



February 28, 2017

To: U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos

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Re: Educational Priorities and Decision-making

We were troubled by your **recent comments** and the combative tone you put forward at the 2017 Conservative Political Action Conference. As research faculty in the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California, we deeply value educational policy based on rigorous research and informed debate. We are confident of your good intentions for America's youth, and we would welcome a conversation with you about the educational issues facing our country.

Based on your remarks, we are concerned about the future of scholarly research in education. We offer here our collective thoughts about how research that would usefully inform the country's educational policies must be configured and might be utilized. We provide these comments based on our collective knowledge and experience, and we trust that you will consider them in the manner in which they are intended.

Our expectation is that the Department will maintain five key principles:

Research will not be constrained by political ideology: The political standpoint of a researcher should be irrelevant to whether the Department of Education funds their research. Research proposals need to be vetted according to the highest standards of scholarly work, including blind review by scholars who are knowledgeable about the topic.

Research will be widely shared regardless of the findings: Good research does not have predetermined outcomes, and competent researchers raise questions for which there are several possible results.

Regardless of the findings, research results must be made available to the scholarly community for informed discussion and analysis. Results must never be embargoed because the findings are at variance with a particular viewpoint.

The Department of Education will call upon the large body of research that highlights the benefits of caring social-emotional school environments: All children need to be able to study in an environment that is supportive, caring and safe. Most importantly, they must know their school environments will not tolerate bullying. It is incumbent on the Department to make use of research about social-emotional learning and school safety, as well as to facilitate research about how to improve safety and wellbeing in schools. We are particularly concerned about past and recent findings highlighting widespread bullying aimed at vulnerable groups such as LGBT, students of color, transgender youth, homeless-foster care youth, students from immigrant families, children with disabilities, and children of specific religious groups such as Muslims and Jews. Bullying aimed at these or any groups of students creates hostile and unwelcoming school environments, and policies must be in place to support all students.

Research that protects consumers from fraud is especially important in educational institutions: One long-standing role of the government is to protect consumers from disreputable business practices. A substantial body of research exists about such practices in education and a great deal more work can be done to improve educational ethics.

Current policy should accord with research demonstrating how to reduce systemic social injustice in schools: Research-based policies must be implemented to help schools address the school-to-prison pipeline, equal college access, accountability of educational quality, and equal access to resources for students regardless of socio-economic family background.

Finally, we hope the Department will ground its policies in research that underscores the importance of the public school in the creation of societal civil discourse, the free exchange of scientific and social ideas, a free press, and an appreciation of the systems of checks and balances in a democratic society.

We hope schools will educate students about the variety of ways young adults can participate in the American democratic enterprise. In a divided nation, this direction empowers the potential of our youth, our educational institutions, and society.

We put forward these ideas with the hope that you will consider them as you develop your agenda. Should you have questions or disagreements, we would welcome a conversation. We are prepared to work with you during this critical time in our nation's history.

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