



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 6, 2017

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What Can Americans Expect From Trump's Education Department?

On the campaign trail, Trump promised big things when it came to American education. From dismantling the national Common Core “education” standards imposed by Obama and ending the “indoctrination” of children by “progressives,” to possibly even abolishing the U.S. Department of Education, Trump hit all the important conservative talking points. He also made expanding “school choice” a key focus of his education agenda, drawing mixed reactions among conservatives and libertarians — and fury from the teachers’ unions, the government-school lobbies, and the largely Democrat politicians they bankroll.



Now that Trump's Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has been confirmed by the U.S. Senate with a razor-thin margin, Americans can likely expect some changes on education — possibly even some significant ones. How much of that will be positive or even constitutionally authorized, though, remains to be seen. Unfortunately for American children, after a century of “progressive” government-controlled education, even if Trump were to do everything in his power to make education great again, it would only represent a baby step in the right direction. But considering what is known so far, even those baby steps are not guaranteed. And there is a chance that, counter-intuitively, perhaps, the situation could get even worse if Americans do not remain involved and vigilant.

Common Core and the Every Student Succeeds Act

One of Trump's most frequent pledges on the campaign trail was to crush Common Core, a federally funded set of establishment-developed national K-12 school standards. The controversial plot, which critics and experts say dumbs down students, was quietly imposed on the states by the Obama administration using illegal bribes and threats. The promise of ending the politically toxic standards, which have been exposed by critics from across the political spectrum, energized many of Trump's supporters as very few other issues could. Indeed, millions of parents and teachers had been doing everything they could to stop the scheme, only to be confronted with out-of-touch politicians and bureaucrats willing to do anything for continued federal funding. So when Trump spoke clearly and frequently against Common Core on the campaign trail, it was music to his supporters' ears.

“Common Core is a total disaster,” he said in a video during the election. “We can't let it continue.” In a separate video, he vowed to end the radical scheme to nationalize and even globalize American education. “We're going to end Common Core, we're going to have education an absolute priority,” Trump promised. “Education has to be run locally,” Trump said. “Common Core, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top are all programs that take decisions away from parents and local school boards.



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These programs allow the progressives in the Department of Education to indoctrinate, not educate, our kids. What they are doing does not fit the American model of governance. I am totally against these programs and the Department of Education. It's a disaster. We cannot continue to fail our children — the very future of this nation."

The right words continued to be said even after his election. But right out of the gate, Trump's actions suggested his zealous anti-Common Core supporters might be left disappointed. When he nominated billionaire philanthropist DeVos, who had a history of supporting Common Core, hearts sank across America, even among some of Trump's most loyal backers. Making matters even worse, Trump's team put out a statement announcing DeVos that said the administration would now be pursuing "higher national standards." DeVos has tried to ease concerns by speaking out against Common Core, and some conservative education leaders have called for giving her a chance. But there are reasons for concern.

Even Breitbart News, which has emerged as a sort of pro-Trump counterweight to the pro-Clinton establishment media, immediately pounced on the news of her selection. "Donald Trump Announces Pro-Common Core Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary" read the explosive headline at Breitbart. The article highlighted numerous links between DeVos, whom the Trump transition team touted as a "brilliant and passionate education advocate," and the establishment groups behind the radical national standards Trump so regularly denounced. Among other points, Karen Braun of Stop Common Core in Michigan noted DeVos' close ties to the pro-Common Core Great Lakes Education Project (GLEP), which played a key role in ensuring the survival of the standards in Michigan. DeVos has also been a key booster of "charter" schools, which, due to government funding, are also required to use Common Core.

As outrage grew among Trump's supporters, DeVos immediately sprang into action, releasing a public statement disavowing Common Core after years of battling supporters of local control in Michigan and beyond. "I am not a supporter [of Common Core] — period," she wrote in a statement on social media and her website. "I do support high standards, strong accountability, and local control. When governors such as John Engler, Mike Huckabee, and Mike Pence were driving the conversation on voluntary high standards driven by local voices, it all made sense. Have organizations that I have been a part of supported Common Core? Of course. But that's not my position. Sometimes it's not just students who need to do their homework. However, along the way, it got turned into a federalized boondoggle." The statement sparked even more confusion.

Trump and his team also jumped in to defend the education nominee, a wealthy heiress who has donated huge sums to the establishment wing of the GOP, to the Clinton Foundation, to globalist Jeb Bush's "education" schemes, and to other questionable causes. "Under her leadership we will reform the U.S. education system and break the bureaucracy that is holding our children back so that we can deliver world-class education and school choice to all families," Trump said. A spokesman for the Trump transition team, Jason Miller, also released a statement claiming that, by joining the administration, DeVos had agreed to adhere to Trump's positions. "The President-elect has been consistent and very clear in his opposition to Common Core," Miller was quoted as saying. "Anybody joining the Administration is signing on to the President-elect's platform and vision for moving America forward."

