



Intense Reactions from Across Spectrum as Betsy DeVos Sworn in as U.S. Education Secretary

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Americans from across the political spectrum are voicing strong reactions to the Senate's confirmation of now-Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

Vice President Mike Pence administered the oath of office to DeVos Tuesday evening following her confirmation.

Up until her confirmation vote, DeVos's nomination had been the focus of unprecedented debate and controversy for an education secretary nominee. Pence himself made history as the first vice president to break a tie vote in the Senate for a cabinet nominee's confirmation.

To DeVos, the vice president said, "When I cast my first vote in the United States Senate I wasn't just voting for you ... I was also casting a vote for America's children."

"No longer will our kids be trapped in too many public school systems that are too concerned with the status quo," Pence said, referring to DeVos's primary area of focus, school choice.

DeVos herself tweeted the following after Pence's vote enabled her confirmation:

The offices of Democrat senators, however, were besieged by thousands of phone calls, emails, and faxes from teachers' union members and public school parents protesting DeVos's nomination over fears that she will privatize public schools.

Upon DeVos's confirmation, NEA president Lily Eskelsen García warned that the resistance Trump and DeVos experienced during the confirmation process is "only the beginning."

"Students, educators, parents, civil rights and special education advocates—along with millions of Americans—are speaking loud and clear: we are here to stay ... we will protect public education," Eskelsen Garcia said. "The level of energy is palpable. We are going to watch what

Betsy DeVos does. And we are going to hold her accountable for the actions and decisions she makes on behalf of the more than 50 million students in our nation's public schools.”

However, DeVos's nomination was also opposed by grassroots education activists from across the country who were looking to Trump to begin the dismantling of the federal education department. This constitutionalist base of the GOP has been battling for repeal of the Common Core standards in their states for seven or eight years – often fighting against lawmakers of their own party who support the controversial standards. While, upon her nomination, DeVos announced she was “certainly” not a supporter of Common Core, she has supported – with both her finances and her service – many organizations that have promoted Common Core and fought against grassroots groups of parents attempting to repeal it.

One of DeVos's most vocal supporters has been Jeb Bush, a prominent champion of Common Core. DeVos has contributed to and served on the board of Bush's Foundation for Excellence in Education. Bush congratulated DeVos in a statement following her confirmation in the Senate.

“Millions of families share Secretary DeVos's vision for disrupting a failed status quo that has denied too many children access to a quality education,” he said. “It's time to upend the entrenched special interests that put adults above genuine reforms that will raise student achievement.”

Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-TN), the primary sponsor of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), said, “I championed Betsy DeVos because she will implement the new law fixing No Child Left Behind the way Congress wrote it: to reverse the trend toward a national school board and restore local control of Tennessee's public schools.”

“Under her leadership, there will be no Washington mandates for Common Core, for teacher evaluation, or for vouchers,” Alexander said, even though under ESSA, every state is required to submit its plan for standards for approval to the U.S. Department of Education.

Jane Robbins, senior fellow at American Principles Project, speaks to what DeVos can do to reduce federal overreach in education, even given the massive federal ESSA law:

DeVos should make it clear that states won't be penalized in any way if they ditch the Common Core national standards and the aligned tests. She should minimize the federal influence on state education policies any way she can, letting states chart their own courses as they're entitled to do under the Constitution. She should eliminate the policy of federal bribery and threats to get the states to adopt certain policies. If the federal ESSA law gets in the way of this, or of her winding down the US Department of Education, she should recommend legislative changes to reinstate local control.

Also eyeing a plan to move toward the elimination of federal overreach is Neal McCluskey, education director at Cato Institute.

“The best things DeVos could do to demonstrate a commitment to scaling back federal involvement in education would be to issue ESSA regulations that really leave decisions up to state and local governments, and refrain from endorsing big federal school choice initiatives,” McCluskey tells Breitbart News.

He adds:

The former is the right thing to do no matter what, and the latter would show that she knows that even something demonstrably good—school choice—is not something that Washington is either constitutionally permitted to advance (outside of DC itself, for military families, and on Native American reservations), nor is it wise to extend federal tentacles into truly independent schools.

Grassroots parent activists, who have opposed DeVos's nomination because of her associations with individuals and organizations that promote Common Core, are also looking to see if the new secretary will work to scale back the federal government's role in education.

Dr. Karen Effrem, president of the Florida-based Education Liberty Watch, tells Breitbart News parents want DeVos to fulfill Trump's promise to stop Common Core, shrink the federal education department, and protect student data privacy.

"Parents do not want Betsy DeVos to implement the views and philosophy of Jeb Bush, who was soundly defeated because of his support of Common Core and highly regulated school choice," Effrem asserts, and suggests that DeVos "does everything she can to work herself out of a job by shrinking the USED."

Additionally, Effrem recommends DeVos "promptly accept any state plans as is her purview under ESSA even if they totally repeal Common Core and defer to parents about opting out of the state tests."

"At the very least," she continues, DeVos should also "make sure that any kind of school choice effort coming from DC to the states does not require the states to implement the Common Core/state tests on private or home schools."

Ann Marie Banfield, parent activist and education liaison for Cornerstone in New Hampshire, tells Breitbart News she is "disappointed" with DeVos's nomination and confirmation.

"People like Bill Evers, Sandra Stotsky or Peg Luksik have been fighting against the Common Core reforms, supportive of parental rights and understand the problems with the federal overreach we've been fighting against," she says. "Any one of those three would have been a huge improvement over DeVos based on her record of supporting Common Core in the past. Now we have to 'hope' for the best when we had the best available for this position."