

The Privatization of Education

What you need to know

Q: How will Trump's proposals for spending affect public schools?

A: Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos plan to rechannel funds originally established for innovation in education, to encourage states to create or expand student voucher programs. Vouchers provide public funds for low-income students to use toward tuition at a private school. Advocates believe that vouchers address issues with failing public school systems and help to strike back at court decisions that keep religion out of school. Foes fear that vouchers will destroy traditional public schools by siphoning money from them and will erode the separation of church and state. As of 2017, 14 states and D.C. had school voucher programs. Results on their effectiveness are mixed.

Q: What are the implications of the administration's school choice movement, which seeks to expand alternatives to traditional public schools for children with poor educational options in their neighborhoods? (There are numerous tentacles to the school choice movement: Charter schools*, vouchers, tax-credit programs, education scholarship accounts, home schooling, online schools and more).

A: Devos proposes spending 1 billion dollars to expand school choice; calls the current public school system a monopoly and asserts that more competition will improve public

schools. The attitude of the Trump administration is that public schools are failing, thus it is their desire to enable more people to attend private and charter schools including schools with religious affiliations. Critics argue that using public funds to support more school choice undermines the traditional public school system and is ultimately aimed at privatizing the most important civic institution in the country. There also is no consensus that the parochial schools, other private schools or charter schools have better results than the public schools.

Q: Exactly what is going to be cut?

A: Trump proposes to cut the U.S. Department of Education budget by 13.5%. On average, the federal government contributes about 10% to the total amount spent on public education, but these dollars account for a larger portion of many high poverty districts' budgets.

That includes cutting a 2.3 billion program for teacher training and class-size reduction, a 1.2 billion dollar after-school program serving nearly 2 million low-income children as well as a 190 million dollar literacy program. The administration says these programs are duplicative and have not been shown to be effective.

Q: What changes will result from the administration's decision to cut funding

for the Education Department's Office of Civil Rights?

A: The Education Department's Office of Civil Rights investigates thousands of complaints of discrimination in school districts and sets new standards for how colleges should respond to allegations of sexual assault and harassment. The administration acknowledges that cuts to this department will result in scaling back the number of investigations it conducts and will limit travel to school districts to carry out its work.

Furthermore, voucher programs, which the administration wants to expand, often do not require participating private schools to follow federal civil rights law. That means that these private schools may accept or dismiss students on the basis of religion, gender identity and disability status.

Q. Does Andy Barr support public, rather than privatized, education?

A. The National Education Association grades Barr an "F" for his lack of support for public education. Go here <http://www.nea.org/home/57694.htm> to see the ratings

*Charter schools are public schools of choice, meaning that families choose them for their children. They operate with freedom from some of the regulations imposed upon district schools