

April 06, 2020

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
400 Maryland Ave. S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

Secretary DeVos:

The undersigned organizations are allies of public education, students, teachers, school staff and administrators, and we stand united in opposing the use of vouchers for teachers' professional development. Together, we oppose not only the concept of using vouchers for professional development but also the practice of repurposing grant funding that Congress never intended to be used for vouchers. Using vouchers for professional development would directly contradict the bipartisan approach agreed to under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Congress knew that "one and done," "drive-by" professional development programs were not assisting teachers with the additional learning they needed. As a way to ensure high quality, Congress defined professional development as "sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, and short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused." Under ESSA, professional development is designed to be an integral part of the school and school district's strategies for providing educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed.

There is no research that shows using vouchers for professional development is effective or useful. Instead, the research shows that it would be ineffective and the wrong approach. The Learning Policy Institute reviewed 35 scientifically rigorous studies that showed significant gains in student achievement when teachers receive the kinds of evidence-based professional development that cannot be achieved through vouchers. LPI's research demonstrates that effective professional development is context-based and collaborative in structure, with the goal of building institutional and collective—not individual—human capital. A voucher program, in which only some teachers can participate, does not align with that goal.

The funding source for the proposed voucher program is also concerning. Education Innovation and Research, which also had bipartisan support in ESSA, supports state and local efforts to develop, implement and take to scale innovative and evidence-based projects in public education. EIR grants have funded projects in STEM, computer science and improving school climate. A professional development voucher does not align with the spirit or the goal of the EIR grants. There is also no evidence-based research that professional development vouchers work.

As students, administrators, teachers and school staff experience the sudden closures of their schools due to COVID-19, educators don't need a drive-by course on digital learning. Teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators will need evidence-based professional development that is sustained, in-depth and collaborative, on trauma,

digital learning, social-emotional learning and countless other topics we may not be able to imagine until this pandemic ends. The proposal to use vouchers for professional development has been wrong from the beginning, but implementing it during a national emergency would be irresponsible. Collectively, we strongly urge you to refrain from moving ahead with the plan to repurpose \$200 million from the EIR grant to use it for an unproven voucher program.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Atheists
American Federation of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents
ASCD
Augustus F. Hawkins Foundation
Clearinghouse of Women's Issues
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council for Exceptional Children
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
EDGE Consulting Partners
Educators for Excellence
Feminist Majority Foundation
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
Learning Forward
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity (NAPE)
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Indian Education Association
National Education Association
Public School Employees of Washington/SEIU 1948
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
The Arc of the United States