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DISASTER RELIEF AID

On November 15, Secretary DeVos [traveled to Texas](#) to see first-hand the ongoing rebuilding and recovery in the wake of Hurricane Harvey and assess how the Department can continue to coordinate and support the state, its schools, and its students.

First, the Secretary visited schools in Port Aransas, a city near where Harvey initially made landfall. Students were displaced for weeks but are now learning in portable buildings while school repairs are ongoing. “My purpose in visiting is to see first-hand what is happening -- has happened -- and the way this whole community has come together to move forward,” she said. “[W]e at the Department of Education stand alongside them to help clear the way in whatever ways we can to make things easier as they continue to get on top of things.”

Then, the Secretary visited Summer Creek High School in Houston, which is also serving students from nearby Kingwood High School after it was closed due to flooding. (Summer Creek students use the site in the morning, while Kingwood students use the site in the afternoon.) She noted she was “struck by the resiliency of the students and the creativity used to meet their needs. The best of America has come to light. We’ve found a bright side to a very bad experience.”

Later, she toured the reconstruction work at Kingwood, during which she painted a wall in the foyer, and met with area principals.

This was the Secretary’s second trip to Texas post-Harvey. In September, she joined President Trump and other Cabinet members to visit with those impacted by the storm. She has also traveled to Florida, Louisiana, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands over the past few months to see recovery and rebuilding efforts and discuss with state and local officials their plans to help students resume learning.

Meanwhile, the Administration requested Congress approve an additional [\\$44 billion in disaster aid](#) -- its third such emergency request since August. The package includes \$1.2 billion for an education recovery fund. If approved, this package would bring the total amount for disaster aid from the federal government to \$95.75 billion.

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK

Last week, the country celebrated [National Apprenticeship Week](#) in a variety of ways, including apprenticeship program open houses, skills competitions, apprenticeship graduations, high school and college career fairs, business open houses, industry roundtable events, and community forums.

In recognition of National Apprenticeship Week, President Trump issued a [proclamation](#), declaring “Apprenticeships provide an alternative path to a high-paying job by providing opportunities to gain real world skills while earning a paycheck. In addition, research suggests that graduates of apprenticeship programs earn \$300,000 more throughout their lifetime than non-apprentices working in the same field. Because new jobs in our 21st century economy -- from healthcare to advanced manufacturing -- demand technical skills, apprenticeship programs are uniquely able to provide the affordable and relevant training workers need to fill in-demand jobs throughout the economy.”

Also last week, the White House Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion convened for the first time. “We’ve seen strong interest in apprenticeship programs since President Trump signed his [Executive Order Expanding Apprenticeships in America](#),” Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta emphasized in a [statement](#) regarding the meeting. “Apprenticeships are designed to meet the needs of America’s dynamic economy. Working together, we will help ensure that job seekers have the skills to fill open positions. I am grateful to the [Task Force members](#), all of whom are leaders in their fields, for participating in today’s productive discussion.”

“We have to stop forcing kids into believing a traditional four-year degree is the only pathway to success,” Secretary DeVos asserted at the meeting. “We need to expand our thinking on what apprenticeships actually look like. We need to start treating students as individuals -- not boxing them in.”

Secretary DeVos echoed those remarks a day later at the *Wall Street Journal*’s CEO Council. “For decades now, we have given the subtle -- or not so subtle -- message that the only path for a successful life is a four-year degree,” she declared. “The fact that we have many students that graduate high school [and] don’t know what they want to pursue, we have to give students a much wider venue of opportunity, starting in high school and middle school, to help guide them into a productive future.”

STUDENT LOAN SCAMS

Student borrowers have reported receiving phone calls, text messages, and other communications offering relief from federal student loans or warning them that student loan forgiveness programs are ending. Typically, the companies offering these types of services do not provide any relief. The Department’s Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) has taken several steps to raise awareness of such scams.

For example, FSA has posted descriptions of claims made by student loan debt relief companies, as well as tips on avoiding scams and getting help with loans for free, [here](#).

It also partnered with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to answer questions about repaying loans and avoiding debt relief scam companies during this month’s [#AskFSA Office Hours](#).

Furthermore, on November 30, from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time, FSA and the FTC will host a [webinar](#) focused on what action student borrowers can take if contacted by debt relief companies.

