

Opening Statement for the Record by James C. Blew, Nominee for Assistant Secretary for the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, U.S. Department of Education.
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
November 15, 2017

Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Members of the Committee:

It is an honor to appear before you today as the nominee for Assistant Secretary for the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development at the U.S. Department of Education.

I appreciate the confidence and support that President Trump and Secretary DeVos have placed in me and education reform with this nomination. Before sharing my approach to the position, if confirmed, I have two families that I would like to thank. Without them, I would not be appearing before you today.

First is my own family, especially my wife Carole. She has a demanding orthodontic practice back in our home town, which keeps her from joining us today. But without her consistent support, love and partnership, I would not have been able to commit much of my adult life to the education reform cause.

Second is the Walton family. After Sam Walton's death in 1992, one of his sons, John Walton, took leadership in developing a philanthropic strategy that would help our country's public education system live up to the following aspiration: every child should be educated to his or her fullest potential. It is a strategy to create more high-quality school options in lower-income communities, more transparency about school and educator performance, and more accountability for performance.

For a decade after John's untimely death in 2005, it was my great privilege to help the Walton family execute their K-12 philanthropic investment strategy. This involved , among other things, managing hundreds of grants totaling more than \$1 billion over several years.

As a country, we still have a long way to go to achieve our aspirations for every child. But thanks to the Walton family — along with like-minded philanthropists, the federal government, and many others — our K-12 system is improving and continuously serving students better.

For 20 years, I have focused on our students and policy at the state and local level. I chose to focus locally because that's where I felt my efforts could yield the greatest change. It is also where 90% of K-12 funding is generated.

However, I do believe the federal government has important roles to play. I'll address three:

First, for more than 50 years, Congress has stood by our country's most vulnerable children. As result, it has steadily increased and refined the Department's role enforcing civil rights laws in our schools and colleges.

Second, Congress has also invested significantly in our most vulnerable children — those from lower-income communities, as well as those with disabilities.

For our lower-income students, I think the bipartisan framework laid out in the Every Student Succeeds Act is an historical step in the right direction. The federal government must empower states to pursue the best strategies they can devise, recognizing local context, while simultaneously enforcing the accountability guardrails Congress has put in place.

I'm equally sanguine about the federal role in supporting our vulnerable students with disabilities. Its role is critical to making sure all special needs students get the education they need and deserve.

Third, Congress directs more than \$100 billion annually to provide students with access to higher education in this country — several times more than the amount it spends through Title I on disadvantaged K-12 students. Yet, far too many of those students are neither completing their degrees nor obtaining the skills and knowledge they need to improve their wages. We can and must do better.

Let me close by thanking the thousands of classroom teachers and parents who work every day to ensure that all children in our country get the excellent education they deserve – and that our country needs them to have. The key to our country's future success is empowering those teachers and parents to improve our education system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to answering your questions.