

Council for American Private Education

CAPE outlook

Voice of America's private schools



Donald Trump Chooses Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary

President-elect Donald Trump has named Betsy DeVos as his nominee for education secretary, prompting widespread praise from advocates of school choice and signaling a likely sea change at the U.S. Department of Education.

Mrs. DeVos was chairman of the American Federation for Children (AFC), one of the nation's premier promoters of comprehensive school choice, including vouchers, tax credit scholarships, education savings accounts, and charter schools. During the most recent election cycle, the AFC successfully supported scores of pro-school-choice candidates in primary and general elections across the country. The map of school choice states has expanded significantly in recent years because of AFC's efforts, a growth documented in the organization's annual School Choice Yearbook.

John F. Kirtley, vice chairman of the AFC, expressed the organization's support for Mrs. DeVos: "For more than 20 years, Betsy has fought relentlessly for the right of every child—especially disadvantaged children—to receive a quality education of their parents' choice. We are confident Betsy will take the same passion, commitment and leadership she's shown in the school choice movement to the helm of the U.S. Department of Education."

Education, Business, Politics

Mrs. DeVos has been active not only in education, but also in business and in politics. She has served as chairman of the Windquest Group, a Michigan-based investment and management firm, and was elected four times as chairman of the Michigan Republican Party (1996-2005). She also chaired The Philanthropy Roundtable board of directors and served on the boards of several other prominent organizations, including the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

Mrs. DeVos is a graduate of Holland Christian High School in Michigan, which is a member of Christian Schools International, which is a member of CAPE.

Widely recognized as a skillful innovator, manager, and leader, Mrs. DeVos will need those qualities when she takes the helm of a department that employs some 4,400 people and spends roughly \$68 billion annually.

Swift Consideration

Mrs. DeVos's appointment will likely be confirmed by the Senate in January. Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, said the committee "will move swiftly in January to consider her nomination." He called her "an excellent choice," adding, "Betsy has worked for years to improve educational opportunities for all children." Senator Alexander predicted that Mrs. DeVos would implement the recently reauthorized *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* "just as Congress wrote it, reversing the trend to a national school board and restoring to states, governors, school boards, teachers, and parents greater responsibility for improving education in their local communities."

Transformation

For her part, Mrs. DeVos said on her Web page that she is "very excited to get to work and to talk about my thoughts and ideas on making American education great again." She added: "The status quo is not acceptable. I am committed to transforming our education system into the best in the world."

Mrs. DeVos sounded a similar theme of educational transformation during her

welcoming remarks at AFC's annual policy summit last May: "We want our children to be the best educated in the world. We want every child to have access to a world-class education...no matter their race, no

matter their family's income, no matter their ZIP code." She went on to say, "The problem is—and we all know this—the system is broken, and too many children are missing out. And school choice is the pathway for millions of children to get the education they deserve."

Bush and Brooks

School choice advocates across the country were quick to praise the selection of Mrs. DeVos. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush called her "an outstanding pick," citing her "long and distinguished history championing the right of all parents to choose schools that best ensure their children's success." He said he could not think of a more "effective and passionate change agent to press for a new education vision, one in which students, rather than adults and bureaucracies, become the priority in our nation's classrooms."

AEI President Arthur Brooks described Mrs. DeVos as "a passionate, hands-on advocate for school reform" and "a true champion for the competition of ideas." He continued: "She pursues innovative solutions in education by engaging all players.... Her strong conviction that education reform has to be a bipartisan issue comes at a pivotal time, when Washington is in urgent need of productive cooperation. I am confident that she can bring people together to ensure that all children, particularly the most vulnerable, have greater opportunities to build their human potential and receive a high-quality education."



CAPE member organizations:

- Agudath Israel of America
- American Montessori Society
- Association Montessori International—USA
- Association of Christian Schools International
- Association of Christian Teachers and Schools
- Association of Waldorf Schools of N.A.
- Christian Schools International
- Council of Islamic Schools in North America
- Council on Educational Standards and Accountability
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Friends Council on Education
- Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
- National Association of Episcopal Schools
- National Association of Independent Schools
- National Catholic Educational Association
- National Christian School Association
- Oral Roberts University Educational Fellowship
- Seventh-day Adventist Board of Education
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Schools
- Affiliated State Organizations

a coalition of national associations serving private schools K-12
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Private Schools See Enrollment Uptick

Private elementary and secondary school enrollment in the United States increased by 82,000 students, or 1.8 percent, between 2011 and 2013, according to a government report released last month. The latest count of private school students (an estimated 4,576,410) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) signaled an end to an overall downturn in enrollment for the sector since 2001.

Parallel to the enrollment growth, the number of private schools also increased during the same two-year period from 30,861 to 33,619, a gain of 2,758 schools or 8.2 percent. Measured alongside NCES's count of public schools, private schools in 2013 accounted for 25.5 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary schools.

Detailed Demographics

The biennial Private School Universe Survey (PSS) provides a detailed picture of private school demographics and is closely followed by the private school community as a barometer of enrollment shifts.

