

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Geoff Garin and Guy Molyneux

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**RE: National Poll Finds Strong Opposition to Trump Administration's
Education Priorities and Budget Cuts**

The findings in this memorandum are based on interviews with a nationally representative cross section of voters conducted online from June 3 to June 5, 2017. The self-reported 2016 presidential vote of this sample is 48% for Hillary Clinton and 45% for Donald Trump. The party identification of the sample is 41% Democratic and 40% Republican.

Overview

By a wide margin of 62% to 15%, voters across the country believe that the federal government today spends too little rather than too much on public education. Public education is a priority for voters, and fully half of all voters identify education as the part of the federal budget for which they would most strongly oppose cuts.

Voters strongly reject the Trump administration's proposal to cut spending on education by 13.5% while reducing taxes on large corporations and wealthy individuals. Fully 74% of voters oppose this policy, including 54% who strongly oppose it. Half (48%) of Trump's own voters are in opposition.

Large majorities deem many specific elements of the Trump administration's education budget to be unacceptable. Cuts to programs and services for students with disabilities, elimination of funding that public schools use to reduce class sizes, and reduction of funding for career and technical education are examples of cuts that evoke deep opposition from voters. This opposition is shared across diverse communities—with large majorities of urban, suburban, small town, and rural voters saying they are unacceptable.

Voters also reject the Trump budget's education priorities, and believe that the emphasis by Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos on vouchers and charter schools to promote school choice is misplaced and misguided. For example, 76% of voters say it is unacceptable that the Trump-DeVos budget takes away funding from public schools that serve poor children while increasing funding for private school vouchers and the expansion of charter schools; 53% say this is totally unacceptable. By 67% to 14%, voters prioritize funding for public schools to reduce class sizes, improve professional development of teachers, ensure access to after-school programs, address the needs of students with disabilities, and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds over funding for private school vouchers and the expansion of charter schools to give parents more freedom to choose which schools their children will attend. Only 23% of Trump voters believe that funding of "school choice" initiatives should be the priority over investments in public schools.

There are important political implications to these attitudes, as 63% of voters say they would be less likely to reelect their senator or congressperson if they supported the Trump-DeVos budget cuts—including 50% who are much less likely to vote for their reelection. Only 24% say they would be more likely to reelect someone who backs Trump and DeVos on these cuts.

Discussion of Key Findings

1. Voters across the country believe that the federal government today spends too little rather than too much on public education.

Nationally, 62% of voters say the federal government spends too little on public education today, while just 15% say it spends too much and 23% say the current level of spending on public education is the right amount.

Majorities of both Democratic voters (83% too little, 3% too much) and independent voters (55% too little, 21% too much) believe that the current level of federal spending on public education is insufficient. Only a quarter of Republican voters say the federal government is overspending on public education (42% too little, 25% too much), and in a separate question just 19% of Republicans say the federal government should decrease funding for public education. By 45% to 14% Republican women say federal funding for public education should be increased rather than decreased.

2. Public education is a priority for voters, and fully half of all voters identify education as the part of the federal budget for which they would most strongly oppose cuts.

The Trump administration’s proposed budget makes large cuts to many different parts of the federal government. Voters identify healthcare and education as the two areas for which they would most strongly oppose making large budget cuts.

Parts of the federal budget that voters would most oppose cutting	
	%
Healthcare	59
Education	49
Environmental protection.....	24
Nutrition assistance (Food Stamps).....	16
Transportation	8
Housing	7
Agriculture	6
International assistance and development	4
None of the above—support large cuts for all of these	11

Trump voters (45%) are nearly as likely as Clinton voters (52%) to identify education budget cuts as particularly objectionable. College-educated Republicans (58%) are among the most likely of any group to prioritize education as a part of the federal budget that should not be cut.

3. Voters strongly reject the Trump administration’s proposal to cut spending on education by 13.5% while reducing taxes on large corporations and wealthy individuals.