Still, in a readout from the transition team summarizing the meeting between Trump and DeVos, the discussion was described as being "focused on the Common Core mission, and setting higher national standards and promoting the growth of school choice across the nation." Setting "higher national



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standards” immediately raised alarm bells across America, making it sound as though Trump and DeVos were plotting Common Core 2.0 in defiance of the Constitution and campaign pledges of local control. Very little was reported on the “higher national standards” remark. Requests for clarification were not answered. And eventually, the statement was quietly taken offline, leaving analysts to wonder what, exactly, was meant by it. The U.S. Constitution and federal law both prohibit federal involvement in standards and curricula.

DeVos is also reportedly close to establishment, globalist-minded Senator Lamar Alexander, a key “education” point-man in the GOP responsible for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that Obama described as a “Christmas miracle.” The scheme, which cements Common Core in place, was celebrated by Obama’s education chief Arne Duncan, who bragged about conspiring with establishment Republicans to get it through. “Embedded in the law are the values that we’ve promoted and proposed forever,” explained Duncan, who boasted of using education as a “weapon” with his partner UNESCO to transform children into “green” global citizens. “The core of our agenda from Day One, that’s all in there — early childhood [“education”], high standards [Common Core], not turning a blind eye when things are bad. For the first time in our nation’s history, that’s the letter of the law.”

So-called School Choice

Another key theme of Trump’s campaign, as well as his education secretary’s signature issue, is the idea of “school choice.” Just days into his administration, the president issued a proclamation in honor of “National School Choice Week.” In the document, Trump offered perhaps the clearest signals yet on what sort of developments might be expected on the education front over the next four years. Unfortunately, some of it is not constitutional. And experts say there are massive risks associated with the agenda, which has also been pushed by establishment forces in both parties.

Among other elements, Trump called on state and federal lawmakers to expand “school choice,” by which he means allocating more taxpayer dollars to private, religious, and charter schools. Lawmakers in Congress responded right away, with Representative Steve King (R-Iowa) and Representative Andy Harris (R-Md.) introducing H.R. 610. Essentially, the legislation would send federal education dollars to the state governments as “grants,” and then have states use the money to provide vouchers for public, private, and homeschooled students. While the bill does do some positive things — repeal the unconstitutional Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), for example — it also presents enormous dangers.

Aside from constitutional problems with a “school choice” program at the federal level, there is a wide array of concerns with the broader agenda among conservatives and liberals alike. In fact, some critics say the “school choice” agenda is a key element of the globalist establishment’s plan to undermine educational freedom. While virtually everyone today acknowledges that there are systemic and catastrophic problems with the current government-education model, critics on both sides of the political spectrum have long been opposed to the so-called school choice agenda — albeit for very different reasons.

Public-school teachers unions, self-styled “progressives,” and government-education monopolists dislike the idea of losing any share of the hundreds of billions in tax funding flowing to government schools, not to mention the virtual monopoly on the minds of young Americans. On the other side, though, critics warn that the “school choice” agenda is a major threat to genuine choice. Among other concerns,



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studies show that government-controlled charter schools and similar programs tend to crowd out truly independent schools. And schools that take tax funding end up being controlled by government. What the government funds, the government controls, of course.

Already, at least half of all states have “voucher” programs that can be used for private schools, and just a handful remains of states that do not have “charter school” laws. And it is not surprising. So-called school choice has become a rallying cry for many conservatives and libertarians, many of whom were delighted by Trump’s support for the issue. The thinking goes that, if competition is good — and supporters of free markets must agree that it is — then having government introduce some additional competition into education must be good as well. It sounds simple enough. And some “choice” schools have indeed succeeded in providing a better education than the dumbed-down public schools controlled by Washington, D.C., today. That much is undeniable.

However, in the case of vouchers for ostensibly private schools, and the creation of charter schools as they have been implemented in most states across America, the result has been, perversely, a decline in real choice. That is because once schools start accepting government money, they also must accept government regulation, including Bible bans and a prohibition on anything deemed “religious,” the establishment’s terrible Common Core standards that Trump campaigned against, and other counterproductive policies that make good education almost impossible.