Although the most recent two-year trend is positive, the past 12 years have generally seen enrollment declines. From 2001 to 2013, private schools lost 765,000 students, a drop of 14 percent. Much of that decline was attributable to Catholic schools, where enrollment during that 12-year period fell 25 percent from 2,515,524 to 1,891,387. Catholic schools, which in 2001 accounted for 47 percent of the private school population, now account for 41 percent. Conservative Christian schools, which enroll 13 percent of all private school students, also saw a 25 percent downturn during the same dozen years, dropping from 823,469

students to 613,713.

By contrast, several types of private schools managed to defy the 12-year downward trend. For example, the enrollment count in Jewish schools jumped 17 percent from 198,478 students in 2001 to 233,197 in 2013. Islamic schools grew from 22,951 students to 39,358 in the same period, an increase of 71 percent. Schools without any religious affiliation saw an 8 percent increase in enrollment, and

Montessori school enrollment grew by 20 percent.

Enrollment swings over the past two decades have accounted for shifts in the relative share of students captured by various sectors of the private school community, as the table below illustrates.

State Count

Among states, California had the highest private school enrollment in 2013 (513,164), followed by New York (401,119), Florida (312,227), Texas (245,915), Illinois (227,709), Pennsylvania (220,526), Ohio (208,971), New Jersey (165,503), Wisconsin (142,724), and Georgia (130,260). All top ten states for private school enrollment have state CAPE affiliates.

Private schools tend to be small. According to the report, "The average school size in 2013–14 was 136 students across all private schools." Also, "The average pupil/teacher ratio in 2013–14 was 10.4 across all private schools."

Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results from the 2013–2014 Private School Universe Survey is available on the NCES Web site at nces.ed.gov.

[photo © dglimages / Adobe Stock]

	Schools	Students
2013–2014	33,619	4,576,410
2011–2012	30,861	4,494,845
# Increase	2,758	81,565
% Increase	8.2%	1.8%

Source: Private School Universe Survey, NCES

Type of School	1991	2001	2013
Catholic	53.0	47.1	41.3
Nonsectarian	14.8	16.9	21.3
Conservative Christian	12.0	15.4	13.4
Baptist	5.8	5.9	4.3
Lutheran	4.4	4.1	3.4
Jewish	3.4	3.7	5.1
Episcopal	1.8	1.9	2.1
Adventist	1.5	1.1	1.1
Calvinist	0.9	0.7	0.5
Friends	0.3	0.4	0.4
Islamic	0.1	0.4	0.9

USDE Issues ESSA Equitable Services Guidance

The U.S. Department of Education last month released eagerly anticipated guidance relating to equitable services for private school students and teachers under the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), as amended by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). The guidance reinforces and clarifies new provisions in the law concerning such matters as funding, consultation, and the responsibilities of the state-appointed ombudsman.

Title II-A

One significant change in the reauthorized ESEA, which becomes fully effective in the 2017-18 school year, involves the calculation of funds available to provide professional development services to private school teachers and school leaders under Title II-A. The new law requires that such funds be based on a proportionate share of a district's total Title II-A allocation, rather than the amount the district earmarks for the professional development of its own teachers. The change will result in a substantial increase in funds for private school professional development activities, and the guidance spells out precisely how those funds are to be calculated.

Disadvantaged Students

Another important change in ESEA involves the calculation of funds available for services under Title I-A, which provides assistance to disadvantaged students. Under the new law, the proportionate share of services to such students in private schools must also be based on the district's total Title I allocation, similar to the new Title II-A formula. In the past, districts were able to set aside funds for other expenses before calculating the share of funds available for private school students.

The following question and response from the guidance document captures the change succinctly: Q. "May an LEA reserve funds off the top of its Title I allocation before it allocates funds for equitable services?" A. "No. An LEA must determine the amount of funds available for providing equitable services prior to any expenditures or transfers of funds. This includes all reservations previously taken "off the top" of an LEA's Title I allocation, including reservations for administration, parental involvement, and district-wide initiatives."

The new law requires each state education agency (SEA) to designate an ombudsman to monitor and enforce the requirement that school districts ensure equitable services to private school students and teachers. The guidance describes the roles and responsibilities of the ombudsman, saying the person "should serve as an SEA's primary point of contact for addressing questions and concerns from private school officials and LEAs regarding the provision of equitable services..." The document also offers

examples of what activities the ombudsman might undertake.

Goal of Consultation

ESSA strengthens the consultation process between officials from the local educational agency (LEA) and private schools by specifying that the goal of consultation shall be to reach "agreement on how to provide equitable and effective programs for eligible private school children."

The guidance document unpacks that provision, indicating that the goal is "grounded in timely, meaningful, and open communication between the LEA and the private school officials on key issues that are relevant to the equitable participation of eligible private school students, teachers, and other education personnel, and families in ESEA programs."

The topics to be discussed during consultation have also been expanded in the new law, and the guidance addresses those topics in considerable detail. The document also refers the reader to previously issued guidance documents on equitable services, which remain applicable unless revised by the new guidance.

