

ZUNI PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT #89

P. O. DRAWER A, 12 TWIN BUTTES DR.

ZUNI, NM 87327 PH

FAX: 505-782-5870

SUPERINTENDENT
Mr. Daniel P. Benavidez



BOARD OF EDUCATION
Haskie, President
nti, Vice President
etwyne, Secretary
Panteah, Member
Ms. Shelly Chimoni, Member

January 30, 2017

To our Honorable Senators and Representatives:

We, the Board of Education of Zuni Public School District, ask you to add your support as we stand in opposition to the appointment of Betsy DeVos as United States Secretary of Education on the following grounds:

During her confirmation hearing, Mrs. DeVos demonstrated that she was woefully ill-equipped to head the Department of Education. She has never attended a public school, never taught or administered in a public school, and her children have never attended a public school. She does not hold any degree in the field of education, either in theory, administration, or practice. She has a documented history of promoting a charter and voucher based system that she supported in her home state of Michigan, diverting funding and support away from public education and deserving children. Furthermore, when questioned in her hearing, Mrs. DeVos was unable to explain the difference between growth and proficiency, nor was she familiar with the federal law behind IDEA, two essential and basic aspects of education. As well, Mrs. DeVos advocated in her hearing to allow the presence of guns in schools during an era of rampant mass violence based primarily on the use of guns in schools. Mrs. DeVos has also publicly stated that she sees education as a way to further proselytize for the Christian faith, which would constitute a violation of the Constitutional separation of Church and State in public schools as it would in all federal institutions.

Our pueblo of Zuni is a small community in a western pocket of rural New Mexico. We are neither a rich district nor one that wields a great deal of political influence. What this Board does represent is a rich, Indigenous tradition and culture that holds high the ideals of hard-work, humility, and integrity. We are an agricultural, peace-loving society that has lived in this land since time immemorial.

Yet our memory is long. We remember the era during which education was combined with religion to be used as a weapon against the Native peoples of this great nation. We know the trauma such action has caused to reverberate through generations of good, decent Americans. We also know the resilience of those same people who, despite the infliction of weaponized education, have come today to see literacy as their American birthright, and to crave that sacred American Dream for which we are all Constitutionally entitled to strive. This is a living medicine and healing that must not be undone through the dissolution of the separation of church and state, one that we must nurture and safeguard for all American children.

We are reminded during this time that, as you do, we hold publicly-elected positions designed to represent a broad spectrum of constituent. The beauty of the United States public school system, unlike many in the rest of the world, is that we take everyone who walks through our

doors and love every child who sits in our desks, without question. This Board therefore stands by all of our students, no matter what color or ethnicity, regardless of their creed; every child who identifies on the spectrum of L,G,B,T,or Q; every child with either a physical or learning disability, or both; every child who speaks a second language; every immigrant child as well as every Native American child who can trace their lineage in this land back thousands of years; every child who sees their education as the bridge between their most ardent dreams and their most hopeful futures.

We further stand by each parent, guardian, grandparent, sibling, aunt, uncle; every member of kin that builds and holds strong the dream of education for each of our children, knowing as we have always known in Zuni that our children are our most sacred gifts.

And we, the Board of Education in Zuni Public School District, stand by the teachers, aides, administrators, counselors, liaisons, nurses, secretaries, custodians, cooks, and bus drivers who as their daily work participate in the painstaking and deeply patriotic act of ensuring equitable access to education for all of our students. It is through the diligence and action of just such citizens that this nation is able to deliver unto each new generation of American a passport to the possibility of American success.

The children, families and hard-working faculties and staff of the American public school system deserve a Secretary of the Department of Education who is most eminently qualified, through both education and experience, to advocate for all Americans: diverse, complex, and brilliant citizens; to work toward the most equitable education for all; and to uphold this cornerstone of our democratic republic.

It is for these reasons that the Zuni Public School District Board of Education respectfully requests your most passionate and vocal support in opposing the appointment of Mrs. Betsy DeVos. We also ask that you look toward the experienced and qualified education professionals working within the public school system to fill this highest position in the field.

E:lah'kwa (Thank you) for your representation,

Zuni Board of Education:

Mr. Jerome Haskie, Board President
Ms. Stephanie Vicenti, Vice Board President
Ms. Masika Sweetwyne, Secretary
Ms. Bernadette Panteah, Member
Ms. Shelly Chimoni, Member