



Donald Trump's views on education, common core, and reform

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For someone who had a university named after him, President Donald Trump's views on education are relatively unknown. What we do know about the president's thoughts on the matter can be summarized with two words: school choice. "I will be the nation's biggest cheerleader for school choice," Trump said at a campaign rally in Cleveland in 2016.

School choice has been a rallying cry for conservatives since the Reagan era. Many Republicans and some Democrats argue that the public education system is a lost cause. Indeed, American students do lag behind their peers from other industrialized countries in math and science, according to the Pew Research Center.

The answer to this problem, school choice advocates say, is increased privatization of the public school system. According to this line of thought, funds earmarked for public education should instead be diverted to private schools, charter schools and other non-public institutions. Schools should compete for students the way companies compete for customers, they say. School choice is part of the broader conservative drive to privatize public services.

Trump's massive voucher plan

Trump has promised a \$20-billion voucher program that students could use at public and private schools, but experts question how realistic Trump's plan is. For one, there's the issue of where he's going to find the money. For reference, the Department of Education's current budget is around \$70 billion. Trump told voters the funds will come from "reprioritizing existing federal dollars," but which dollars he aims to shuffle around remains a mystery. Further, as Education Week reported, implementing Trump's plan would require Congress to amend existing legislation; the Senate rejected a similar proposal last year.

Perhaps most telling has been Trump's selection of Betsy DeVos for secretary of education. DeVos, a billionaire philanthropist and fundraiser, is a fierce proponent of school voucher programs. Until her nomination, she chaired the American Federation for Children, a nonprofit that promotes voucher programs, and she and her husband — Dick DeVos, heir to the Amway fortune — are longtime critics of the public education system. "It is hard to find anyone more passionate about the idea of steering public dollars away from traditional public schools than Betsy DeVos," the *New York Times* reported in November.

Common Core isn't easily undone.

During the campaign, Trump also promised to do away with Common Core, a set of benchmarks for K-12 students. However, as Common Core was developed and adopted by a group of states, not the federal government, Trump's options for doing away with it are limited. "Unless Trump tries to coerce states to dump the Core — [by making] receipt of funds or regulatory relief dependent on ditching it — he can't end the Core," Neal McCluskey, of the conservative think tank Cato Institute, wrote.

Trump also promised to get the federal government out of the student loan business and has proposed new terms for forgiveness of federal student loans. Trump's plan would have borrowers pay 12.5% of their income over a period of 15 years, after which their loans would be forgiven. Under the Department of Education's current Revised Earn As You Pay loan forgiveness program, borrowers pay 10% of their incomes over a course of 20 or 25 years, depending on whether the loan was for undergraduate or graduate study.