As the following table indicates, both Democrats and independents overwhelmingly oppose this proposal, as do a majority of Republican women.

Voter's Feelings Toward Proposed Cut in Federal Education Budget					
	All				Republican
	<u>Voters</u>	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Independents</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Women</u>
	%	%	%	%	%
Strongly favor	10	1	11	19	16
Somewhat favor	16	1	14	32	29
Somewhat oppose	20	8	25	30	28
Strongly oppose	54	90	50	19	27
Total favor	26	2	25	51	45
Total oppose	74	98	75	49	55

Opposition exceeds 70% among urban voters, suburban voters, and small town/rural voters. Hostility toward the Trump education cuts is especially intense among younger voters (78% oppose, 63% strongly oppose), but 71% of voters age 65 and older are opposed as well, including 48% who are strongly opposed.

4. Large majorities deem many specific elements of the Trump administration's education budget to be unacceptable. Cuts to programs and services for students with disabilities, elimination of funding that public schools use to reduce class sizes, and reduction of funding for career and technical education are examples of cuts that evoke deep opposition from voters.

In addition to asking voters about their overall attitudes toward the proposal to cut education funding by 13.5% while cutting taxes for large corporations and wealthy individuals, we asked them to react to 12 specific cuts in the Trump-DeVos education budget. For all 12, at least 66% find the cut to be an unacceptable way to reduce federal government spending. The appendix to this memo includes a table with the responses to each of the 12 items. Several items stand for special note because of the depth and breadth of the opposition they generate:

- This budget cuts programs and services for students with disabilities (80% unacceptable, including 66% among Trump voters).
- This budget takes away funding from public schools that serve poor children, while increasing funding for private school vouchers and the expansion of charter schools (76% unacceptable, including 56% among Trump voters).
- This budget reduces spending on vocational and job-training programs by cutting \$168 million from career and technical education (76% unacceptable, including 59% among Trump voters).
- This budget cuts \$7 million from programs to support the education of children and youth who are homeless or have unstable housing (74% unacceptable, including 55% among Trump voters).
- This budget eliminates after-school and summer programs that keep kids safe, provide meals, engage kids in sports and academic enrichment programs, and support working parents (73% unacceptable, including 53% among Trump voters).
- This budget eliminates the funding that public schools—especially high-poverty schools—use to provide teachers with training and professional development to improve their instruction (71% unacceptable, including 47% among Trump voters).
- This budget cuts nearly \$500 million from work-study programs that provide part-time jobs for students to help pay for college, and it eliminates a program that gives low-income parents support with childcare while they pursue a degree (72% unacceptable, including 50% among Trump voters).

5. The Trump-DeVos education cuts reinforce important economic themes that will be central to the elections in 2018, particularly with regard to Trump-Republican policies stacking the deck even further against working families in favor of powerful and wealthy special interests.

Sixty-eight percent of voters say the following statement gives them big concerns about the Trump-DeVos budget, including 50% who say it gives them very big concerns:

- *By cutting funding for public schools and for college student loans while giving tax breaks to millionaires and big corporations, the budget proposed by Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos is stacking the deck even further against working families, and would make the problem of economic inequality even worse.*

Similarly, 66% express big concerns about the economics of privatizing education, including 48% who have very big concerns:

- *The Trump-DeVos budget is a windfall for investors and hedge fund managers who see the opportunity to make a profit from the privatization of public education—while making dramatic cuts to public schools that are open to everyone.*

6. Voters reject the education priorities in the Trump budget, and believe that the emphasis by Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos on vouchers and charter schools to promote school choice is misplaced and misguided.

At least half of all voters want the federal government to increase federal funding for (a) career and technical education programs, (b) programs to support innovations and improvements in local public schools, (c) the education of students with disabilities, and (d) public schools that serve students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds. Ten percent or fewer think that the federal governor should decrease funding for any of these programs.

