

What DeVos Needs Now Is a Great Public School Education

Why Magnet Schools of America Invited DeVos to Keynote Our Policy Conference

It was a contentious week last week as our new Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos visited Jefferson Middle School in my home city of Washington, D.C. We all saw the protesters as she attempted her first school tour. While I understand the protesters' frustrations, here's what's wrong with that scene: The doors of our public schools should never be closed to those who seek to learn more about them. And it is absolutely imperative that our Secretary of Education understands them.

We have entered a new political era, one tense with strong words, closed doors and hard lines. That is not what education is about and it is not what we at Magnet Schools of America believe in. Instead, we believe in open doors that serve all students, words of sharing and the building of common ground.

Across the country, more than 4,300 magnet schools serve nearly 3.5 million students each year to teach them STEM and art skills, even how to be a firefighter. Our schools are public schools that have a proud history steeped in the civil rights movement. Magnet schools were originally created in the wake of the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision with the explicit goal of reducing school segregation while providing high-quality public education programs to all students.

This rich tradition of serving all students by creating an inclusive and diverse student population is exactly what we need to be sharing with Secretary DeVos. In an era of divisiveness, what could possibly be more important than showing her excellent public schools that prioritize student diversity and welcome students outside of traditional school boundaries?

We took a bold step and invited Secretary DeVos to keynote our National Policy Training Conference this week. We believe as Secretary DeVos learns more about the power of magnets to close the achievement gap, increase diversity in our school system and make a lasting, positive impact on children, families and communities, she will find ways to expand funding and support districts to increase their magnet school offerings.

We view this as our opportunity to open our doors, assert our belief in quality public education that prioritizes students and shape the Secretary's agenda for the next four years.

Last week when some were protesting DeVos, Randi Weingarten and Former Secretary Duncan spoke out against the actions, urging our schools to open the doors. They were correct, and in that we heard a rallying cry. We hope you'll join us as we begin the critical work of sharing the best of what our public schools have to offer with our new Secretary.

Every student deserves an education that will help them be college and career ready, and reach their full potential – let's not be quiet about it.

Todd Mann
Executive Director
Magnet Schools of America