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Date: 3/2/2018 7:58:00 PM
Subject: [ED_REVIEW] ED Review (03/02/18)



March 2, 2018

PARKLAND SCHOOL SHOOTING

In the wake of the tragic shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, President Trump held two listening sessions, welcomed the nation's governors, and convened members of Congress.

First, joined by Vice President Pence and Secretary DeVos, he met with more than 40 [students, parents, teachers, and community leaders](#) to gain perspective from members of the education community, including individuals who have confronted acts of violence in recent history. Among the participants were about a dozen from the Parkland community, as well as students and teachers from the Washington, D.C., area. Also participating were Mark Barden and Nicole Hockley -- two of the founders of Sandy Hook Promise, the non-profit organization started after the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting to help prevent gun-related deaths caused by crime, suicide, and accidental discharge. For much of the afternoon, students led the discussion. The question-and-answer period covered a range of topics, including the need to reduce violence and improve access to much-needed resources in America's schools ([blog post](#)).

Second, joined by Attorney General Jeff Sessions, Secretary DeVos, and new Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, the President met with [state and local leaders, law enforcement officers, and education officials](#) to discuss securing schools and communities.

Third, the President hosted the nation's governors, where the focus was on action steps for school and public safety: [President's remarks at governors' ball](#) and [President's remarks at governors' business session](#). "Our nation is heartbroken," he emphasized. "We continue to mourn the loss of so many precious, innocent young lives. These are incredible people. I visited a lot of them. But we will turn our grief into action. We have to have action.... We've got to stop [these tragedies]." (Note: Secretary DeVos attended both the ball and the business session. During the latter, she co-led a [breakout session on workforce development](#) with Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta and Small Business Administration Administrator Linda McMahon.)

Fourth, the President met with a [bipartisan group of federal lawmakers](#). "We're going to come up with some ideas," he stressed. "Hopefully, we can put those ideas in a very bipartisan bill...."

Also, Secretary DeVos announced the Department had awarded Broward County Public Schools -- Douglas High School's school district -- a [Project School Emergency Response to Violence \(SERV\) grant](#). The initial \$1 million grant will support recovery efforts at schools across the system. Examples of activities that may be funded by Project SERV include mental health services; overtime for teachers, counselors, and security staff; and payment of substitute teachers.

DISASTER RELIEF AID

The *Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018*, signed into law by President Trump on February 9, 2018, included significant new funding to support disaster relief. The Department will award up to \$2.7 billion to assist schools, school districts, and institutions of higher education in meeting the educational needs of students affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria and the 2017 California wildfires. This assistance will help return schools and institutions to their full capabilities as quickly and effectively as possible ([press release](#)).

Specifically, the Department launched the following [programs](#):

- Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations;
- Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students;
- Assistance for Homeless Children and Youth;
- Emergency Assistance to Institutions of Higher Education; and
- Defraying Costs of Enrolling Displaced Students in Higher Education.

The agency will share additional information, including application packages and technical assistance, on its [Disaster Relief web page](#).

Secretary DeVos has visited each of the hurricane-impacted areas and continues to be in contact with education leaders as they restore learning environments. In the aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, the Secretary deployed over a dozen volunteers as part of the Department of Homeland Security's Surge Capacity Force across Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The Department has staff currently deployed on a rotating basis to Puerto Rico to provide critical technical assistance.

SUPPLEMENTAL GRANT PRIORITIES

This week, following a 30-day public comment period, the Department released the [Secretary's final supplemental priorities](#) for competitive grant programs. The Secretary may choose to use one or more of the priorities in competitions for new grant awards this year and in future years. These priorities align with the vision set forth by the Secretary in support of expanding the number of high-quality educational opportunities available to students.

The priorities will allow the agency and program participants to focus limited federal resources in areas of greatest educational need and on multiple issues related to improving student outcomes, including expanding educational options; promoting innovation, streamlining education, and reducing red tape; and supporting career pathways, citizenship, STEM/computer science, and school climate.

TITLE IX COMPLIANCE

Also this week, the Secretary announced a [Title IX directed investigation](#) into Michigan State University's handling of reports of sexual violence against former employee Dr. Larry Nassar.

"This new Title IX investigation will look at systemic issues in the University's handling of sex-based incidents involving Dr. Larry Nassar," she said. "Our Office for Civil Rights team will be in East Lansing shortly, where they will join the Federal Student Aid team already on site. FSA is currently performing a *Clery Act* compliance examination regarding MSU's reporting of crimes committed on campus.

"I appreciated seeing acting President [John] Engler's directive to the entire University to cooperate fully with our -- and with all -- inquiries into the University's actions. We expected MSU's full and complete disclosure about its actions to protect students from sexual assault.

