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DeVos denies low-income students the opportunity to improve academic achievement

Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos pulls funding for Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities grant program

Washington, DC - The National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSD) and our partners are disappointed by Secretary of the Department of Education (DOE) Betsy DeVos' decision to eliminate funding for the Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities (ODEO) grant program – denying parents and students an opportunity to reach a community consensus on the best methods of socioeconomic integration in isolated, struggling schools.

As reported by Emma Brown in the Washington Post, an anonymous official from the DOE stated that the program was cancelled because “it would not be a wise use of tax dollars, in part because the money was to be used for planning, not implementation.” This statement is both factually inaccurate and also indicates a misunderstanding of the barriers to school integration – and an injustice to communities interested in coming together to develop new education models for their students.

The intention of the ODEO grant was not only to fund an extended period of public engagement and consultation, but allow applicants with pre-existing integration efforts to implement pre-implementation activities including pilot activities in target schools. Intensive community education and input to the development of socioeconomic integration plans is one of the biggest hurdles school integration efforts face. After the Supreme Court's 2007 Parents Involved in Community Schools decision, parents and school officials in Louisville, KY, came together to develop a new integration plan. This inclusive community effort resulted in higher educational outcomes for low-income students and African-American students.[i]

The Century Foundation Report, *Louisville, Kentucky: A Reflection on School Integration*, recognized that the city's “adoption of stronger socioeconomic measures, as well as its regional approach to desegregation, careful timing, and continued emphasis on school quality represent critical lessons that could be adopted by other regions and school districts willing to put in the work.”

In her speech at the Magnet Schools of America Conference earlier this year, Secretary DeVos stated, “I think experiencing and being a part of a diverse environment is really critical to the development of any young person.”^[ii] But when provided with an opportunity to take a step towards helping districts create diverse environments, Secretary DeVos failed to support effective diversity efforts.

Successful integration programs have shown that community consensus takes time to build and is imperative to the improvement of schools and increased academic achievement for all students regardless of socioeconomic status. ODEO would have provided 20 school districts an opportunity to take the first steps towards successful integration efforts.

NCSD Partner Quotes:

“If the Trump Administration is seriously committed to a full range of choice, the fact is that most choice programs usually stratify students by race and that this small program to help school districts create voluntary programs to support integrated schools, which have very well documented benefits and many families desire, and should be part of true choice.” – Gary Orfield, Co-Director, Civil Rights Project, University of California, Los Angeles

“Secretary DeVos continues the sins of school segregation by canceling funds for the Opening Doors grants to promote the proven benefits of school diversity for many schoolchildren of color.” – John Brittain, Professor at University in Washington D.C. Law School and specialist in educational equity

"This is indicative of an Administration that claims to care about the enduring legacy of Brown v. Board, but whose actions instead show a blatant disregard and lack of will to do the work. When I was at the Department helping to craft this grant, we took the necessary time and energy to meet with districts who wanted and needed federal support to pursue diversity strategies in their schools as part of their effort to close the achievement gap and uplift ALL students. The Opening Doors, Expanding Opportunities Grant was a culmination of this deliberative process - and was requested by districts. If Secretary DeVos claims to care about local control, then her actions show otherwise." - Tanya Clay House, Former Deputy Assistant Secretary DOE Senior Consultant, Schott Foundation for Public Education

About NCSD:

The National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSD) is a network of national civil rights organizations, university-based research centers, and state and local coalitions working to expand support for government policies that promote school diversity and reduce racial and economic isolation in elementary and secondary schools. We also support the work of state and local school diversity practitioners. Our work is informed by an advisory panel of scholars and

academic researchers whose work relates to issues of equity, diversity, and
desegregation/integration.

www.school-diversity.org