

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools

Secretary DeVos Promotes Parent Choice at AFC Summit

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos sounded a clarion call for parent choice in education at the annual national policy summit of the American Federation for Children, an organization she once headed.

"The time has expired for reform," she told the 400 attendees in Indianapolis on May 22. "We need a transformation—a transformation that will open up America's closed and antiquated education system."

Mrs. DeVos said President Trump was proposing "the most ambitious expansion of education choice in our nation's history," and the next day, the country got its first detailed look at that proposal: a three-sector approach advancing school choice in traditional public schools, public charter schools, and private schools (see related story).

Seminal Opportunity

"This is a seminal opportunity to transform our nation's education system; a once-in-a-generation opportunity to profoundly benefit millions of children; an unprecedented moment to shape the future of our nation," she said.

Making clear that choice initiatives under the president's plan would not be designed or managed from Washington, DC, the secretary forcefully affirmed that "one size doesn't fit all" and that she had "zero interest" in replacing the current big government approach with her own big government approach. "When it comes to education, no solution, not even ones we like, should be dictated or run from Washington, DC."

State Decisions

Decisions about whether to embrace a school choice program and how to design one "are decisions states must make," said Mrs. DeVos. "No two states are the same and no two states' approaches will be the same—and that's a good thing. States are

the best laboratories of our democracy."

The secretary expressed broad openness to "new solutions" in education "that challenge the way things currently are." She had a name for that approach: "It's called progress." She said education reformers should not "reflexively protect" their own ideas of transformation or "shut out new ideas and new delivery methods." Doing so would make them "no better than the status quo [they] seek to change."

Parents Know

Speaking on the role played by parents in education, Secretary DeVos said, "Parents know—or can figure out—what learning environment is best for their child, and we must give them the right to choose where that may be." Washington and the federal bureaucracy must get "out of the way so parents can make the right choices for their kids."

"Every one of us here tonight is united in our belief that empowering parents and students is the only way to give kids an equal opportunity to a quality education... and an education that fits their unique, individual needs," she said.

Accountable to Parents

On the issue of accountability, Mrs. DeVos said all options chosen by parents should be held accountable, "but they should be directly accountable to parents and communities, not to Washington, DC, bureaucrats."

Started by a Democrat

Recalling some of the history of school choice in the United States, Mrs. DeVos

noted that the movement "to open up American education and to provide choices has come a very long way."

She reminded the group that Democratic City Councilwoman Polly Williams spearheaded a voucher program in Milwaukee back in 1990. "Yes, you heard that right," said the secretary. "The oldest school choice program in the country was started by a Democrat."

Sustaining the spirit of bipartisanship, Mrs. DeVos said, "If you hear nothing else I say tonight, please hear this: 'Education should not be a partisan issue.... Everyone

—in both parties—should support equal opportunity in education, regardless of a child's income, ZIP code or family circumstances."

Although Secretary DeVos was the centerpiece of the two-day conference and certainly a powerful magnet for media attention, the event approached parent choice from a variety of perspectives through a variety of personalities. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush offered a luncheon keynote in which he called on choice advocates to be "big and bold and take on the powerful interests that challenge any kind of change at all."

Various panel discussions covered topics such as federal policy, student diversity, research findings, legal developments, and ways to engage the business community.

An unrivaled highlight of the summit was testimony from several individuals who had directly benefited from choice initiatives on how their lives had changed through the power of those programs.

[Image captured from AFC Summit video.]



CAPE

CAPE member organizations:

Agudath Israel of America

American Montessori Society

Association Montessori International—USA

Association of Christian Schools International

Association of Christian Teachers and Schools

Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.

Christian Schools International

Council of Islamic Schools in North America

Council on Educational Standards and Accountability

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Friends Council on Education

Jesuit Schools Network

Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

National Association of Episcopal Schools

National Association of Independent Schools

National Catholic Educational Association

National Christian School Association

Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship

Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools

Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12

Executive Director: Joe McTighe

Outlook is published monthly (September to June) by CAPE.

An annual subscription is \$35.

