

# MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

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## November 13, 2017

Fiscal year (FY) 2017 was my first as U.S. Secretary of Education, and it has been nothing short of fulfilling. I would like to take a moment to reflect on what we have accomplished thus far and share the exciting efforts that we will pursue on behalf of America's students, parents and educators.

Our mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. This mission drives me and all employees at the Department to work even harder than we had the day before. Our nation's students deserve nothing less than 100 percent of our efforts.

Even though our administration began in the middle of the fiscal year, we have been able to build on efforts to identify new priorities and objectives to better help America's students succeed. In FY 2017, we began work on four goals: first, to support state and local efforts to improve learning outcomes for all P-12 students in every community; second, to expand postsecondary education options and improve outcomes to foster economic opportunity and informed, thoughtful and productive

citizens; third, to strengthen the quality, accessibility and use of education data through better management, increased privacy protections and transparency; and fourth, to reform the effectiveness, efficiency and accountability of the Department.

Achieving the first goal begins with acknowledging the fact that each and every child is unique, with different abilities, talents and needs. Far too many students do not have access to a learning environment that is able to maximize their abilities or meet their individual needs.

Every child deserves access to a safe and nurturing learning environment where they can grow and thrive. It is imperative they gain that access, regardless of where they live or how much money their family earns.

Our nation has taken concrete steps towards offering students that access through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law in 2015 and currently in its first year of application.

No two states are the same—each has its own unique education challenges and opportunities. And, as in any other sector, the best solutions in education will come from the bottom up, not mandated from the top down. That is why the organizing principle of ESSA is to provide states with greater flexibility so they can best meet the needs of the students and families they serve.

But a student's education should not end upon graduating from high school. There are many pathways students can choose in their quest for lifelong learning and search for employment, and that is why we are committed to expanding the postsecondary education options available to them. Each year there are fewer "traditional" students seeking postsecondary degrees or credentials, thus our goal is to support the innovative and affordable options that meet their needs and help them succeed.

We started by making Pell Grants available year-round. This gives low-income students the flexibility to complete their education at a faster pace if they so choose, thereby potentially reducing their debt and allowing them to pursue the next chapter of their lives.

Access to federal student aid has allowed millions of students to further their education at an institution of higher learning, yet the customer experience for acquiring and paying off these loans has been subpar at best. Complex applications, confusing notifications and multiple platforms have all led to a lack of clarity and created an onerous process for borrowers. This reality has prompted us to begin transforming Federal Student Aid's service delivery by implementing the Next Generation Processing and Servicing Environment. Our goal is to put in place a servicing system that will greatly enhance the user experience while protecting taxpayer dollars.

We are also committed to improving how Department staff access, use and share meaningful education data, while protecting the privacy of children and their families. These improvements will enable us to provide appropriate support to education stakeholders so they, too, have the information necessary to make informed decisions on behalf of their students, parents, educators, states and local districts.

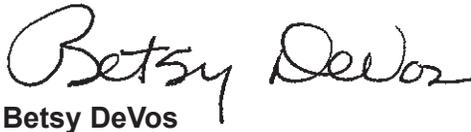
Finally, it is important for the Department not only to look for avenues where we can help, but also to examine whether we are creating unnecessary burdens on educators, administrators and, most importantly, families. We want to foster a culture of innovation in

education, and that begins by reviewing and removing those regulations that make it harder for educators to do what they do best: educate.

This year we paused the Borrower Defense to Repayment and Gainful Employment regulations, each well-intentioned but not implemented in the best way, so that we can revisit and rewrite them in a way that protects students, uses taxpayer dollars wisely and treats all institutions fairly. Throughout FY 2018, we will continue our review of all departmental regulations, rules and guidance to ensure that they are indeed furthering the Department's mission.

When confronted with any decision at the Department, my first question is always the same: what will most benefit students? Improving education for every student is the entirety of the Department's mission, and I remain laser-focused on keeping our orientation around what is best for them.

It is incumbent upon us to bring education up to speed to meet the ever-evolving demands of the 21st century. Thanks to the support of the President, and with the efforts of our entire staff, the Department of Education is poised to do just that.



**Betsy DeVos**