"The crimes for which Dr. Nassar has been convicted are unimaginable. The bravery shown by the survivors has been remarkable. My heart goes out to them as they have had to relive their horrific experiences and as they

begin the long road to hearing. Every student across every campus should know that I am committed to ensuring all students have access to a learning environment free from sexual misconduct and discrimination and that all institutions that fall short will be held accountable for violations of federal law.”

DIGEST OF EDUCATION STATISTICS

The “[Digest of Education Statistics 2016](#),” from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), is the 52nd in a series of publications initiated in 1962. Its primary purpose is to provide a compilation of statistical information covering the broad field of American education -- from pre-kindergarten through graduate school -- drawn from government and private sources, but especially from surveys and other activities led by NCES. The digest contains data on the number of schools, students, and teachers in the U.S., as well as statistics on educational attainment, finances, libraries, technology, and international comparisons.

Information on population trends, education attitudes, labor force characteristics, and federal aid, among other measures, provides useful background for evaluating education data.

ODDS AND ENDS

- On February 27, President Trump announced [Johnny Taylor, Jr.](#), the former seven-year President of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, as Chairman of the President’s Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Chairman Taylor will work closely with [Johnathan Holifield](#), appointed executive director of the White House Initiative on HBCUs last year.
- In her remarks at the [Conservative Political Action Conference](#) (CPAC), Secretary DeVos discussed educational savings accounts for military families and threats to free speech on college campuses.
- The Department has posted a webinar and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on [equitable, student-centered funding systems](#). Districts may pursue such systems under a pilot program authorized by the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA).
- In a [Federal Register notice](#), the Department proposed postponing by two years (from July 1, 2018, to July 1, 2020) the compliance date for implementing the “significant disproportionality” regulations published in December 2016. The regulations concern the identification, placement, and discipline of students with disabilities based on race or ethnicity.
- A Homeroom blog post highlights [rural Montana students](#) becoming citizen-scientists through place-based learning.
- NCES released “[Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the U.S.: 2014](#),” drawing on a wide array of surveys and administrative datasets to present statistics on high school dropout and completion rates at the national and state levels. High school status completion rates increased from 83.6% in 1974 to 92.4% in 2014, while, over the same time period, the completion rate gaps between white students and black and Hispanic students narrowed -- although gaps remain.
- “[Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten Through 3rd-Grade](#),” the What Works Clearinghouse’s practice guide, provides four recommendations for improving students’ skills in the early grades. Additional resources are now available that can help parents and caregivers put these recommendations into action outside the classroom -- “[Tips for Supporting Reading Skills at Home](#)” and “[Evidence on Tips for Supporting Reading Skills at Home](#).”
- According to the College Board, over the last decade, both the participation and performance of public high school graduates on [Advanced Placement \(AP\) exams](#) increased by about 70%. For the second year in a row, Massachusetts led the nation in the percentage of students (32%) taking and scoring 3 or higher on at least one AP exam.

QUOTE TO NOTE

“[A] lot of these solutions that we talk about -- whether you agree with me or agree with somebody else -- you can do them pretty much by yourselves within your state.... And we’ll back you up, regardless of what you want to do.... [T]his is largely a state issue, in terms of that school’s security. And, in many cases, it’s a local issue.... You can go in as a school district and do what you have to do for the safety of your children. So my attitude is: Get it done, and get it done properly.”

-- President Donald Trump (2/26/18), in [remarks](#) at the White House business session with governors

UPCOMING EVENTS

Starting next week, the Department will host an art exhibit of approximately 90 works by K-12 students from the Rose Tree Media, Pennsylvania, school district. The opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony will take place on March 8 at 11 a.m. Eastern Time and feature a 32-piece jazz band, a flute ensemble, an elementary chorus, and a high school choral group. Remarks by agency senior staff, the Rose Tree superintendent and school board chairman, and students will place the arts in an excellent education. To RSVP to attend or learn more about the Department’s year-round exhibit program, please contact Jacquelyn.Zimmermann@ed.gov.

The Department’s School Support and Rural Programs (SSRP) Team is offering a [series of identical webinars](#) -- March 8 through April 17 -- to assist districts in applying for Small, Rural School Achievement (SRSA) grants.

April 10 is National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Day. National and state results from the 2017 NAEP in reading and mathematics will be released at 10 a.m. ET, and results for 27 urban districts will be released at 1 p.m. ET. Registration and further details will be available soon.

Register now for [ParentCamp: Informed Parents Thrive -- Preventing the Summer Slide](#) on April 23 at the Department. Parents, students, educators, and faith-based and community leaders are invited to share experiences, concerns, and solutions in order to make informed decisions about their children’s education in a series of workshop sessions facilitated by agency staff and invited guests.

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