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Sent: Thursday, December 29, 2016 12:06 PM
To: Haley, Nikki
Subject: Students were the real winners in 2016

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December 29, 2016

Dear Friend,

I hope your holiday was as joyous as mine. During this time of year, we celebrate the blessing of family and, in particular, the children in our lives.

Each child is born with an exceptional capacity to learn and explore the world around them. This is why we are working to give all kids—no matter their circumstances—the opportunity to learn, excel and reach their greatest potential.

It is a mission we take seriously and undertake with sincere commitment.

This year saw states enact more than 40 student-centered reforms. Idaho, Michigan and Tennessee advanced **early literacy**. Arizona, Colorado, Minnesota, North Carolina and South Carolina expanded **college and career pathways** for high school students. Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee expanded and protected **school choice**. And Florida and Idaho advanced competency-based education to personalize learning.

We're excited for this nationwide progress. But best of all, these reforms translate into changed lives.

Elementary students are experiencing [personalized learning in their local public school](#) in Lake County, Florida. "Whether below grade level, on grade level or above grade level, [learning] is focused on where students are and allowing them to excel," says school principal Susan Pegram. In [Mississippi's first charter school](#), students are challenged and

setting their sights on Ivy League schools. In Arizona, Florida, Mississippi and Tennessee, targeted Education Savings Account programs are giving students—like [Adeline with unique learning needs](#)—access to life-changing educational resources and services.

Today, because of our work together, 670,000 more students have educational choice. Student achievement is rising in states with strong accountability models. More children are reading on grade level in states with a focus on early literacy. And in states offering incentives, more than 250,000 students have earned an industry certification or passed an advanced placement course in readiness for college or a career.

We often think of education reform as policies written in legislation—as rules enacted by elected officials and appointed boards. Rather, reform is a profound game changer in the lives of individual children, a gift that allows them to maximize their potential and explore meaningful futures.

There is much more to do.

Every child in America deserves access to the quality education that will empower him or her to succeed. And with your partnership, we will continue working toward that goal.

God bless,



Patricia Levesque



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