By contrast, relatively few voters want the federal government to spend more on vouchers and charter schools, and are more likely to say the federal government should decrease funding for these. With regard to private school vouchers for elementary and secondary school students, only 20% say the federal government should spend more while 36% say it should spend less. On charter schools, 19% say there should be more federal funding and 33% say there should be less.

When asked on a head-to-head basis which approach should be the priority for Congress, few voters believe that funding vouchers and charter schools to give parents more freedom to choose which schools their children attend should supersede the imperative to fund core investments in public schools. This is the case across the board, regardless of party affiliation, including among Republican voters.

Which of the following should be the priority For Congress?

	All Voters %	Demo- crats %	Indepen- dents %	Repub- licans %
(A) Provide funding to public schools to reduce class sizes, improve professional development of teachers, ensure access to after-school programs, address the needs of students with disabilities, and support students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds.....	67	87	59	51
(B) Provide funding for vouchers to parents who want to send their children to private or religious schools and expand funding for charter schools, in order to give parents more freedom to choose which schools their children will attend.	14	6	13	22
Neither should be a priority.	19	7	28	27

Catholic voters (by 58% to 15%) and evangelical voters (by 57% to 21%) say that Congress should give priority to funding public schools over school choice programs such as vouchers and charter schools.

7. Voters’ opposition to the education budget cuts envisioned by Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos can have significant electoral consequences, as large majorities say they would be less likely to reelect their senator or congressperson if they backed these cuts.

Only 24% of voters say they would be more likely to support their senator or congressperson for reelection if he or she voted in favor of these education budget cuts, while fully 63% say they would be less likely reelect their senator or congressperson under these circumstances—including 50% who say they would be **much** less likely. Independent voters split decisively against a pro-education-cut official (21% more likely, 63% less likely). Voting for these cuts would turn off 39% of Republican women and 41% of college-educated Republicans.

**APPENDIX:
REACTIONS TO SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF TRUMP EDUCATION BUDGET**

	<u>Totally Acceptable</u>	<u>Somewhat Acceptable</u>	<u>Somewhat Unacceptable</u>	<u>Totally Unacceptable</u>
This budget cuts education funding by 13.5% while cutting taxes for large corporations and wealthy individuals	11	16	16	57
This budget cuts programs and services for students with disabilities	6	14	26	54
This budget takes away funding from public schools that serve poor children, while increasing funding for private school vouchers and the expansion of charter schools	10	14	23	53
This budget cuts \$7 million from programs to support the education of children and youth who are homeless or have unstable housing	8	18	26	48
This budget eliminates after-school and summer programs that keep kids safe, provide meals, engage kids in sports and academic enrichment programs, and support working parents.....	9	18	27	46
This budget eliminates funding for community schools, which provide nearly two million students nationwide in high-poverty areas with food, medical and emotional healthcare, and after-school programs	10	18	26	46
This budget eliminates the funding that public schools—especially high-poverty schools—use to provide teachers with training and professional development to improve their instruction	10	19	26	45
This budget reduces spending on vocational and job-training programs by cutting \$168 million from career and technical education	6	18	32	44
This budget reduces by 25% spending on Medicaid, which pays for school-based health services such as physical therapists, feeding tubes and other medical equipment, and health screenings	14	18	24	44
This budget cuts federal programs that reduce the burden of student debt; it requires lower-income students to start paying interest on their student loans while they are still in school; and it eliminates the program that forgives student debt after 10 years for people who work as teachers, police officers, or in other public-service jobs.....	15	19	22	44
This budget cuts nearly \$500 million from work-study programs that provide part-time jobs for students to help pay for college, and it eliminates a program that gives low-income parents support with childcare while they pursue a degree	9	19	29	43
This budget eliminates funding that public schools use to reduce class sizes.....	9	22	28	41
This budget eliminates funding that supports the inclusion of arts education in the schools.....	11	20	28	41