

EDITORIAL

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EDUCATING A NEW PRESIDENT

The election of Donald Trump sent shockwaves throughout the Washington DC establishment. For many years our citizens have grown distrustful of our federal government and those who govern. It is why those outside the establishment did much better than those within. We inherently know that solutions do not come from the White House. They are more likely to come from our house, local government and state government.

The leadership of the teacher unions hastily endorsed his opponent Hillary Clinton in the primary, selecting her over rival Bernie Sanders to the dismay of many union members. Politicians understand political endorsements were done from the top, pretty much without debate. The political calculation and strategy backfired and now will likely fuel more education reforms pushed down to the states by the Federal Department of Education. We need less federal intrusion.

When Donald Trump is inaugurated as President of the United States, his education advisors should remind him that out of the roughly 55.5 million K-12 students in America, 49.5 million of them are in our public schools, which is a little over 89%. So, while his campaign buzzwords of more “school choice” and “ending common core” were popular sound bites, they are also somewhat naïve.

As President, Donald Trump and his administration would be wise to start reaching out to public school educators. Not all educators are members of the NEA or AFT. In fact, there are more educators that are members of independent education associations than the AFT. Most of the independent organizations do not endorse political candidates, or use their members’ dues to fund political candidates. It is a sharp distinction. The Trump Administration should quickly reach out to these groups.

Vouchers are not a magic bullet to improve the quality of public schools. Vouchers are also not a solution to problems in urban cities. These cities face societal challenges well beyond the classroom door. Most communities lack the number of high quality private schools to meet any real demand. It is clear that for now and the foreseeable future, a vast majority of children will be educated by public schools. We must focus on making public schools successful. Hopefully, Donald Trump paid attention to the elections in several states which rejected school choice initiatives. Therefore, choosing an education secretary that is pro-voucher could be very problematic.

SUMMARY

The newly elected President should extend his administration’s reach to independent education associations and focus on issues such as the reduction of high stakes testing and making sure the federal government’s role remains limited. His previously stated support of school choice initiatives is likely to be as problematic as Common Core was for the last administration, and the federal government’s focus should be on the continued success of public schools.

For all practical purposes, common core state standards are already dead. One-size-fits-all mandates and centrally planned curriculum are no longer fashionable, but could return, although unlikely anytime soon. About 20 states still use the aligned tests. That number is also likely to decline. The Trump administration should focus on using their bully pulpit for the reduction of high stakes testing and making sure the federal government's role remains limited.

The Trump team should put a mandate in place that stops compulsory unionism in public education in non-right to work states. Thomas Jefferson hailed America as a society that is formally democratic and individualist. In the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, Jefferson wrote: "...to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical." Teacher unions, which once served a noble purpose of helping teachers and children, have unfortunately become a piggy bank to politicians and many non-education causes. We believe in the rights of educators to be members of any organization that reflects their values, but they should never be forced to join as a condition of employment.

A strong public educational system is essential not only to the successful functioning of a democracy, but also to its future. That system must provide all children with an equitable and exceptional education that prepares them for college, career and life. A pragmatist such as Donald Trump will analyze the purpose of public education and eventually reach that conclusion, if he is surrounded by people who know public education, preferably from outside of the current education bureaucracy.

We encourage Mr. Trump to go out and visit our public schools and see the incredible things that educators are doing every day across our nation. We think he would be amazed.

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