



Our Editorial: It's now time for DeVos to work for kids

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Betsy DeVos has endured weeks of attacks on her character—and her mission to make schools work for children. But Michigan's billionaire philanthropist has prevailed, despite the best efforts of Democrats and teachers unions.

We're glad for that.

It was certainly not an easy victory. Following the defection of two Republican senators last week, Alaska's Lisa Murkowski and Maine's Susan Collins, Vice President Mike Pence needed to cast the tie-breaking vote, which was unprecedented in Cabinet nominations.

Democrats tried their darnedest to sway one more Republican to defect, spending 24 hours repeating union talking points on the Senate floor.

The teachers unions have tried to convince politicians, teachers and even parents that DeVos will dismantle public education as it exists. That's not true, and they know it, but to their credit they launched an effective campaign to discredit DeVos that almost worked.

The federal Department of Education is in major need of an overhaul — one that will reduce its ever growing bureaucracy, which only causes headaches for districts and isn't making a dent in academic performance.

America's schoolchildren need help. Recent national standardized test scores show that just 40 percent of America's fourth-graders are proficient in math. And only 36 percent are proficient in reading. That's despite the U.S. being one of the highest education spenders in education in the world.

We think DeVos is the perfect person to approach the department in a way that will shrink the education department's footprint and untie some of the strings attached to the federal dollars that make up roughly 10 percent of states' school budgets.

Any school administrator will tell of the hours wasted complying with federal paperwork. That translates into a waste of taxpayer dollars, too. The department currently spends about \$70 billion a year on education, with very little to show for it.

Throughout the confirmation process, DeVos said she believes in turning more control back to the states, where most education decisions are made anyway.

This is a concept even the Democrats embraced in ditching No Child Left Behind a year ago. The new federal education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, which got bipartisan support, made big steps to return more control to the states. No Child misguidedly tasked the Education Department with school board duties, micromanaging the performance of districts.

“If Democrats fear what a Trump administration might try in education, they ought to be encouraged by Betsy DeVos, who made one thing clear in her confirmation hearing: she does not think she should be calling the shots,” observes Neal McCluskey, director of Cato’s Center for Educational Freedom.

At its core, the Education Department has a fairly narrow mission: “To promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.”

It also is tasked with “establishing policies on federal financial aid for education,” “collecting data on America's schools and disseminating research”; “focusing national attention on key educational issues”; and “prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education.”

Yet since the department was formed in 1980 under President Jimmy Carter, it’s grown to 4,400 employees.

DeVos should take on the task of reducing the overreach of the Education Department. And she should use her post to continue advocating for policies that will improve opportunities for kids, rather than boosting a system that is failing far too many.