has outlined a bold plan to foster the creation of 25 million new American jobs in the next decade and achieve 4 percent annual economic growth.

The President's 100-day action plan is his contract with the American voter. This plan notes the importance of expanding vocational and technical education—the types of career and technical education that community colleges excel at providing—and making two- and four-year college degrees more affordable. He has called multiple paths for postsecondary education “an absolute priority” for his Administration, and I share that vision.

Today is the beginning of what I'm confident will be years of productive collaboration and a healthy exchange of ideas among our nation's colleges and universities, and the Department of Education.

I know that there are many items on your legislative agenda, from reauthorization of the Higher Education Act and the Perkins Act, to ways community colleges can help transform the nation's infrastructure, to allowing Pell Grants to have flexibility in supporting students working to graduate more quickly. And in the days ahead, I'll look forward to hearing your thoughts and working with you as President Trump's vision continues taking shape.

I also know that there are local and state-based initiatives this Administration can learn about and highlight, including the early college programs I've mentioned.

As you know, the Department provides many resources for community colleges through our Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, including information about grant opportunities, veterans' resources, promising practices, and more. You can find these resources on our website, [ed.gov](http://ed.gov), and we'll be adding information as new initiatives develop.

Thank you once again for the warm welcome. I and our team at the Department look forward to working with and to sharing thoughts on how we can implement the President's goals and accomplish a shared vision for education.

It is a great honor to stand with you in this work. I am encouraged and excited by what we can achieve together for America's students and families, and for this nation that we love.

## Congress

### **Rep. Massie Introduces Bill to Abolish Federal Department of Education**

*(Courtesy of Lorenz Isidro, Office of Congressman Thomas Massie)*

Representative Thomas Massie has introduced H.R. 899, a bill to abolish the federal Department of Education. The bill, which is one sentence long, states, “The Department of Education shall terminate on December 31, 2018.”

On the day of Betsy DeVos' scheduled Senate confirmation for Secretary of Education, Massie said, “Neither Congress nor the President, through his appointees, has the constitutional authority to dictate how and what our children must learn.”



Massie added, "Unelected bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. should not be in charge of our children's intellectual and moral development. States and local communities are best positioned to shape curricula that meet the needs of their students. Schools should be accountable. Parents have the right to choose the most appropriate educational opportunity for their children, including home school, public school, or private school."

"For years, I have advocated returning education policy to where it belongs - the state and local level," said Rep. Walter Jones, an original co-sponsor. "D.C. bureaucrats cannot begin to understand the needs of schools and its students on an individual basis. It is time that we get the feds out of the classroom, and terminate the Department of Education."

"I've always been a proponent of empowering parents, teachers and local school boards who best know our children and their needs," said Rep. Raul Labrador, another original co-sponsor. "Eliminating the U.S. Department of Education is the most important step we in Congress can take in returning decision making to the local level."

"Education of our students should lie primarily with parents, teachers, and state and local officials who know how to meet their individual needs best," said freshman Rep. Andy Biggs. "Since its inception, the Department of Education has grown into an unrecognizable federal beast, and its policies have helped foster Common Core across the country. It is time the one-size-fits-all approach by the federal government is ended and authority is returned to the local level."

The Department of Education began operating in 1980. On September 24, 1981 in his Address to the Nation on the Program for Economic Recovery, President Ronald Reagan said, "As a third step, we propose to dismantle two Cabinet Departments, Energy and Education. Both Secretaries are wholly in accord with this. Some of the activities in both of these departments will, of course, be continued either independently or in other areas of government. There's only one way to shrink the size and cost of big government, and that is by eliminating agencies that are not needed and are getting in the way of a solution. Now, we don't need an Energy Department to solve our basic energy problem. As long as we let the forces of the marketplace work without undue interference, the ingenuity of consumers, business, producers, and inventors will do that for us. Similarly, education is the principal responsibility of local school systems, teachers, parents, citizen boards, and State governments. By eliminating the Department of Education less than 2 years after it was created, we cannot only reduce the budget but ensure that local needs and preferences, rather than the wishes of Washington, determine the education of our children."

Original co-sponsors include Rep. Justin Amash (R-MI), Rep. Andy Biggs (R-AZ), Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT), Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-FL), Rep. Jody Hice (R-GA), Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), and Rep. Raul Labrador (R-ID).

## Resources

### Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts: School Year 2013-14

A new report from the National Center for Education Statistics provides information about revenues and expenditures in the nation's public school districts in Fiscal Year (FY) 2014. [Learn More](#)

## **Enrollment and Employees in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2015; and Financial Statistics and Academic Libraries, Fiscal Year 2015: First Look (Provisional Data)**

This provisional First Look report includes fully edited and imputed data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) spring 2016 data collection, which included four survey components: Enrollment for fall 2015; Finance for fiscal year 2015; data on employees in postsecondary education for Fall 2015; and data for Academic Libraries for fiscal year 2015. [Learn More](#)