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HURRICANES HARVEY AND IRMA

The Department has significantly expanded its [Hurricane Help web site](#). Originally created in response to Hurricane Harvey, the site now has a page with Hurricane Irma information and a page with general disaster information in both English and Spanish. The Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma pages have links to federal resources, including the latest information from the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), government-wide activities related to each of the hurricanes (coordinated by the General Services Administration), and other information for those impacted by the storms. Each of the pages also provides specific resources related to education. All of these pages are continually updated, so users are urged to regularly check for the latest information.

On September 2, Secretary DeVos joined President Trump and other Cabinet members in Texas and Louisiana to visit with those impacted by Hurricane Harvey. The group toured the Hurricane Harvey Relief Center and met with members of the Texas and Louisiana congressional delegations to learn more about how best to assist those on the front lines of the recovery effort. “Texas and Louisiana have a long road to recovery ahead, but the resilience of those in areas affected by Hurricane Harvey was evident today,” the Secretary stressed. “The Department of Education will continue to work side-by-side with the people of both states as they begin to piece their lives back together and get their communities and schools up and running again.” The corresponding [press release](#) lists some of the actions already taken by the Department to aid victims of Harvey, as well as actions planned for the near future.

Then, this past weekend, the President assembled his Cabinet at Camp David for regular briefings on Harvey and Irma, issuing readouts on [September 9](#) and [September 10](#), while the Department subsequently issued a [press release](#) updating its efforts related to Harvey and Irma.

BACK TO SCHOOL TOUR

This week, Secretary DeVos held her first back to school tour, highlighting the innovative and groundbreaking work happening in schools across America’s heartland. The “[Rethink School](#)” tour, with stops in Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, and Indiana, is showcasing creative ways in which educators are meeting the needs of students in K-12 and higher education. “There are so many new and exciting ways state-based education leaders and advocates are truly rethinking education,” the Secretary noted. “It is our goal with this tour to highlight what’s working. We want to encourage local education leaders to continue to be creative, to empower parents with options and to expand student-centered education opportunities.”

On [Day 1 \(recap blog\)](#), in Wyoming, she visited Woods Learning Center in Casper ([infographic](#), [prepared remarks](#), and [video](#)) and St. Stephens Indian School on the Wind River Reservation ([infographic](#) and [photos](#)).

On [Day 2 \(recap blog\)](#), she visited Firefly Autism House in Denver ([infographic](#)) and the U.S. Air Force Academy ([infographic](#)), both in Colorado, and Midland University-Omaha Campus in Nebraska.

On [Day 3 \(recap blog\)](#), she visited Nelson Mandela Elementary School in Omaha ([infographic](#)), St. Mary's Catholic School and Lincoln Public Schools' "Zoo School" ([photos](#)), both in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas ([infographic](#) and [photos](#)).

On [Day 4](#), she will visit the Kansas City Academy in Missouri and Gary Middle College/21st Century Charter School in Gary, Hope Academy in Indianapolis, and Eastern Hancock Junior-Senior High School in Charlottesville, all in Indiana.

Throughout the tour, the Secretary, the Department, and local schools were using [#RethinkSchool](#).

TITLE IX ENFORCEMENT

On September 7, with students and faculty at George Mason University in Virginia, the Secretary discussed a better way forward on Title IX civil rights enforcement. In her remarks, she laid out the problems with the current system and the need to establish a regulatory framework that serves all students. Below are excerpts from the Secretary's [prepared remarks \(video\)](#).

"Title IX has helped make clear that educational institutions have a responsibility to protect every student's right to learn in a safe environment and to prevent unjust deprivations of that right. It is a responsibility that I take seriously, and it is a responsibility that the Department's Office for Civil Rights takes seriously. We will continue to enforce it and vigorously address all instances where people fall short."

"[L]et me be clear at the outset: acts of sexual misconduct are reprehensible, disgusting, and unacceptable. They are acts of cowardice and personal weakness, often thinly disguised as strength and power.... Every person on every campus...should conduct themselves with self-respect and respect for others."

"We know this much to be true: one rape is too many; one assault is one too many; one aggressive act of harassment is one too many; one person denied due process is one too many. This conversation may be uncomfortable, but we must have it. It is our moral obligation to get this right."

"Here is what I've learned: the truth is that the system established by the prior administration has failed too many students. Survivors, victims of a lack of due process, and campus administrators have all told me that the current approach does a disservice to everyone involved. That's why we must do better, because the current approach isn't working."

"Every survivor of sexual misconduct must be taken seriously. Every student accused of sexual misconduct must know that guilt is not predetermined. These are non-negotiable principles. Any failure to address sexual misconduct on campus fails all students. Any school that refuses to take seriously a student who reports sexual misconduct is one that discriminates. And any school that uses a system biased toward finding a student responsible for sexual misconduct also commits discrimination."

"Due process is the foundation of any system of justice that seeks a fair outcome. Due process either protects everyone, or it protects no one. The notion that a school must diminish due process rights to better serve the victim only creates more victims."

"[T]o ensure that America's schools employ clear, equitable, just, and fair procedures that inspire trust and confidence, we will launch a transparent notice-and-comment process to incorporate the insights of all parties in developing a better way. We will seek public feedback and combine institutional knowledge, professional

expertise, and the experiences of students to replace the current approach with a workable, effective, and fair system. To implement sustainable solutions, institutions must be mindful of the rights of every student.”

