

Don't Use COVID-19 Pandemic As Cover to Privatize Education



Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and her allies are using COVID-19 to advance their failed effort to privatize education. In the process, they are robbing public schools and campuses of the resources they need to reopen safely and provide meaningful distance learning—the opposite of what is needed.

WHERE WE ARE

- ▶ DeVos has ignored CARES Act provisions related to **equitable services** and issued guidance that is intended to divert hundreds of millions of dollars of emergency education funding from public schools to private schools.
- ▶ Other actions taken by the Department of Education and some state governors have further undermined Congress' intent when it passed the CARES Act. Specifically, funds intended for public schools—from the Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund and a 1 percent set-aside for the states most heavily impacted by COVID-19—have been shifted to **"microgrants" and other voucher-like grant programs**.
- ▶ The recent Senate GOP relief package provides more mechanisms to siphon funding from public schools: **vouchers** funneled through non-profits (like foundations) and \$7 billion in **direct aid** for private schools—10 percent of the total amount provided for education.
- ▶ Unlike public schools, private schools are eligible for the **Paycheck Protection Program** and have already received billions of dollars in aid from it.

PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE SCHOOLS

- ▶ The **overwhelming majority** of America's students attend public schools.
- ▶ Public schools are **open to all students** while private schools can pick and choose their students based on economic status, academic achievement, or even gender.
- ▶ Private schools can **deprive students** of religious freedom, civil rights and protections, fail to provide adequate support for those with disabilities, and are not accountable to the public.
- ▶ **Students with special needs** who use vouchers lose many rights granted by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and may not have the protection of an individualized education plan.

NEXT STEPS

- ▶ Face reality: Reopening schools safely will require **significant resources**—for example, modifying classrooms, cafeterias, and school buses to permit social distancing and providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for students and educators.
- ▶ Recognize meaningful distance learning is essential: It is unconscionable that **16 million students**—nearly 1 in 3—cannot do schoolwork at home because they don't have access to the internet.
- ▶ Do what is needed: Include in the **next coronavirus package** at least \$175 billion to meet the needs of students and educators, at least \$4 billion to equip students with hot spots and devices to narrow the digital divide and close the homework gap, directed funding for PPE, and relief for student loan borrowers.