There is nothing a student loan debt relief company can do for student borrowers that they cannot do for themselves for free. At no cost, the Department and federal loan servicers can help [lower or cap monthly federal student loan payments](#), [consolidate federal loans](#), [determine eligibility for loan forgiveness or other programs](#), and [get loans out of default](#). The Department never charges application or maintenance fees; if you are asked pay, just walk away.

WHITE HOUSE NOMINATIONS

President Trump recently announced his [intent to nominate](#) Johnny Collett to be the Department’s Assistant Secretary for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Collett is currently Director of Special Education Outcomes at the Council of Chief State School Officers. In this role, he supports states in their work to raise

expectations and improve outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. He previously served as Director of the Division of Learning Services and State Director of Special Education for the Kentucky Department of Education. In that role, he provided oversight to a division that included special education, as well as English language learners, gifted and talented students, response to intervention, the Kentucky School for the Blind, and the Kentucky School for the Deaf. Collett has also served in other positions, including high school special education teacher and exceptional children consultant.

That same day, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing ([video](#)) on the nominations of [Mitchell Zais](#) to be Deputy Secretary of Education and [James Blew](#) to be the Department's Assistant Secretary for Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development.

Moreover, last month, the Senate HELP Committee approved and advanced to the full Senate the nomination of [Carlos Muñiz](#) to be the Department's General Counsel.

HONORING SUSTAINABILITY

The Department invites state education authorities to nominate schools, school districts, and/or postsecondary institutions for [U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools](#) recognition in 2018. Honorees must demonstrate leadership in three broad areas: (1) reducing environmental impact and costs, (2) improving health and wellness, and (3) teaching environmental/sustainability education, including an emphasis on hands-on, place- and project-based learning; service learning; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Each year, honorees are invited to Washington, D.C., for a ceremony to celebrate their success and share best practices. (Note: Nominations from states will be accepted on a rolling basis until March 31, 2018.)

ODDS AND ENDS

- A [blog post](#) by School Ambassador Fellow Melody Arabo recounts First Lady Melania Trump's and Secretary DeVos' visit to Orchard Lake Middle School in Michigan to spotlight anti-bullying efforts.
- Senior Counselor Robert Eitel [testified](#) before two subcommittees of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform on the work of the Department's Regulatory Reform Task Force. Also, the Department has posted [justifications](#) for each of the withdrawn guidance documents from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE). The agency followed a similar process after announcing withdrawn guidance documents from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) ([justifications](#)).
- The Department released the names of the 16 [panelists and alternates](#) who will be participating in negotiated rulemaking on [Gainful Employment regulations](#).
- October was a month full of awareness issues surrounding special education and rehabilitative service topics. The Department worked with individuals with disabilities, educators, service providers, and technical assistance centers to share their stories. Review all the highlights via Storify timelines ([1](#) and [2](#)).
- The Department's International and Foreign Language Education Unit debuted a [series of images and messages](#) to encourage U.S. students, teachers, and citizens to be "globally ready."

QUOTE TO NOTE

"During American Education Week, we recognize that the foundation of the American Dream is a quality education that instills life-long skills and develops strong character. All our Nation's children deserve the chance to be successful, to live fulfilling lives, and to give back to our communities. As parents, teachers, and advocates, we recommit to ensuring that all children in America have a meaningful opportunity to harness their full potential.... This week, we also reiterate the vital importance of family involvement in education. Whether that means checking homework, setting high expectations, or establishing healthy evening and morning routines, schools rely on families to accelerate student achievement. When families devote time and effort to their children's education, students earn higher grades, have more positive attitudes about school and homework, and are more likely to graduate. There can be no greater investment than into the success of our

children.”

-- President Donald Trump (11/10/17), [proclaiming](#) American Education Week

UPCOMING EVENTS

The annual [Speak Up survey](#) on leveraging technology in schools remains open through January 19, 2018. Since 2003, Speak Up has helped education leaders include the voices of stakeholders in annual and long-term planning. More than five million participants have made Speak Up the largest collection of authentic, unfiltered input on education, technology, schools of the future, math and science instruction, career exploration, and professional development. There is no charge for schools and districts to participate. Participants will receive local data results with state and national comparisons.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) funds [tuition-free summer programs](#) for school and college educators. Participants receive stipends to help cover travel and living expenses. Programs are held across the country. These one- to four-week study opportunities focus on important topics, texts, and questions in the humanities; enhance the intellectual vitality and professional development of participants; build a community of inquiry and provide strong models of scholarship and teaching; and promote connections between teaching and research in the humanities. The deadline for applications is March 1, 2018.

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