



A Union of Professionals

The Real Betsy DeVos

BETSY DEVOS HAS NEITHER THE QUALIFICATIONS NOR THE EXPERIENCE TO BE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

The U.S. Department of Education’s mission is to promote excellence and equity in our public education system—a goal parents overwhelmingly want for their children. The secretary of education should have a commitment to that mission and the relevant experience with public education to be the nation’s chief education official. **DeVos has neither.** She has called public schools a “dead end,” said “we don’t fire teachers enough,” and aggressively supported private school vouchers and unaccountable for-profit charters that underperform and siphon funding from public schools.

That record is why AFT President Randi Weingarten has called DeVos the most anti-public education nominee since the creation of the U.S. Department of Education in 1979.

DEVOS HAS NO EXPERIENCE WITH PUBLIC EDUCATION

- She would be the first secretary of education to have no experience or training of any kind in public education—never teaching or working as an elected official on local, state or federal education policy.
- She is a billionaire lobbyist and campaign contributor, not an educator.
- She has never attended or worked in a public school, or been a public school parent.
- In fact, her only real connection to public schools is the decades she has devoted to defunding, destabilizing, and demonizing them, both in her home state of Michigan and across the country.

DEVOS’ POLICIES HAVE CONSISTENTLY UNDERMINED PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Parents want schools where children are respected and nurtured, where there is a focus on the joy of learning and on developing creativity, critical thinking and 21st-century skills—schools that educate the whole child. DeVos’ extreme, profit-driven approach to education policy ignores those aspirations and what’s best for children.

- Since 2000, DeVos and her husband have given more than \$47 million in campaign contributions to politicians whose agenda is to undermine public education. “My family is the largest single contributor of soft money to the national Republican Party,” she says. “We expect a return on our investment.”
- Her central goal: undermine public schools by promoting private, for-profit schooling—including vouchers and for-profit charters—with little regulation, transparency over how taxpayer money is spent, or respect for civil rights and church-state separation.
- In Michigan, DeVos promoted vouchers and for-profit charter schools that divert tax dollars from our public schools while allowing unaccountable corporations to make money off taxpayers with poor results for students.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of 1.6 million professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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- She also has consistently supported and invested in for-profit online charter schools. A 2015 study found a majority of these schools' students fell behind their peers in reading and learned nothing new in math over a school year.
- In Michigan, in the midst of a severe budget crisis, she fought to protect tax cuts for the wealthy that resulted in large budget cuts to public education and other public services.

MICHIGAN'S CHARTER SCHOOLS UNDERPERFORM

After pouring millions into a failed private school voucher initiative in Michigan in 2000—which voters soundly rejected—DeVos turned her sights to expanding unregulated charter schools.

- Because of her money and influence, Michigan's charter schools are among the least regulated in the country. About 80 percent of them are run by for-profit companies, far more than in any other state.
- Reports of Michigan charters' financial mismanagement and other documented abuses of the public trust abound. For example, some Detroit charter schools closed just days after the deadline to get money from the state for enrolled students, leaving students and parents scrambling just weeks into the school year while charter operators still profited.
- In 2015, a broad coalition of parents, educators, community members and lawmakers proposed legislation that would have increased funding and strengthened oversight of Detroit's charter and public schools. In response, DeVos lavished \$1.45 million on state lawmakers who killed the legislation and scrapped oversight of for-profit charter schools. She even fought to allow failed charter operators to open new schools.
- Charter schools in Michigan are not a model for the nation: Their students in Detroit and statewide perform far worse than students in traditional public schools. For example, 80 percent of students in Detroit charters perform below the state average; in math, it's 84 percent.

DEVOS' POLICIES PUT VULNERABLE CHILDREN AT RISK

All students deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. But DeVos' favored policies could have grave consequences for vulnerable students, including students with special needs, English language learners, LGBT kids and religious minorities:

- Civil rights groups have said they're "deeply concerned" that DeVos will dismantle the civil rights protections gay and transgender students now have.
- She helped steer nearly \$5 million to the Family Research Council, an anti-LGBT group that champions the discredited and inhumane practice of gay "conversion therapy." She strongly opposes marriage equality, including making large donations to an anti-gay-marriage initiative in Michigan.
- Special-needs students and English language learners in the unregulated Detroit charters DeVos champions perform worse on English and math tests than their peers in the city's public school district.
- She supports diverting taxpayer money to private schools that can discriminate based on students' religion, sexual orientation, past academic performance and even political views.
- Her lobbying and support of conservative groups helped push through Michigan's undemocratic emergency manager law, which has produced scandals such as the lead poisoning of Flint's drinking water and the indictment of several prominent officials.
- Recent press reports about her investments also indicate that DeVos is profiting from the refinancing of student loans held by the Department of Education that she'll oversee.

For additional information and research, please **click here**.