ESSA UPDATE

The Secretary recently announced the approval of more consolidated state plans under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). [North Dakota](#) (September 1 [release](#)) and [Arizona](#) (September 7 [release](#)) were among the 16 states and the District of Columbia to submit their plans by the early deadline of April 3.

The following are some of the unique elements from each state’s approved plan:

- Arizona allows elementary and middle schools to earn additional points in its accountability system for accelerating student achievement, including increasing student performance in math, decreasing the number of minimally proficient students, and boosting the performance of certain student subgroups and/or using an inclusion model for special education. Arizona also allows high schools to earn additional points in its accountability system for preparing students to be college- and career-ready, including students performing well in career-technical education (CTE) courses, passing college-level courses, earning an industry credential, and/or completing a work-based learning internship.
- North Dakota creates a “Choice Ready” framework that will measure how effectively schools are preparing students for success after high school, with the goal of having the state’s graduation rate and “Choice Ready” rate be the same.

State plans from the remaining states are due by the final deadline of September 18.

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS

On September 8, President Trump [signed into law](#) a bill that includes the *Continuing Appropriations Act, 2018* and *Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief Requirements Act, 2017*. The bill provides funding at approximately the Fiscal Year 2017 level through December 8 for the continuing activities and projects of the federal government, including education. It also provides \$15.25 billion in emergency funding for the Departments of Homeland Security and Housing and Urban Development and the Small Business Administration to support disaster response and assistance. Additionally, the bill temporarily suspends the statutory debt limit ([Press Secretary’s statement](#)).

ODDS AND ENDS

- Earlier this week, the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs hosted a bipartisan group of senior state government officials from 44 states and four territories at a [forum](#) on the relationship between state and federal governments.
- Secretary DeVos issued a [statement](#) praising expansion of educational opportunities for Illinois’ students and families.
- In preparation for the release of the 2018-19 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, the Department posted blogs on “[3 FAFSA Deadlines](#)” and “[7 Things You Need Before You Fill Out the 2018-19 FAFSA Form](#).”
- Another blog post recaps the first in-person peer exchange of the [California Affinity Group](#), whose members work in Promise Neighborhoods, Promise Zones, a Performance Partnership Pilot area, city governments, school districts, community organizations, and the Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development with the common goal of improving opportunities for people living in some of the state’s most distressed communities.
- The Department’s Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) announced \$20 million in grants under the [National Professional Development Program](#) to support educators of English Learner students. The program provides grants to eligible institutions of higher education and public or private entities with

capacity and relevant experience, in partnership with states and districts, to implement professional development activities. This cohort of 42 grants will serve approximately 1,796 pre-service and 9,731 in-service teachers.

- According to the latest [student readiness report from ACT](#), 39% of high school graduates showed strong college readiness, meeting benchmarks in at least three of the four core subjects (English, math, reading, and science), up from 38% in 2016 but down from 40% the year before. In contrast, 33% of graduates did not meet readiness levels in any of the subjects, down from 34% in 2016 but up from 31% each of the previous three years. ACT notes that the more underserved characteristics that students possess, the less likely they are to be college- and career-ready.
- “[Education at a Glance](#),” the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) annual report, compares education systems in 35 member countries and a number of partner countries using a range of indicators, such as student participation and achievement, public and private spending, conditions for students and educators, and the state of lifelong learning.
- The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), which oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), is [seeking nominations](#) for five open positions -- fourth- and eighth-grade teacher, secondary school principal, Chief State School Officer, and public representative -- by October 31.

QUOTES TO NOTE

“[F]irst of all, my heart is with them. I understand they’re here not by their own volition, and yet they are serious about pursuing their education and contributing to our American society and culture. I would just encourage them to take courage and have courage.... I know this is a very difficult issue, and I know it’s one with which the President has struggled, as well as all of us. We are a nation of compassion, and we are also a nation of laws.”

-- Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (9/7/17), commenting on recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program during an interview with CBS News’ Jan Crawford

“Watching brave men and women rush into danger to help in the wake of devastating natural disasters over the past days and weeks, one can’t help but be reminded of the heroes who rushed in to help in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania 16 years ago today. Their courage is the true embodiment of the American spirit, something not even the most horrific of attacks could dampen. We remember the victims, honor the heroes, and offer our deepest thanks to those who continue to fight for our freedom today.”

-- Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (9/11/17), in a [statement](#) commemorating the anniversary of 9/11

UPCOMING EVENTS

[National Preparedness Month](#) -- observed each September -- is a reminder that everyone must take action to prepare for emergencies. This year’s theme is “Disasters Don’t Plan Ahead. You Can.” Today is [National PrepareAthon! Day](#), a bi-annual opportunity to prepare for hazards with drills, exercises, and group discussions -- use [#PrepareAthonforSchools](#) and [#CampusPrepareAthon](#) to learn from others and share insights.

September 19 and 20, U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Director Andrea Falken will visit [honorees in Georgia](#), as part of the agency’s annual [Green Strides Tour](#). The public is welcome to join the tour and witness how innovative outdoor learning expands traditional learning into the real world.

Planning is underway for the 18th annual [International Education Week](#) (November 13-17). The week, a joint initiative of the Departments of Education and State, gives schools, colleges and universities, and communities an opportunity to celebrate the benefits of international education and exchange worldwide.

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