ISSN 0271-1451

13017 Wisteria Drive #457

Germantown, MD 20874

(tel) 301-916-8460

(fax) 301-916-8485

(email) cape@capenet.org

www.capenet.org



Administration Unveils \$20 Billion Parent Choice Program

President Trump last month released his proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2018, delivering a down payment on a campaign promise to earmark billions of dollars for school choice. The budget provided the most detail yet on how the administration would like to give parents more control over the education of their children.

The three-sector approach to school choice described in the budget would invest an additional \$1.4 billion to expand opportunities for students in public schools, charter schools, and private schools, and would, according to one of the budget documents, represent “an initial investment toward the president’s goal of making \$20 billion available annually to support school choice within the next 10 years.”

During a dinner address the night before the budget was released, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos described the initiative as “the most ambitious expansion of education choice in our nation’s history.” If enacted, it would be exactly that.

Funds set aside in the budget for choice represent three separate allocations: \$1 billion for choice in public schools; \$500 million for charter schools, and \$250 million to help “students from low-income families to attend the private school of their choice and to build the evidence base around private school choice.”

FOCUS

The public school initiative falls under the heading “FOCUS Grants” (Furthering Options for Children to Unlock Success). A budget narrative says the grants to school districts would support “crucially needed, locally driven efforts to make public school choice a meaningful reality for more students, especially the poor and minority students that are the focus of Title I.” Grants would go to school districts that agree “to adopt weighted student funding combined with open enrollment systems that allow federal, state, and local funds to follow students to the public school of their choice.”

Charter Schools

On the charter school front, the president proposed \$500 million in funding for the cur-

rent grant program that supports “the startup of new charter schools and the replication and expansion of high-quality charter schools serving students in prekindergarten through grade 12.” The program also supports grants “to improve charter schools’ access to facilities and information dissemination and evaluation activities.” The proposed funding would represent an

increase of \$167 million over the program’s annualized level in 2017.

Private Schools

The piece of the school choice pie that attracted the most media attention was, ironically, that which was one-fourth the size of the public school choice program, one-half the size of the charter school piece, and one-two-hundred-thirty-sixth the size of the \$59 billion overall education budget. Predictably, headlines and critics screamed of the president abandoning public education for pri-

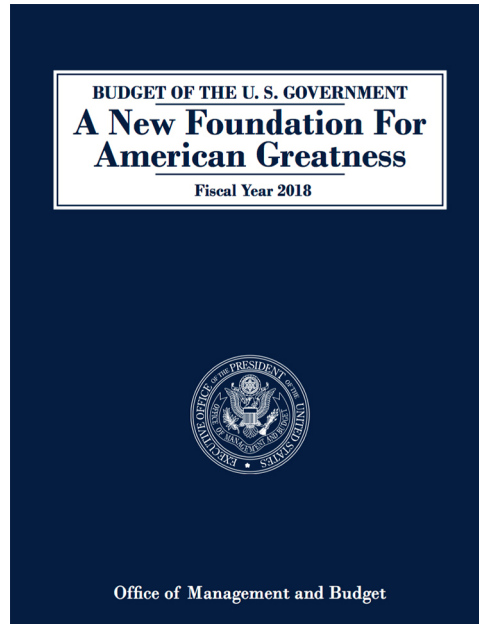
private school choice.

The \$250 million private school component of the choice initiative would fall under the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program, established by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). EIR grants are available to state education agencies, school districts, and nonprofit organizations.

Funds could be used to “support efforts to test and build evidence for the effectiveness of private school choice as a strategy for (1) expanding school choices for parents who wish to send their children to high quality private schools; (2) improving educational outcomes for students from low-income families or students enrolled in persistently low-performing schools; and (3) increasing competition in order to improve the quality and performance of all schools.”

The budget document states that the administration “believes that expanding public and private school choice through student-centered reforms is necessary to ensure that students from low-income families have access to a quality education that will prepare them for further education and entering the workforce.”

