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## **AP INTERVIEW**

In an August 9 interview with The Associated Press, Secretary DeVos spoke about a wide range of issues. Below are some of her remarks. The full transcript is available [here](#).

On the federal role in education: "We think that there has been an overreach in many cases on the part of the federal government in really intruding on states' issues and states' areas of responsibility, as well as trying to engineer things from the federal level in a way that is not helpful to students overall."

On school choice: "I think there is an opportunity for the federal government to set a tone, and I'm working to continue to do so every opportunity I have to talk about this, to encourage states to look at programs within their states, to consider the President's [proposals]. The President has talked repeatedly about empowering parents with more choices. We are collectively discussing the best way to implement something like that, to encourage that from the federal level, without enacting a big new federal program that's going to require a lot of administration."

On affirmative action in college admissions: "I think this has been a question before the courts, and the courts have opined. We have not been involved with the Justice Department's posting [for staff].... I think the bottom line here is that we want an environment where all students have an opportunity, an equal opportunity to get a great education, whether that's at the K-12 level or the higher ed level."

On Historically Black Colleges and Universities: "Let me just comment on what I think was an out of context comment and a misunderstanding with the HBCUs. When I talked about it being a pioneer in choice, it was because I acknowledge that racism was rampant, and there were no choices. HBCUs provided choices for black students that they didn't have. I think that that comment was -- while I could have said it, stated it much better -- my intention was to say they were pioneering on behalf of students that didn't have another choice. This was their only choice."

On minority students: "I should have decried much more forcefully the ravages of racism in this country. My last three decades have been working on behalf of primarily minority families and students to allow them to make choices for their kids. To think anything otherwise, my feelings otherwise for providing opportunities for minority students, is just absolutely false. I mean, that's where my heart has been for three decades, to really empower and allow families the same kind of opportunities I've had for my kids."

On public schools: "I know there are many schools that do a great job for the students they serve. At the same time, I know that even the best public schools might not be a great fit for every single child, and we need to recognize and acknowledge that. We also need to encourage schools, public schools that are doing a great

job, to not rest on their laurels but to continue to improve, because unless you're constantly oriented around continuous improvement and excellence, we know that there's going to be reversion to something less than that."

On teachers: "I think we need to honor and support great teachers in a way that I don't think they've been probably recognized as much recently. We also need to be honest if there are classroom teachers who are not doing the job. I think there's got to be more conversation around that, because we know for a fact that great classroom teachers are irreplaceable when it comes to students' ability to advance and achieve."

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## SECRETARY IN MICHIGAN

Within the span of a week, the Secretary participated in a number of events in her home state of Michigan. Among the highlights: addressing the Michigan Community College Association Summer Conference ([remarks](#)); visiting [Van Andel Education Institute](#) in Grand Rapids, where she observed a fifth- and sixth-grade student science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) program and met with teachers; visiting [Grand Rapids Community College](#), where she toured the culinary kitchen, machine laboratory, and apprenticeship facilities; and meeting with superintendents from across the state for a roundtable discussion on such topics as recruiting, honoring, and retaining effective teachers, removing regulatory burdens that limit flexibility for local educators and pull school leaders out of the classroom, and implementing personalized learning solutions to better meet the needs of students ([readout](#)). Later, the Secretary met with over 50 Michigan county commissioners at the White House for a State Day.

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## ESSA UPDATE

The Secretary recently announced the approval of several consolidated state plans under the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). [Delaware](#) (August 1 [release](#)), [Nevada](#), [New Jersey](#), and [New Mexico](#) (August 9 [release](#)), and [Connecticut](#) and [Louisiana](#) (August 15 [release](#)) were among the 16 states and the District of Columbia to submit their state plans by the early deadline of April 3. "Throughout this approval process, it has been exciting to see how each state has chosen to serve its students through the flexibility afforded to them under the ESSA," the Secretary noted. "[These plans]...provide a solid framework for educating students in ways that meet each individual state's needs." State plans from the remaining 34 states and Puerto Rico are due by the final deadline of September 18.

The Department also provided initial feedback to more states -- [Arizona](#), [Colorado](#), [Illinois](#), [Maine](#), [Michigan](#), [North Dakota](#), [Vermont](#) -- and the [District of Columbia](#). All states that submitted their plans this spring have now received their initial feedback. States received notes from external, independent peer reviewers, as well as specific information from Department staff about changes needed to ensure they are meeting the requirements under the statute. Providing feedback is an opportunity for the agency to work with states and offer technical assistance to help improve outcomes for students.

Meanwhile, the Department issued [new rules](#) to apply standards of research evidence for school improvement and other activities under ESSA.

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## LOAN SERVICING PRONOUNCEMENT

The Secretary also recently announced her intent to transform how the Department's Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) offers customer service to more than 42 million student loan borrowers. The anticipated [Next Generation Processing and Servicing Environment](#) will provide for a single data processing platform to house all student loan information, while allowing for customer account servicing to be performed by a single contract servicer or by multiple contract servicers. This new approach is also expected to require separate acquisitions for data housing, system processing, and customer account servicing, which will allow for maximum flexibility now and into the future.

“Doing what’s best for students will always be our number one priority,” she said. “By starting afresh and pursuing a truly modern loan servicing environment, we have a chance to turn what was a good plan into a great one. I hired Dr. [Wayne] Johnson [as FSA Chief Operating Officer] for his extensive private sector expertise, his fresh perspective, and his innovative thinking. After just a few days on the job, he has already identified potential ways to modernize FSA and leverage new technology that will not only enhance the customer service experience for borrowers but will also protect taxpayers.”