The decline in real choice is well documented. According to a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York that focused on the effect of charter school proliferation in DeVos’ home state of Michigan, the introduction and expansion of tax-funded charter schools, which must conform to destructive federal and state regulatory regimes and dumbed-down standards, crowded out genuinely independent education. “We find robust evidence of a decline in enrollment in private schools,” the researchers found, calling the effect “modest” and noting that Catholic and other religious schools suffered from declines similar to non-religious private schools.

“When we consider the failed state of American public schools, I certainly understand the push for school choice,” explained Dr. Duke Pesta, academic director at FreedomProject Academy, an independent online K-12 school providing classical education based on Judeo-Christian values. “The problem, however, is that charter and voucher schools are not really ‘choice’ if all they offer are different platforms to deliver exactly the same politicized, ineffective schooling models. All charter and voucher schools take state and/or federal money to function. That means states can — and are — requiring these schools to conform to Common Core methods and testing.”

The school Pesta leads, though, is different, vowing to remain independent no matter what. “At FreedomProject Academy, we refuse all state and federal money,” he said. “Because we are not beholden to these entities — the very forces that have weakened and politicized our kids’ education — we are free to teach a Classical curriculum and incorporate Judeo-Christian values. Real school choice means opting for schools completely outside the orbit of one-size-fits-all big government education. FreedomProject Academy is that choice.”

Meanwhile, Charlotte Iserbyt, a senior advisor at the U.S. Department of Education under Ronald Reagan and the author of the book *The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America*, was even more critical. Iserbyt has taken a hard line against the use of tax dollars by schools that do not operate under the control of elected local school boards, labeling it “taxation without representation.”



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But the real agenda is even more sinister, according to Iserbyt, who has spent decades studying education, education policy, and the establishment's globalist plans. The ultimate goal behind "school choice," Iserbyt said, is to have government and the establishment end up in charge of all education, cutting parents and communities out of the decision-making process. "School choice, as it is being offered to Americans by President Trump and the elitists on the right and the left, is NO CHOICE," she told The New American in an e-mail. "What the government funds the government controls. What government funds, in partnership with industry, is corporate fascism."

Indeed, precisely such a process occurred in Sweden. First, the government began offering "vouchers" in the early 1990s so that parents could put their children in any school they wanted — private, religious, public, and beyond. It was also marketed as "school choice," and was very popular across the political spectrum. In 2010, though, it all came crashing down and the trap closed when Parliament decided that, since taxpayers fund all the schools, all of the schools would need to teach exclusively from the government's totalitarian curriculum.

Despite the recent uproar among Democrats over the Trump administration's perceived educational agenda, presidents Clinton and Obama were also strong boosters of charter schools and "school choice" — and not because they wanted to help American children become well-educated. In fact, as The New American reported in late 2015, Obama celebrated as a "Christmas miracle" the totalitarian and unconstitutional "Every Student Succeeds Act" (ESSA) passed by establishment Republicans. Among other schemes, the statute dramatically expanded federal funding for "charter" schools and "choice."

While it is almost certain that government-controlled "school choice" will expand in the coming years, how that might affect homeschooling — if at all — remains unclear. In his proclamation on choice, Trump touted homeschooling. And in a 2013 interview, DeVos praised homeschooling as "another perfectly valid educational option." "We've seen more and more people opt for homeschooling, including in urban areas," she added. "What you're seeing is parents who are fed up with their lack of power to do anything about where their kids are assigned to go to school. To the extent that homeschooling puts parents back in charge of their kids' education, more power to them."

So, unlike Obama's education secretary who questioned whether homeschoolers were getting the "education" they "need," the new administration appears friendly to home educators. But concerns are still being expressed. The same bill in Congress to expand "school choice" would send federal dollars to state governments, with a mandate that states spend the money on vouchers that would follow students to private schools. Homeschooling advocates, though, promptly sounded the alarm, because the bill would also order states that take the money to provide funding for homeschool families. And with government funding, regulation will inevitably follow.

No Comment on Closing

In addition to crushing Common Core and expanding school choice, Trump also spoke regularly of shutting down the entire Education Department. Whether that will happen remains to be seen, but a bill has already been introduced in Congress to do that. (See article on page 23) Since taking office, neither Trump nor DeVos has commented on that.

There is still much to be concerned with. But there are also some reasons for optimism. It took progressives, humanists, and the establishment more than a century to destroy genuine education in



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America, and so fixing it will not be easy. But America's children, and therefore America's future, depend on getting it right. That means making American education great again must be done. Unfortunately, it remains unclear whether Trump will be willing and able to do what is necessary to even begin that process. But in the meantime, homeschooling and independent schools offer hope for those with school-age children.



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