Up to 10 grants would be awarded. The budget includes estimates that 17,500 to 26,000 students could be served by the program through scholarships ranging from \$8,000 to \$12,000.



Trump Budget Would Affect Private School Students

DC OSP

The FY 2018 budget that President Trump released last month reorders priorities in education spending and scales back the federal role in education. In testimony delivered May 24 before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said the budget “focuses on returning decision-making power and flexibility to the states, where it belongs.”

According to the Department of Education, “The budget eliminates or reduces more than 30 programs that duplicate other programs, are ineffective; or are more appropriately supported with state, local, or private funds.” Some of those programs involve the participation of students and teachers in private schools.

Plus

On the plus side, the Trump budget would provide roughly level funding in programs serving at-risk students. Title I-A grants to school districts, which cover supplemental services to low-performing children in high-poverty areas, including children attending private schools, would receive a slight bump over the FY 2017 level from \$15.46 billion to \$15.88 billion.

Similarly, IDEA, which serves children with special needs in public and private schools, would see only a slight reduction in funds. The same is true for programs that serve English language learners and migrant children, regardless of the school they attend (see table).

Career and technical education funds, which school districts, upon the request of private school officials, may use to provide services to secondary school students in private schools, would see a drop from \$1.12 billion to \$0.95 billion.

Minus

Other programs would not fare as well. Title II-A, designed to ensure high-quality teachers and effective instruction, would be eliminated because “evidence shows the program is poorly

structured to support activities that have a measurable impact on improving student outcomes and it duplicates other ESEA program funds that may be used for professional development,” according to a Department of Education fact sheet. Since being reauthorized under the *Every Student Succeeds Act*, Title II-A requires districts to set aside a proportionate share of funds for services to teachers in private schools based on

their total Title II-A allocation and not just on the funds they earmarked for professional development, which was the case under the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Another program on the chopping block is the new Title IV-A Student Support and Academic Enrichment grant,

which provides states and school districts with flexibility in directing funds to a broad array of educational purposes. Grant recipients must ensure equitable services designed to meet the needs of students in private schools. The Trump budget would provide zero funding for the program.

The budget also eliminates funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers because, as the Department put it, the program “lacks strong evidence of meeting its objectives, such as improving student achievement.” Private schools are eligible to apply for the learning center grants, and grant recipients must provide equitable services to private school students and their families.

Budget Background

A bit of background about the budget may be helpful. First, most education programs in the federal budget are “forward funded,” which means they affect services in the following school year. So, the FY 2017 budget (which Congress just passed and the president signed May 5) will affect programs in the 2017-18 school year.

Second, the president’s FY 2018 budget has a long way to go before being enacted. Congress has to dissect and reassemble it to reflect political realities and priorities. The Congressional version rarely matches what a president proposes.

Students and parents in the District of Columbia can breathe a lot easier after Congress passed and President Trump signed legislation reauthorizing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) for three years and appropriating dollars to fund the initiative next year. The scholarship program, which began in 2004, had been targeted for elimination by the previous administration, and its continuation was repeatedly in jeopardy.

According to Serving Our Children, which administers the OSP, the program received 3,898 applications for school year 2016-17, including 1,549 from returning students and 2,349 from new applicants. Sadly, it was only able to provide scholarships to 234 new students. Bottom line: the program is in high demand.

Average annual household income for participating students is \$20,472. Eighty-one percent of scholarship students are black and 16 percent are Hispanic.

Currently, 47 private schools participate in the program, including Evangelical Christian schools, Jewish schools, Catholic schools, and Independent schools.

John Schilling, chief operating officer of the American Federation for Children, called the program “an educational lifeline for children.” He summed up its success this way: “Parents are satisfied, children are succeeding, graduating from high school, and most go on to college. This is a federal program that works for kids.”

Schilling thanked the program’s many Congressional supporters, including “Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell; House and Senate Oversight and Appropriations Committee Chairmen Jason Chaffetz, Rodney Frelinghuysen, Ron Johnson, and Thad Cochran; Education Committee Chairmen Virginia Foxx and Lamar Alexander; and long-time champions Rep. Dan Lipinski and Senator Dianne Feinstein.”

