



Learning Community and Blackstone Academy Charter Schools Oppose Trump's Choice for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos

Trump nominated Betsy DeVos, a major advocate for school choice, as Secretary of Education.

It may be surprising, then, that as charter schools we oppose this nomination.

We are public, non-profit schools, committed to the original intent of charter legislation, to be incubators that support innovation within the larger public education system. We want to support, not undermine, district success.

To fulfill this aim, we believe charters must be non-profit, public schools, highly accountable to the public in every way.

Betsy DeVos does not.

Don't believe us? Look at her home state of Michigan, where, according to a recent NPR report, roughly 80 percent of charter schools are run by private, for-profit companies. (Trump Chooses Betsy DeVos for Education Secretary, Eric Westervelt, November 23). That is a far higher percentage than any other state.

You might be thinking, but public education is failing – we need to shake it up. Then we should ask, is DeVos' voucher system working in Michigan? Are more kids getting a better education?

The answer is no, proving what should be obvious – that student need will never be the driving factor in for-profit schools. Profit will be.

From the New York Times (Betsy DeVos, Trump's Education Pick, Has Steered Money From Public Schools, By Kate Zernike, Nov. 23, 2016): "But if Michigan is a center of school choice, it is also among the worst places to argue that choice has made schools better... a federal review in 2015 found 'an unreasonably high' percentage of charter schools on the list of the state's lowest-performing schools."

Surely when DeVos saw that these schools were failing, she changed course, right? No. Actually, according to the NYT, DeVos' advocacy group "blocked a provision in that (Michigan) law that

would have prevented failing schools from expanding or replicating.” Shockingly, Michigan’s failing choice schools can expand and replicate unchecked because of DeVos’ advocacy.

Traditional school district proponents have come out in opposition to DeVos, of course.

As charter leaders, we must also voice our opposition. DeVos’ public track record and anticipated vision of for-profit charter schools and private school vouchers runs counter to what is positive and powerful about the charter movement – that we are public, non-profit schools, accountable to the public for our management and results.

Rhode Island is a state where there are no for-profit charter schools popping up in strip malls. Rhode Island has in fact done an exemplary job ensuring that our charter schools meet high standards. And RI independent and district charters have been models for the nation in true collaboration with districts.

On behalf of the children of our state, we want to keep it that way.

Should DeVos be confirmed, we ask our state educational leaders to maintain the high standards of quality and accountability that have been our state’s hallmark in the charter sector, and to reject any move toward privatization of public education in our state.

We will never have a healthy democracy without a strong public education system, free from corruption, profiteering and religious influence.

RI Senators and state educational leaders, we urge you to join us in opposing Betsy DeVos’ nomination.