

# EDUCATION WEEK

## 'Bye Betsy' and More: Education World Reacts to Biden Victory

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**Joe Biden's victory** has been greeted with an outpouring of emotion from the education community that's endured a divisive presidential election and the **coronavirus pandemic's disruption and trauma**.

Many school leaders and others in the K-12 world—though not all—exulted in Biden's victory, which was declared by the Associated Press, the standard *Education Week* uses when calling election results, and by many other media outlets. The outcome might still be subject to legal challenges from President Donald Trump, who had not acknowledged his defeat to Biden as of late Saturday.

And some reactions also focused on U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, who's been champion for school choice, but a bitter enemy of public school advocates during her tenure.

Trump sought a second term with relatively low support from educators. In October, **36 percent of educators had a favorable view of Trump**, according to an EdWeek Research Center survey, while **29 percent of educators** said they supported him in a 2017 research center survey. And political donors classifying themselves as **educators had given Biden nearly six times as much money as Trump** as of a Center for Responsive Politics analysis from late September.

### 'Americans Made a Clear Choice'

The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, which both endorsed Biden in the general election and have opposed Trump at virtually every turn, expressed their confidence that Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris would support public schools and work to address systemic issues in education.

"Together, we will strengthen our public schools by investing in neighborhood community schools, dismantling the institutional racism denying access and opportunity for too many students, and building our economy back better so it works for all Americans," NEA President Becky Pringle said in a Saturday statement.

On Friday, as Biden widened his lead and moved closer to victory, Weingarten said in an interview that she had cried that morning and added: "It's the first time I felt like I could release emotions in the last five years."

"Joe Biden and Jill Biden and Kamala Harris all believe in public education," Weingarten also said.

Democratic lawmakers with leading roles in education policy also congratulated the Biden-Harris win.

"This election, Americans made a clear choice. They chose hope over fear, unity over division, and science over fiction. In the midst of a global pandemic and economic crisis, Americans expect us to lead," said Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., the chairman of the House education committee, in a statement.

Meanwhile, Sen. Patty Murray, the ranking Democrat on the Senate education committee, **said simply that she was "thrilled"** with the Biden-Harris election win. If the Democrats win two run-off Senate elections in Georgia in two months and take control of the Senate, Murray will be first in line to be chairwoman of the committee.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, an influential conservative in education policy and a one-time presidential hopeful, **congratulated Biden**. Arne Duncan, President Barack Obama's first education secretary and a vocal critic of Trump and DeVos, **said, "American just won."** And Duncan's successor, John B. King Jr., **also celebrated** by highlighting a statement from Obama.

Education groups congratulating Biden and Harris also took the opportunity to urge them to take action on pressing K-12 issues.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities, for example, said the Biden administration must immediately focus on addressing how education has been disrupted and students hurt by the coronavirus pandemic. "Ensuring equity and enforcing civil rights must be the foundation on which the Biden Administration builds its legacy, and it begins now," the group said.

And GLSEN, which advocates for LGBTQ students' rights, said that while "all of us can now move forward with greater hope," following Biden's victory, "We cannot allow ourselves to be complacent. There is much work still ahead to rebuild and repair our schools to ensure that every LGBTQ+ child finds safety and liberation in education."

As part of his education agenda, Biden has promised to restore Obama administration guidance focused on transgender students' ability to use school facilities that match their gender identity.

Some of the reaction from educators also focused on Harris, the first Black woman on a successful presidential ticket. Brenda Cassellius, the superintendent of Boston Public Schools, shared an image of **Harris casting a silhouette of Ruby Bridges**, the first Black student to integrate an elementary school in the South in 1960.

### **#AdiosBetsy**

However, it was hard to avoid the jubilation—and mockery—educators aimed at DeVos on Saturday.

The co-leader of the Educators for Biden 2020 group, Arizona teacher Marisol García, **said** she was "proud of every educator who said, it's too much and we need to get us a new President," and added the hashtag #AdiosBetsy. The Chicago Teachers Union **tweeted: "Bye Betsy."** Nate Bowling, the 2016 Washington state teacher of the year, **used a GIF to express his joy**. And the

president of the American Federation of Teachers' Massachusetts affiliate, Beth Kontos, shared this image of DeVos:

Like other Democratic presidential candidates, Biden turned routine presidential cabinet turnover into a pointed barb by **promising to get rid of DeVos** if elected.

Not everyone in the K-12 world, of course, was happy with the results.

Max Eden, a senior fellow at the conservative Manhattan Institute who studies education policy, cautioned that a Biden administration would be a return to the bad old days of the Obama era:

Jeanne Allen, the CEO and founder of the Center for Education Reform, a school choice advocacy group, **offered both congratulations and condolences** and said people should respect those who didn't yet see Biden as the president elect. **A set of education policy goals** came from Neal McCluskey, the director of the libertarian Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, in response to the election results. McCluskey also shared a thought about pluralism:

Others stressed that the 2020 election results should not lead to complacency. Howard Fuller, a veteran school choice advocate and civil rights activist, **celebrated** the end of Trump's "reign of terror" but added, "For Black people the Struggle Continues!!!!!"

During his campaign, Biden expressed some strong skepticism about charter schools and said they need more oversight and accountability. That didn't stop Nina Rees, the president and CEO of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, from congratulating him.