

# WORLD

## The Education Department's staffing diet

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The Education Department workforce is shrinking, more evidence of the Trump administration's attempt to destroy the public education system, according to teachers unions and other critics. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has cut about 350 department jobs so far and earlier this month offered buyouts to another 255 staffers.

Career bureaucrats whined to *The Washington Post* last week about how much harder it will be for the department to fulfill tasks taken on under the Obama administration with fewer workers. DeVos and her supporters essentially say, yeah, that's the point.

President Barack Obama set out to expand the Education Department's influence, especially through its Office of Civil Rights. The agency launched a massive investigative project involving sexual assault on college campuses, doing in-depth analyses of every college that had a complaint lodged against it. Such detailed and lengthy investigations required a lot of people. From the beginning, DeVos said she didn't intend to pursue the institution-wide assessment process based on just one allegation. That approach alone resulted in the need for much fewer department staffers, said Neal McCluskey, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

McCluskey, who advocates for shrinking the Education Department's role, does not believe the recent staffing cuts are going to make much of a difference to an agency that has about 4,100 employees. While he calls the new Civil Rights office focus a "good reason" to decrease workload, he notes ensuring equality is one of the department's few legitimate jobs. Just about everything else the department does, McCluskey insists, is unconstitutional: "If we think that the staffing should reflect what the government is allowed to do under the Constitution, staffing would be zero."

DeVos might not disagree. After President Donald Trump nominated her to head the department, critics warned her primary goal would be to deregulate herself out of a job. Hyperbole aside, DeVos has made no secret of her plan to return control to state and local governments, which oversee the bulk of the nation's public school system functions.

Nat Malkus, an education policy expert with the American Enterprise Institute, argues DeVos' approach is consistent with the department's original goal: "The Education Department's lawful purpose has never been to prescribe policy, but to support states' efforts to provide education, and further, to support a diversity of state-devised efforts."

During DeVos' confirmation hearings, Malkus noted her opponents' success in branding her an "enemy of public education." But they could only do that by conflating public education with

traditional public schools, he said. The 1979 law that created the Education Department didn't combine the two, noting "the American people benefit from a diversity of educational settings, including public and private schools." Based on that definition, all schools parents choose to educate their children, including lessons at the kitchen table, are a legitimate part of the nation's education system.

So DeVos does intend to shrink the Education Department, but not to destroy it or the nation's public schools, as her critics claim. Her goal is to liberate all schools from the weight of a bloated federal bureaucracy—essentially putting the department on a staffing diet.

### **Not their brother's keeper**

Texas State University, my alma mater, became the latest college to crack down on fraternities and sororities following the death of a pledge. Matt Ellis, a 20-year-old sophomore, died Monday after attending an off-campus Phi Kappa Psi party. Officials say Ellis participated in an initiation ritual that likely included alcohol.

University President Denise Trauth on Tuesday suspended all Greek organization activities and ordered a full investigation into the system. The findings probably won't surprise anyone. Fraternities and sororities are known for their out-of-control parties and outrageous behavior, excesses that often provide fodder for comedy skits and movies. (*Animal House*, anyone?)

But behavior once dismissed as boorish or crass has become increasingly lethal. And no one is laughing anymore.

The most shocking case, at Pennsylvania State University, continues to make headlines for the sickening disregard students showed for someone yearning to become their "brother." Prosecutors in Centre County, Penn., filed new charges Monday against 10 more members of Beta Theta Pi in the death of 19-year-old pledge Tim Piazza. During their initial investigation, police discovered one of the fraternity members had erased security camera footage from a basement bar. With help from the FBI, investigators recovered the footage this month.

Recordings already obtained by prosecutors provided hard-to-watch details of Piazza's final hours, but the new material shows a mind-boggling disregard for human life. Fraternity members gave Piazza at least 18 drinks in less than 90 minutes. He eventually suffered a fractured skull, shattered spleen, and other injuries after falling down the steps of the fraternity house basement. The recovered footage shows fraternity members further abusing Piazza as he lay unconscious on the basement floor, pouring liquid on him, and strapping a loaded backpack to him. They presumably thought he was just drunk and could sleep it off. He lay on the basement floor all night, and no one bothered to summon help until the next morning.

Piazza's heartbroken parents described the defendants' behavior as egregious, noting they had to know giving someone so much alcohol over a short period of time could be dangerous. A judge in September threw out the most serious charges, manslaughter and aggravated assault, but District Attorney Stacy Parks Miller refiled them after reviewing the basement footage. Will the new evidence be enough to convince the judge Piazza's death amounted to more than a tragic accident? —*L.J.*

### **Still coming to America**

According to data released this month by the State Department and the Institute of International Education, student interest in coming to America hasn't slowed. In fact, a record 1.08 million international students flocked to U.S. colleges for the 2016-17 school year, a 3 percent increase over the previous year. The number of incoming freshman dropped by 3 percent, but since those students made their commitments before President Donald Trump's election, the decline can't be blamed on the White House stance on immigration. After the election, higher education leaders warned fewer international students would want to study at U.S. universities, a dynamic we won't see play out until we get a look at this year's numbers.

The largest drops in last year's enrollment came from Saudi Arabia and Brazil, which scaled back government scholarship programs. Meanwhile, other countries are ramping up their own appeals to international students, siphoning off some who might otherwise come to the United States

A majority of international students come from China, India, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea. The most popular states for study are California, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas. —*L.J.*

### **Fifth Wheaton football player arraigned in hazing case**

The fifth Wheaton College football player charged with battery following a hazing incident last year pleaded not guilty during a Monday arraignment hearing. His four teammates entered the same plea last month. All five men will head back to court Jan. 11. The most serious charge carries a maximum five-year sentence. —*L.J.*