

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4704

May 8, 2019

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

I am extremely troubled by the U.S. Department of Education's (Department) decision to insert a competitive priority for "educational choice" into the FY 2019 Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program (CCAMPIS) competition and write to learn more about this priority. It appears this priority is designed to promote the use of private, third-party child care providers and vouchers while disadvantaging those colleges and universities that are working to build accessible and affordable child care for their student parents on campus. This is contrary to the intent of CCAMPIS and undermines the federal investment in campus-based child care. The Department should not be politicizing a program to provide child care for student parents in order to further its own privatization agenda.

Pursuant to the Department's notice, a competitive preference priority worth an additional five points will be awarded to CCAMPIS "projects that are designed to address increasing access to educational choice (as defined in this notice) in early learning settings."¹ The Department's definition of educational choice appears to be written to promote school privatization by awarding points to colleges that partner with "private or home-based educational programs or courses, including those offered by private schools, private online providers, private tutoring providers, community or faith-based organizations, or other private education providers."²

The new priority seems to incentivize applicants to design projects that direct student parents to child care services at off-campus providers, which is contrary to the intent of CCAMPIS. This program was designed to promote on-campus child care that serves student parents where they are located and also allow students in early education programs at such institutions to gain valuable, hands-on experience in working with children in the on-campus child care centers. Furthermore, CCAMPIS awards are often small grants, and institutions of higher education often use those awards to leverage additional local or institutional funds to serve more student parents. For example, in Washington state, the 13 colleges receiving CCAMPIS funding in FY 2018 had an average award of just \$71,000, and the lowest award was just \$15,000. On their own, these grant amounts are inadequate to meet the needs of student parents and on-campus child care providers, and must be leveraged effectively with additional local or institutional funds.

¹ Department of Education, "Applications for New Awards; Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program," April 16, 2019. Document Citation 84 FR 15606. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2019/04/16/2019-07579/applications-for-new-awards-child-care-access-means-parents-in-school-program>

² *Id.*

By encouraging applicants to reserve a portion of their awards to provide vouchers for off-campus services, regardless of whether that is the most efficient use of funds, I am concerned the Department will dilute the impact of concentrated investments in on-campus child care programs. The Department's decision also puts local and institutional funding at risk, particularly for public institutions of higher education, given that public funding is often restricted to programs on campus or otherwise under the direct control of the institution rather than private providers. Finally, the Department has created confusion for applicants by failing to define "early learning settings," leaving applicants to guess at the Department's intention. Taken together, there are numerous unanswered questions about the Department's reasons for modifying this competition.

In order to understand more about the decision to add an "educational choice" priority to CCAMPIS and any potential consequences, I request that you provide the following information no later than May 22, 2019:

1. The competitive preference priority for projects "that are designed to address increasing access to educational choice" could have a substantial impact on applicant scoring. For each of the last five competitions, please provide the total number of awards in such competition, percentage of all awards in such year, and amounts awarded in such competition, to institutions of higher education (IHEs), that:
 - a. were solely to provide services at the IHE's on-campus child care center;
 - b. were solely to provide services to other child care providers that were off-campus (such as community partners, or providers not owned by the IHE); and
 - c. were to provide services at both the IHE's on-campus child care center and to off-campus providers.
2. Please explain how the Department will score an applicant for addressing and earning points on the "educational choice" competitive preference priority in the following scenarios:
 - a. in rural communities, where IHEs may be unable to provide services through off-campus child care providers (such as community partners, or providers not owned by the IHE) due to inadequate supply of child care options in the surrounding area; and
 - b. given two otherwise-equal applicants meeting all absolute priorities where one applicant proposes to serve a greater number of student parents overall but exclusively on-campus, and another applicant proposes to serve fewer student parents but with activities supported both on-campus and through private educational providers;
3. Given that the Department does not have a definition of "early learning settings" within the FY 2019 CCAMPIS Notice Inviting Applications, how will it reply to technical assistance requests asking for a definition of such settings (such as age restrictions or eligibility requirements)?
4. For each of the last five competitions, please provide:

- a. the total number of applications that were not awarded but were within five points of the award threshold;
 - b. the difference between the score for the lowest-scoring, funded application and the score for the highest-scoring, unfunded application;
 - c. of the applications that were not awarded funds, the number that specified they would provide services either in whole or in part through providers that were off-campus (such as community partners, or providers not owned by the IHE); and
 - d. of the applications that were not awarded funds, the number that specified they would provide services exclusively on-campus.
5. Does the Department anticipate that fewer recipients of FY 2019 grants will offer student parents child care services that are concentrated on-campus relative to previous competitions?

CCAMPIS is the sole federal funding stream for institutions of higher education to help student parents afford child care. While I was proud to help increase the overall funding for this critical program by 233 percent in FY 2018 and FY 2019, I was extremely disappointed to see the Administration propose to reduce the program's funding by 70 percent in its FY 2020 budget. Now, the Department is politicizing and further undermining a program to provide child care for student parents with this privatization priority.

The information requested in this letter is critical to understanding the full impact of your policy change. If you have any questions about these requests, please contact Mark Laisch on the Minority Staff of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



PATTY MURRAY
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health
and Human Services, and
Education, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate