

# An indecent budget proposal

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Donald Trump's first budget proposal is a nightmare for children. Ironically named "America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again," it contains \$9 billion in cuts to education and forecloses on the federal government's long-standing commitment to reduce educational inequalities. The budget would take a meat cleaver to public schools, and children with the greatest needs would suffer the greatest harm. Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos plan to slash programs that help low-income children—like after-school and summer programs, class-size reduction efforts, mentoring for early-career teachers, child nutrition programs and community schools.

Trump's budget director said the administration "went looking for the most wasteful, most

**In Trump's budget, children with the greatest needs would suffer the greatest harm.**

indefensible programs" in order to increase defense spending and build the infamous "wall." Apparently, the wealthiest Cabinet in U.S. history considers Meals on Wheels for seniors and programs to alleviate child hunger to be wasteful.

Half of all children in America's public schools live in poverty. Rather than make a specious claim that the budget blueprint protects "the nation's most vulnerable populations," DeVos should have fought for the programs that would actually do that. For example, in McDowell County, W.Va., formerly coal country and now the seventh-poorest county in the nation, 900 children could lose after-school programs that provide tutoring, technology, healthcare, counseling, recreational activities and, for some children, their only reliable meal of the day. Parents—like Irma Castanon, whose son Juan attends the after-school program at Hart Elementary School in Austin, Texas, while she is at work—have peace of mind knowing their children are safe, supported and engaged after school. And kids like Juan can experience things that, Irma says, "all children should be able to," like being on a soccer team, joining Boy or Girl Scouts and getting help with homework.

More than 80 House of Representatives members—including Trump supporters—and nearly 1,500 organizations are calling on Congress to maintain federal funding for after-school programs.

Trump's budget proposal also targets funding for community learning centers, like the Community Health Academy of the Heights in New York City, that wrap services for children and families around the school. CHAH offers a full-service health clinic, mental health services, free eyeglasses for students who need them, a parent resource center and a food pantry. Far from wasteful, these resources are life-changing, as nearly all of the school's 650 students live below the poverty line. Aside from the obvious benefits to their well-being, CHAH students are making the grade; the number of students reading at the lowest level fell by 37 percent between 2013 and 2016. Dozens of other communities have taken similar approaches with similar results.

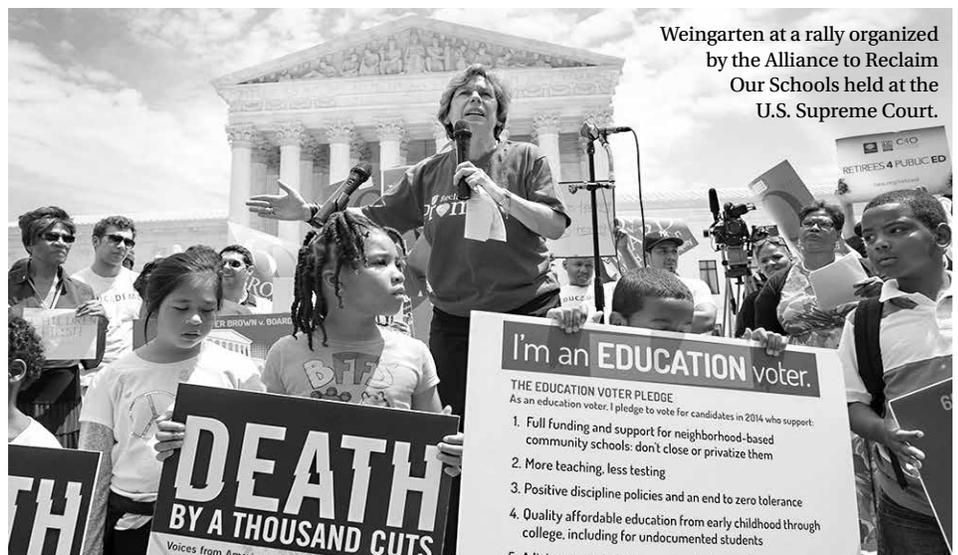
Compare this with school voucher programs, which get a windfall in the budget despite reams of research showing their ineffectiveness. The Louisiana voucher program has led to large reductions in kids' reading and math scores. Even a study by a pro-voucher group, the Fordham Institute, found that students in Ohio's voucher program did worse than children in public schools.

The proposal also targets initiatives that help teachers teach. In Toledo, Ohio, for example, teachers receive training in an intensive reading program for students who are not reading proficiently by third grade—which research

shows puts them at greatly increased risk of not graduating from high school. Classes that have implemented the program have shown a 50 percent increase in reading proficiency. Escambia County, Fla., could lose a peer mentoring and assistance program that pairs accomplished teachers with first-year and struggling teachers. In addition to improving teaching quality, the high level of support has been an effective recruiting tool. All this is on the chopping block.

DeVos often says she wants parents to have more choices. Ask parents what they want, and most often you will hear they want things like a school that is safe, with well-prepared teachers and class sizes small enough that their child can get personal attention; a school that meets children where they are and helps them thrive. The Trump-DeVos budget does just the opposite. Indeed, it seems intended to do what DeVos did in Michigan: defund and destabilize public schools so parents feel the need to look elsewhere.

I have invited the education secretary to visit public schools with me so she can see that they are far from being a "dead end," as she called them, but rather are foundational to our communities and our democracy. That is as true in deep-blue places as it is in places that are ruby red—like Van Wert, Ohio, the rural district we will visit next week. Van Wert's public schools focus on children's well-being, engage in project-based learning and anchor the community. They—like so many others—need federal investment in these programs, not a budget that takes a hatchet to public schools, which 86 percent of American children attend.



Weingarten at a rally organized by the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools held at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Michael Campbell

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