



January 26, 2017

The Honorable Lamar Alexander, Chairman
The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and members of the U.S. Senate HELP Committee:

On behalf of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), representing the nation's principals and assistant principals, I am writing to urge you to vote "no" on the confirmation of Betsy DeVos as U.S. secretary of education. Our organization has never taken a position on a nominee, but school leaders have expressed deep and profound concern regarding the ability of Ms. DeVos to be a champion for our nation's public schools and the children they serve.

When Ms. DeVos was introduced as the nominee, her biography revealed only her ardent commitment to and advocacy for privatizing public education as her credentials to lead the U.S. Department of Education. Confident there was much more to her background and policy positions, NASSP withheld judgment of her suitability. Yet, her substandard—and frankly embarrassing—performance at her Senate HELP Committee confirmation hearing only exacerbated our previous concerns and sparked a series of new ones. Specifically, Ms. DeVos:

- Revealed a breathtaking ignorance of the federal government's role in ensuring equitable access to education for all students, specifically those with disabilities.
- Faltered in sharing her understanding of the growth-proficiency dichotomy commonly debated in education circles.
- Refused to assign equal accountability to nonpublic schools that receive public funds.
- Offered a glib response to the debate over guns in schools, displaying a marked insensitivity to the thousands of students, educators, and families affected by gun violence.
- Lacks understanding of the federal financial aid system and the difficulties students face when managing their college loans.

Sadly, this was the sum total of Ms. DeVos' substantive responses, as she otherwise fell back on the assurance that she "looks forward to reviewing" various guidance and regulations currently in place or pending.

By now, opposition to Ms. DeVos' privatization policies are well documented by organizations like NASSP that aspire to ensure a viable public school option that builds the potential of each student. Yet our opposition to this nominee goes well beyond simple policy differences. Our nation's students—and the educators who work tirelessly each day to help them become their best selves—deserve a national education secretary possessed of a deep understanding of the greatest obstacles to a high-quality public education for each child. They deserve an education secretary who will work to constructively address the challenges common to high-poverty school systems, rather than avoid them for the benefit of a few under the euphemistic “choice” label. They deserve an education secretary who has the experience and knowledge necessary to effectively implement the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act. And they deserve an education secretary who believes in the promise of public education, which is the bedrock of American democracy. Betsy DeVos is not that secretary. Therefore, the leaders of our nation's schools encourage Senate HELP Committee members to vote “no” on this nomination.

Thank you for your consideration, and for your continued support of our nation's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JoAnn D. Bartoletti". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

JoAnn D. Bartoletti

Executive Director, NASSP