

## University of Virginia Center for Politics



### Talking Turkey: Education

#### General Facts

- The future of American education has reached a fork in the road. President Donald J. Trump’s selection for national education secretary is Betsy DeVos. If Ms. DeVos’s nomination is confirmed by the Senate, she will represent a highly unusual education secretary, based on her priorities and beliefs, and would likely sponsor significant changes in the American educational system.
  - Ms. DeVos is strongly in favor of “school choice” programs, which grant parents the ability to choose whether to send their children to public or private school and to have government funds follow the child at the school of choice. “School choice” programs often involve the use of “vouchers” representing the value of the funds associated with an individual student’s public school education.
  - Ms. DeVos would be perhaps the only education secretary ever to not be strongly supportive of the public education system.
  - Ms. DeVos’s educational experience centers around her leadership of The American Foundation for Children, which focuses on providing “low- and middle-class families with access to great schools through private school choice”.
  - Source: <https://edsources.org/2017/devos-sets-precedent-as-secretary-of-education-without-strong-commitment-to-public-schools/574836>  
<https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/what-is-school-choice/>
- Common Core Standards are a set of educational standards researched and developed by educators at the state-level to put states’ educational goals for students on par with one another. Common Core Standards were designed to make U.S. students better prepared for college and entry-level careers, and to make our students competitive on an international level. Though 42 states chose individually to opt-in to

the Common Core Standards, they are still highly controversial. Many critics, many of whom are educators, feel that the Standards' focus on critical- and analytical-thinking sets the bar too high for younger students.

- President Donald J. Trump has professed to be staunchly against the Common Core Standards, as is Betsy DeVos, but because the Standards were voluntarily adopted at the state level, it's unclear what action, if any, he will choose to take in Office.
- Source: <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/policies/education>  
<http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/11/10/501426803/can-president-trump-get-rid-of-common-core>  
<http://www.corestandards.org/what-parents-should-know/>
- “School Vouchers” and “School Choice”: School vouchers would allow students in underperforming performing schools to take the government funds normally spent on them to fund attendance at private schools, charter schools, or homeschools instead of public school. Republicans, typically in favor of voucher programs, see vouchers as a way to allow the free market to correct failing public schools. Democrats are more likely to view vouchers as abandonment of the public school systems and the civic responsibility to educate all children in the U.S.
- The federal government's involvement in higher education typically revolves around financial aid to individual students. Students who want grants or loans from the federal government fill out FASFA forms and, depending on their income level, receive access to low-interest loans, grants, and work study programs. The financial aid structure tends to be difficult to navigate and is sometimes cited as not doing enough to help low-income students go to college.
  - In the 2016 election, the cost of higher education was a rallying cry for supporters of Bernie Sanders in the Democratic Primary. Ultimately, party nominee Hillary Clinton adopted aspects of Sanders's plan to make higher education a debt-free endeavor.
  - President Donald J. Trump has pledged to work towards lowering the financial burden of higher education, but has stopped short of guaranteeing a debt-free graduation.
    - <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/policies/education>

## Links for Additional Info

- In Depth
  - Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml?src=a>
  - Government Links for Education History and Policy: [http://infousa.reingoldweb.com/education/edu\\_overview.html](http://infousa.reingoldweb.com/education/edu_overview.html)
  - Common Core: <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- Party and Presidential Positions
  - President Donald J. Trump: <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/policies/education>
  - Democratic Party: <https://www.democrats.org/issues/education>
  - Republican Party: <https://www.gop.com/issue/education-reform/canonical/>
- Kid Friendly
  - <http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/>

## Talking Points with your Child

- Who should pay for education/construct most education policies: federal or state government?
- What do you think of the Common Core Standards?
- What is a “standardized test”? Do you take them? Do you think they accurately measure your progress
- How has school changed since you first began? Are the changes for the better? Why or why not?
- What can we do to help more students graduate from high school and go to college?
- Are school vouchers a good thing? Should school vouchers cover private schools that may be religious in nature? What if the voucher does not cover the full cost of tuition, should lower income students get larger vouchers or will the free market make private schools lower their prices to compete for all students who chose to use their vouchers?