Contracts with current student loan servicers expire in 2019; Dr. Johnson’s team will have the new processing and servicing environment in place prior to the expiration of the current contracts.

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## FOREVER GI BILL

This week, President Trump signed into law the *Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017*, also known as the “[Forever GI Bill](#).” Among other provisions, the bill: eliminates the time limit to use benefits (until now, veterans had 15 years after they were discharged to use their benefits); expands access to a wider group of servicemembers (including National Guard and Reserve members and any member who receives a Purple Heart -- regardless of how long they have served); restores benefits for veterans whose colleges shut down in the middle of the semester (helping veterans affected by abrupt closures of schools in recent years); gives additional boost to students in STEM programs (by offering extra funding to veterans enrolled in these programs); and eases the process for veterans trying to access their benefits (with resources dedicated to technology and training aimed at making the program run smoothly). Since 2009, more than 350,000 veterans have earned postsecondary certificates and degrees under the GI Bill. (Note: Secretary DeVos and Secretary of Veterans Affairs David Shulkin released a [joint statement](#) lauding the legislation.)

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## ODDS AND ENDS

- Building upon the recommendations in the [interim report](#) from the [President’s Commission on Combatting Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis](#), President Trump instructed his Administration to use all appropriate emergency and other authorities to respond to the crisis caused by the opioid epidemic ([statement](#), [President’s remarks](#), [officials briefing](#), and [press briefing](#)).
- On August 11, President Trump, Secretary DeVos, and Secretary of Labor Alexander Acosta discussed additional steps to expand apprenticeship programs, especially for women and minorities within STEM fields ([President’s remarks](#) and [press briefing](#)).
- The Department [extended until September 20](#) the opportunity for the public to submit comments concerning regulations and policy guidance they recommend the agency review, modify, or repeal.
- The Secretary issued a [statement](#) on the confirmation of Peter Oppenheim as Assistant Secretary for Legislation and Congressional Affairs.
- The Department’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) released “First Look” reports on public school [teachers](#) and [principals](#), using results from the National Teacher and Principal Survey.
- Separate NCES “First Look” reports examine the characteristics of U.S. [private schools](#) in the 2015-16 school year and changes in the number of U.S. [postsecondary educational institutions](#) from 2000 to 2014.
- Back in June, the Department’s Principal Ambassador Fellows convened nearly 40 participants across the education spectrum on preparing and developing [culturally responsive school leaders](#).
- A [blog post](#) summarizes the July opening of “The World Through My Eyes,” an art exhibit featuring students from Fairfax County, Virginia, Public Schools.
- Over the last 18 months, the Department’s Office of Educational Technology (OET), partnering with Mathematica Policy Research and SRI International, built a [Rapid Cycle Evaluation Coach](#), a free, web-based platform to help schools and school districts generate evidence of effectiveness concerning their educational technology applications and tools.
- [Research: Arts Works](#) is a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant program supporting projects that

seek to investigate the value and impact of the arts for individuals and communities. Proposed projects may use quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches. A webinar for prospective applicants will be held on September 6, and the deadline for applications is October 10.

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## REFLECTIONS ON CHARLOTTESVILLE

"I write today with a heavy heart for our country. While we should be anticipating and celebrating students' returns to campuses across the country, we are engaged in a national discussion that has stirred ugly, hate-filled conversations and reopened hurtful wounds from shameful portions of our nation's past. There is fear, pain, anger, disappointment, discouragement, and embarrassment across America, and I know, too, here within the Department.

"Last weekend's tragic and unthinkable events in Charlottesville, which stole three innocent lives and injured many more, were wholly unacceptable. The views of white nationalists, neo-Nazis, and other racist bigots are totally abhorrent to the American ideal. We all have a role to play in rejecting views that pit one group of people against another. Such views are cowardly, hateful, and just plain wrong. This is what makes our work so important. Our Department, and particularly the Office for Civil Rights, exists to ensure all students have equal access to a safe, nurturing, quality learning environment free from discrimination or intimidation.

"Our own difficult history reminds us that we must confront, head-on, problems when and where they exist with moral clarity and conviction. Our nation is greater than what it has shown in recent days. Violence and hate will never be the answer. We must engage, debate, and educate. We must remind all what it means to be an American, and while far from perfect, we must never lose sight that America still stands as the brightest beacon for freedom in the world.

"My hope is that we will use this as an opportunity to show that what unites and holds America together is far stronger than what seeks to divide and draw us apart. We can all play a role. Mentor a student. Volunteer at a school. Lend a helping hand and offer a listening ear.

"Our work is truly the bridge to a stronger future. Let's recommit ourselves to ensuring the future is brighter for all."

-- Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos (8/17/17), in a message to Department staff on the attack and violence that took place in Charlottesville, Virginia

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

On August 25, the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center, on behalf of the Department's Office of Safe and Healthy Students, will host a [webinar](#) on how K-12 schools and districts can better plan to recover from emergency events and be ready for hazards and threats that may impact their school community. Presenters will describe key considerations for recovery, detail the process for including recovery activities in planning efforts, and share critical lessons learned from previous events. Throughout the webinar, presenters will focus on the four recovery components of academics; physical and structural; business functions; and social, emotional, and behavioral.

The U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools has conducted a [Green Strides Tour](#) since 2013, allowing schools, districts, and postsecondary institutions to celebrate their achievements and share their work with community leaders and policymakers. This year, on September 19 and 20, the tour will spotlight [honorees in Georgia](#), focusing on the importance of outdoor learning. All are welcome to join the tour and see how innovative outdoor learning -- from school gardens and field studies to citizen science and forest schools - provides new opportunities to expand traditional learning into the real world.

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