Federal Education Spending Levels for Some Programs Affecting Private School Students (in millions of dollars)			
	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018
Title I-A (Grants to LEAs)	\$14,910	\$15,460	\$15,881
Title I-C (Migrant Education)	\$375	\$375	\$374
Title II-A (Teacher Quality)	\$2,256	\$2,056	\$0
Title III-A (English Language)	\$737	\$737	\$736
Title IV-A (Support Grants)	\$0	\$400	\$0
Title IV-B (Learning Centers)	\$1,167	\$1,192	\$0
Special Ed (IDEA Part B)	\$11,913	\$12,003	\$11,890
Career Ed (Perkins Act)	\$1,118	\$1,118	\$949

FY 2016 & 2017 actual appropriation; FY 2018 proposed by President Trump.

CAPE notes

★ The U.S. Department of Education last month announced its 2017 Green Ribbon Schools awardees. Winning schools were recognized “for their exemplary and comprehensive efforts to reduce environmental impact and utility costs, promote better health, and ensure effective environmental education, including civics, STEM, and green career pathways.”

Among the 63 honored schools were the following six private schools: The Thacher School, Ojai, CA; Chiaravalle Montessori, Evanston, IL; Bethany Christian Schools, Goshen, IN; Lakewood Catholic Academy, Lakewood, OH; Portland Waldorf School, Portland, OR; Moses Brown School, Providence, RI.

Schools will be honored at an awards ceremony this summer in Washington.

★ Staying with awards programs, last September the Department of Education announced the 2016 National Blue Ribbon Schools. A new infographic looks at the location and characteristics of those schools and asks, “What drives NBR schools to the top?”

It turns out that “nearly two-thirds (65%) of the responses named either student supports (34%) or instruction (31%), while 23% named school structure and 12% identified curriculum” as key drivers.

Find out more about these exemplary schools at: <<https://nationalblueribbon-schools.ed.gov/national-blue-ribbon-schools-a-closer-look/>>.

★ U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos last month announced the 2017 class of U.S. Presidential Scholars. The class consists of 161 high school seniors, including 43 from private schools, recognized “for their accomplishments in academics, the arts, and career and technical education.”

“I congratulate this year’s class of Presidential Scholars for their devotion to academic excellence and their parents and teachers who have guided them along the way,” said Secretary DeVos. “Today’s Presidential Scholars are tomorrow’s leaders, and I am confident they will continue to be shining examples as they enter the next phase of their academic careers.”

★ Back in 1999, Andrew Coulson launched his brilliant book *Market Education* with an address at the National Press Club. His message was direct: The “path to educational excellence” is to empower parents to “take control of their children’s education.”

Andrew, who served as director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom from 2005 to 2015, passed away last year after a battle with brain cancer. His colleagues have compiled a collection of essays to remember him and discuss his ideas in the just-published book *Education Freedom*.

Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush captured Coulson in an endorsement of the book: “Andrew Coulson was a brilliant man who devoted his life to studying and

advancing freedom through school choice. Though no longer with us, his ideas will live on for generations through the researchers, advocates, and lawmakers who have embraced the philosophy that education simply works best when students and families are put in charge.”

The book is available for purchase on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

★ The federal government last month issued the latest edition of *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* (<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017064.pdf>). The 2016 version, 19th in the annual series, is published by the National Center for Education Statistics in the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences, and the Bureau of Justice Statistics in the U.S. Department of Justice.

The new report offers several interesting findings relating to teachers. For one, “A higher percentage of public school teachers (41 percent) than of private school teachers (22 percent) reported that student misbehavior interfered with their teaching in 2011–12. In addition, 38 percent of public school teachers reported that student tardiness and class cutting interfered with their teaching, compared with 19 percent of private school teachers.”

Also, “During the 2011–12 school year, a higher percentage of public than private school teachers reported being threatened with injury (10 vs. 3 percent) or being physically attacked (6 vs. 3 percent) by a student from their school.”