

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Statement by Betsy DeVos Secretary of Education on the U.S. Department of Education Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Administration's budget proposal for fiscal year 2018. As you know, the full year 2017 appropriation was not enacted until April 28, after the time the fiscal year 2018 budget was prepared. The proposed fiscal year 2018 budget is built off of the Further Continuing Appropriation Act, 2017, and reflects the annualized levels provided by the continuing resolution. I look forward to talking about how we can work together to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all students while also refocusing the Federal role in education.

EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

I want to begin by briefly outlining my own vision for education reform, why I came to Washington to work with President Trump, and what I hope to accomplish on behalf of the students and families we serve.

I am sure you already know that I'm a longtime supporter of expanding educational options for students and parents, in particular for low-income families, by providing a whole menu of educational options both in our public school systems and by promoting greater access to private schools.

In part, my support for educational choice is based on my strong belief in the power of markets and competition as drivers of educational quality and accountability. Providing choices to parents promotes increased involvement in their children's education and empowers them to

seek out the schools and services that best meet their children's unique educational needs—no matter their ZIP code, the color of their skin, their family's income, or their own educational backgrounds.

But my commitment to educational choice has been strengthened by witnessing the impact of federally directed education reform efforts over the past quarter century. Beginning in 1989, every president—Republican and Democrat alike—has claimed the mantle of “the Education President” and attempted to find the right set of levers here in Washington to transform our education system and deliver on the twin promises of opportunity and excellence for all Americans.

Washington's education reformers set national education goals, promoted voluntary national academic standards and aligned assessments, demanded ever-stronger improvement measures from States and school districts, tried top-down accountability systems driven by rigid rules and requirements, incentivized the adoption of the Common Core, and mandated the implementation of prescriptive school improvement models.

Unfortunately, I don't think any of us are happy with the results of these seemingly endless, Washington-led reform efforts. Most discouragingly, the achievement and attainment gaps experienced by poor and minority students, who are the primary focus of these Federal education programs, remain unacceptably large.

While these high-profile, top-down reform efforts have generated more publicity than results, there was a small, initially little-noticed innovation that really caught fire over the same period—and with the help of the Federal Government. I'm talking, of course, about charter schools—a bottom-up, locally driven education reform strategy based on empowering educators and providing choices to students and families. Since 1995, the Department's Charter School

Program has awarded more than \$4 billion to help launch thousands of charter schools, including extraordinarily successful models like the Noble Network of Charter Schools. Many of these charter schools are serving some of our poorest and most disadvantaged students in many of our toughest neighborhoods and are, at the same time, among the top performing public schools in the Nation.

So I'm both proud and excited to join President Trump in his commitment to ensure that every child has the opportunity to attend a high-quality school selected by his or her parents. I hope to help build on the tremendous success of the charter school movement and our 2018 request includes three proposals in this area. First, we would promote locally-developed, student-centered education funding systems that expand educational choice in our public school systems. Second, we would fund State and local efforts to create scholarship programs that help students and families take advantage of private schools and other educational options. And third, we would provide a significant increase for the Charter Schools Program. Each of these proposals reflects my strong belief that a greater focus on student-centered reforms is the next logical step following the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act, which recognized and restored the primary role of States and school districts in operating a public education system that puts students and parents first.

REFOCUSING THE FEDERAL MISSION IN EDUCATION

Turning now to the broad outlines of the Administration's fiscal year 2018 budget request for education, I think a little history may be helpful here as well. Washington didn't just come up with a lot of ideas for education reform over the past 20 years, it also spent *a lot* of money on those ideas. Total discretionary spending at the Department of Education quadrupled from fiscal year 1989 to fiscal year 2016, rising from \$17.1 billion to \$68.3 billion.

Once again, I think it's hard to make a case that the results of this extraordinary Federal investment in all levels of our education system—whether measured by overall gains in student achievement, reduced achievement gaps, graduation rates, or college completion rates—are what we hoped for.

That doesn't mean that Federal dollars are unimportant, or that States and school districts don't rely on them both to maintain and improve services to millions of students across the Nation. But it does mean that it's important to recognize the limited impact of Federal spending on the performance of our education system and that it's reasonable to include the Department's programs in a broad-based effort to address the long-term financial health of our Nation by reducing the Federal deficit.

This is why the President's fiscal year 2018 budget would reduce overall funding for Department programs by \$9 billion or 13 percent. I've seen the headlines, and I understand those figures are alarming for many; however, this budget refocuses the Department on supporting States and school districts in their efforts to provide high-quality education to all our students. At the same time, the Budget simplifies funding for college, while continuing to help make a college education more affordable. I'd like to outline the principles that guided our decision making.

FIVE PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE BUDGET REQUEST

First, our request would provide significant new resources dedicated to helping achieve the President's goal of ensuring that every child has the opportunity to attend a high-quality school selected by his or her parents.

Second, the Administration's request recognizes the importance of maintaining strong support for public schools through longstanding State formula grant programs focused on

meeting the educational needs of the Nation's most vulnerable students such as poor and minority students and students with disabilities.

Third, our request maintains funding for key competitive grant programs that support innovation and build evidence of what works in education. This also means strong support for the research and data collection activities of the Department.

Fourth, our request reduces the complexity of funding for college while prioritizing efforts to help make a college education affordable for low-income students. As Congress prepares to reauthorize the Higher Education Act, I look forward to working with you to address student debt and higher education costs while accelerating and improving student completion rates through such efforts as Year-Round Pell, and reducing the complexity of student financial aid.

And **fifth,** consistent with our commitment to improve the efficiency of the Federal Government, our request would eliminate or phase-out 22 programs that are duplicative, ineffective, or are better supported through State, local, or private efforts, in addition to 6 other programs that were eliminated in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, saving \$5.8 billion.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for this opportunity to share the Administration's vision for a Federal role in education that is both more limited and more effective than past efforts in achieving our shared goal of ensuring that all students have access to high-quality educational opportunities at all levels of our education system.

I will be happy to respond to any questions you may have.