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“Those who would give up essential liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety.”
Benjamin Franklin

Secretary DeVos Indicates New Regulations Will Ensure Equitable Services for Private Schools

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has indicated that the Department of Education will [issue new regulation](#) to ensure that private schools and students are able to participate in the equitable services as provided for by the CARES Act. Signed into law in March, the CARES Act appropriated \$16.5 billion for two programs, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund and the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund, both of which are [required to provide equitable services](#) for private schools in the same manner that equitable services are provided for under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Additionally, the Department of Education issued [guidance](#) which outlined how local and state educational agencies should work with private schools to ensure they receive the appropriate aid and services. However, many local and state educational agencies have refused to follow the law by consulting with private school officials, and many are saying that they will not follow the guidance charging that the Department is trying to use the pandemic as an effort to funnel money to private schools. They further claim that the equitable services should go only to Title 1 students (low-income students) as that is how equitable services are distributed through the ESSA. [In a letter](#) to the Council of Chief State School Officers, DeVos rebuked their refusal to follow the guidance and ensure that equitable services were available to all private school students. She also indicated that the Department of Education would be issuing new regulation which would have the force of law to ensure the distribution and availability of CARES Act relief funds and services to all schools and students.

The letter explicitly clarifies that the CARES Act does not restrict the equitable services to Title 1 students, but rather is a “special, pandemic-related appropriation to benefit *all* American students, teachers, and families.” DeVos further emphasizes, “There is nothing in the Act suggesting Congress intended to discriminate between children based on public or non-public school attendance, as you seem to do. The virus affects everyone.” The letter points out that excluding private schools “would improperly discriminate against an entire class of children,” and then offers a thorough explanation of the meaning of the language in the CARES Act, including a differentiation between ESSA and the CARES Act in regards to the purpose and scope of equitable services in each. The Secretary then offered an instructive rebuke: “Although I understand their reflex to share as little as possible with students and teachers outside of their control, I would remind states and LEAs that their non-public school peers have also been overwhelmed by COVID-19. . . . A growing list of non-public schools have announced they will not be able to re-open, and these school closures are concentrated in low-income and middle-class communities. I would encourage educators everywhere to be as concerned about those students and teachers as they are with those in public schools.” The AACCS has prepared a [resource document](#) for member schools interested in participating in the equitable services provided by the CARES Act.

President Declares Houses of Worship Essential

Last week, President Trump [declared](#) that “churches, synagogues, and mosques are essential places that provide essential services,” and should, therefore, be allowed to open immediately for worship and services. The CDC has also issued [guidance](#) for communities of faith which outlines suggestions for minimizing the risk of the spread of COVID-19 while holding services. This comes as tensions have continued to grow between many faith leaders and some state and local leaders who are restricting religious gatherings but allowing secular activity to open. President Trump pointed out that “some governors have deemed liquor stores and abortion clinics as essential, but have left out churches and other houses of worship. It’s not right.” He then called on governors “to allow our churches and places of worship to open right now.” He also pointed to the importance of faith and church to Americans, stating, “These are places that hold our society together and keep our people united.” Heritage Foundation president Kay C. James [praised](#) the President’s move as “consistent with our Constitution and our history.” She further stated, “Government authorities that treat similarly situated religious activities worse than secular activities create a special burden on the free exercise of religion and foster prejudice and hostility.” Earlier this month, the U.S. Attorney General issued a [memo](#) which condemned the restrictions placed on religious institutions and not secular groups, stressing that “even in times of emergency, when reasonable and temporary restrictions are placed on rights, the First Amendment and federal statutory law prohibit discrimination against religious institutions and religious believers.”

Poll Shows Distance Learning Impact on Parents’ Schooling Choices

The disruptions to education caused by the coronavirus are causing many parents to rethink their children’s schooling and consider options other than public education. A [survey conducted by EdChoice](#) of 510 parents found that 67% of parents are concerned that their child could contract the coronavirus at school, 71% felt they were prepared to facilitate online instruction, and 52% have a more favorable opinion of homeschooling now than they did before the coronavirus shut downs. Another smaller [survey conducted by USA Today](#) surveying 403 parents showed similar leanings on the part of parents, with about one third of the parents indicating they are likely to pursue education at home. [RealClear Opinion Research](#) also conducted a survey of 2,122 registered voters and found strong support for school choice across all demographics. According to the poll results, 64% support school choice and 69% support the federal Education Freedom Scholarship proposal, a plan that would create a federal tax credit to encourage states to establish or expand school choice programs. The survey also found that 40% were likely to pursue virtual or homeschool options for their children’s education. John Schilling, president of the American Federation for Children, noted, “Millions of families are seeing the inadequacies of school districts that are too inflexible. We owe it to our nation’s families and students to give them more flexibility and additional educational options. Moreover, policymakers owe it to the taxpayers who are footing the \$800 billion K–12 education bill to maximize their investment by ensuring every child has access to a quality education and outcomes are improved across the board.”

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACCS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[AACCS Resource Page to Help Christian Schools Responding to COVID Crisis](#)

[The Role of the church in Reopening Could Be Its Finest Hour](#)

[10 Key Education Recommendations for Reopening the K-12 Classroom](#)