Notice of Allocation

Under ESSA, states have to tell private school officials "in a timely manner" the amount of funds that a district determines are available for services and benefits to private school students and teachers. In turn, districts are required to spend the funds allocated for the benefit of private school children in the school year for which the funds are received. The new guidance explains what these provisions mean and how they should be carried out.

Numerous other topics are also covered in the new guidance, which is available in Part V of this document: <<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaguidance160477.pdf>>.

[image © willibetz / Adobe Stock]



USDE Responds

CAPE and others in the private school community generally have a great deal to say about pending guidance and regulations relating to equitable services for private school students and teachers under federal education laws. A case in point is the new ESSA guidance released last month (see story left). In multiple consultation sessions and documents leading up to the guidance, CAPE offered extensive and specific comments about how the guidance should be faithful to the statute and clear in its message. The U.S. Department of Education's final guidance document met and exceeded our high expectations. It's clear that federal education officials heard CAPE's suggestions and took them to heart.

Another example of USDE listening and responding to the concerns of the private school community is provided in [final regulations](#) released November 28 to implement the accountability, data reporting, and state plan provisions of ESSA. CAPE had an interest in these regulations when they were first proposed. In a letter dated June 21, 2016, we made the case for amending the proposed regulations by requiring states to include in their consolidated plans an assurance of compliance with applicable provisions regarding participation of private school students and teachers. CAPE also explained why the list of stakeholders to be consulted in the development of the state plan should include representatives of private school students. Both requests were rooted in the statute itself.

As it turns out, department officials heard the concerns, agreed with the rationale, and incorporated the proposed changes in sections 299.14(c)(4) and 299.15(a) (13) of the final regulations. Hopefully, the department's response will mean an increased likelihood that private school students and teachers will receive the equitable services the law requires.

CAPE notes

★ Joe McTighe, CAPE's executive director since 1996, advised CAPE's board of directors last June of his plans to leave the position at the end of 2017. In a recent letter to the general CAPE community, McTighe said his opportunity to serve CAPE has been a personal "joy and blessing." His letter, a response from The Rev. Daniel Heischman, CAPE's president, and information about the search for a new executive director are available at www.capenet.org/directorsearch.html.

★ In less than two months, what promises to be "the largest celebration of school choice in U.S. history," National School Choice Week 2017, will officially begin.

The week starts Sunday, January 22, and is expected to feature more than 17,500 events across all 50 states.



"Every year more and more schools, organizations, and individuals are jumping at the chance to shine a positive spotlight on school choice during the last week of January," said Andrew Campanella, president of National School Choice Week. "We invite everyone to get involved and have their voices heard."

According to NSCW, "More people search Google for the term "school choice" during National School Choice Week than at any other time of year. In 2016, 153

million people learned about National School Choice Week via 7,500 positive news stories."

Schools can register now to receive free event kits to help celebrate the week with open houses, assemblies, recruitment drives, pep rallies, awards ceremonies, and other events. Visit www.schoolchoice-week.com/schools today to request the kit.

★ The American Federation for Children announced November 30 that Bill Oberndorf will succeed Betsy DeVos as chairman, following Mrs. DeVos's nomination by President-elect Donald Trump to lead the U.S. Department of Education.

John Kirtley, AFC vice chairman, said, "Bill has been guiding the parental choice movement in our nation for well over twenty five years," adding that under his leadership, "AFC will continue to have a lasting impact on education in America."

Mr. Oberndorf, chairman of Oberndorf Enterprises, LLC, issued the following statement: "I'm grateful to follow in Betsy DeVos's footsteps in our effort to improve our nation's education system and ensure every child, no matter their ZIP code, can attend a quality school. The sad fact is every 42 seconds a child drops out of school. This is what motivates me to do more to help these children, and provide every child access to a quality education. I look forward to continuing our efforts to further AFC's mission to positively transform K-12 education outcomes on our country."

★ EdChoice (formerly the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice) recently released a report on the fiscal impact of 10 tax-credit scholarship programs in seven states between 1997 and 2014. Among the findings, as summarized by EdChoice: "Tax-credit scholarship programs have generated at least \$1.7 billion in taxpayer savings (roughly \$1,650 per student) since the first program was implemented in 1997. The savings could be as much as double that." *The Tax-Credit Scholarship Audit* is available at www.edchoice.org.

★ Sticking with EdChoice, the persistently prolific organization released yet another school choice report; this one in mid-November, titled *The Private School Landscape*. It looks at whether school choice has been increasing private school enrollment or capacity. The bottom-line finding: not yet. As EdChoice put it, "School choice programs have yet to fulfill the potential for increasing competition and growing the supply of private schools in states with programs."

"In 1955, Milton Friedman posited that educational options available to all families would increase the number of students in private schools," said EdChoice President and CEO Robert Enlow. "This report makes it clear that the limited choice programs that exist today have not achieved that outcome, but we can make greater strides by truly embracing Dr. Friedman's vision of full and unencumbered choice."