



NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

New York University
Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools
726 Broadway, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10003
Tel: 212-998-5104 Fax: 212-995-4199

www.nysabe.net

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Delegate Assembly, and members of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education (NYSABE), I am here today to express our support of the NYC Department of Education's Panel for Educational Policy in its opposition to the appointment of Betsy DeVos as the U.S. Secretary of Education. The main goal of NYSABE is to advocate for equitable and meaningful educational opportunities for the over 217,000 English language learners/bilingual learners in New York State. Our members include more than 1000 educators, parents, and community members who advocate for the educational rights of students in New York State. We have grave concerns regarding Betsy DeVos' ability to fulfill the duties of this position that is so critical to the education of our students. Among our many concerns are:

1. Lack of experience. DeVos has never attended, worked in nor sent her children to public schools. She has no government experience and no experience running or managing a bureaucracy or large organization. Instead, DeVos has spent much of her adulthood donating millions to politicians so that she can in turn lobby them to support her favorite pet cause: vouchers that give money to conservative religious schools with zero strings attached.

2. Lack of knowledge and preparation. DeVos failed to prepare for her own confirmation hearing with even a baseline level of adequacy. News outlets gave DeVos' confirmation hearing performance a failing grade. The Los Angeles Times editorial board went so far as to say that she'd embarrassed herself. DeVos also revealed that she didn't understand a basic tenet of one of the most important education laws, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Students with disabilities deserve a secretary of education who will protect their civil rights.

3. A dangerous precedent for pay-for-play in politics. During DeVos's hearing, Sen. Bernie Sanders asked DeVos, "Do you think that if you were not a multibillionaire, if your family had not made hundreds of millions of dollars in contributions, that you would be sitting here today?" The implication that DeVos is only being considered for this job, which would be her first as a public servant, as a political favor to reward her for years of donations is not without merit. By some estimates, DeVos and her family have donated over \$200 million to Republicans nationally, including sizable donations to many of the senators who will vote on her confirmation. In fact, DeVos is open about her support of pay-for-play, once stating that "I have decided to stop taking offense at the suggestion that we are buying influence. Now I simply concede the point. They are right. We do expect something in return."

4. No plans or vision, except for outdated and ineffective policies that are harmful to public education. What is DeVos' vision for how to improve public education? Despite a hearing and several weeks of scrutiny, no one knows. She dodged basic questions at the hearing, to the point of ridicule. At one point in response to questioning by Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine, DeVos simply repeated her stock phrase, "I support accountability," yet refused to discuss even the most basic of related policy details. DeVos has said that she wants to "advance God's kingdom" through school reform, a view that is far from mainstream and ignores the separation of Church and State.

As members of an organization of educators and educational advocates, we believe that the leader of the U.S. Department of Education requires knowledge and skills far beyond those exhibited by Betsy DeVos. We urge you to call on Congress to eliminate Betsy DeVos from consideration for the position of Secretary of Education. Furthermore, we encourage you to request that the President put forth a nominee with the experience, credentials, and freedom from bias and conflicts of interest required for this important position. We need a Secretary who will be prepared to meet the challenges ahead and who will strengthen public education for the benefit of our diverse learners across the nation.