

**Questions for the Record from Ranking Member Patty Murray to Betsy DeVos:  
Homelessness and Foster Care**

PreK-12 Education

90. Child homelessness continues to skyrocket in the U.S., with 1 in 30 children experiencing homelessness at some point. Homelessness is a complex problem beyond a lack of affordable housing and interventions to address child and family homelessness must be designed and implemented in true partnership between housing agencies, homeless service providers and other systems such as human service agencies and early childhood providers that understand the trauma and complex barriers faced by homeless children and their families. What do you see as the role of the U.S. Department of Education in addressing child and family homelessness? What specific steps will you take to ensure that homeless students are appropriately identified, especially in rural and suburban communities? How will you ensure that the Title I Part A program appropriately and adequately serves homeless students, including through the mandatory LEA reservation of funds?

ANSWER: Homeless students are a particularly vulnerable population. If confirmed, I look forward to engaging in collaborative relationships with stakeholders to ensure the Department of Education is meeting the needs of these students. Often, the best solutions come from the local level and the federal government can help disseminate best practices so communities can learn from one another. As far as the provisions included in the Every Student Succeeds Act, I commit to faithfully implementing the law as it was written.

91. In the past year, the Department of Education has worked collaboratively with the Department of Health and Human Services to provide guidance to states, local educational agencies, and child welfare agencies concerning the new requirements to support students in foster care in the Every Student Succeeds Act and Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. How do you play to collaborate with HHS to ensure that states, local educational agencies, and child welfare agencies follow through with their commitments to support students in foster care?

ANSWER: Students in foster care are a particularly vulnerable population. If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing these collaborative efforts and examining their effectiveness for foster care students. I know there were many provisions included in the Every Student Succeeds Act intended to help and support students in foster care and I am committed to faithfully implementing these provisions to ensure that these students have the opportunity to achieve and succeed in school.

92. As Secretary of Education, how would you ensure that all students in public and charter schools --most particularly, students of color, impoverished students, undocumented students,

students with disabilities and those with particular disadvantages such as homelessness gain equitable access (not just a chance to apply but actual inclusion in) selective enrollment, higher performing and magnet schools, or schools of choice like charter schools and specialized programs? What resources will you dedicate to ensure that transportation is provided to students who require it in order to attend or remain in such schools?

ANSWER: Charter schools are public schools and are subject to the same standards of compliance as, traditional public schools. Given your role on the Labor-HHS-ED, appropriations subcommittee, I would be willing to dialogue with you on the transportation needs for students attending public charter schools, if confirmed.

93. In 2014, The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), published the "Education of Homeless Students: Improved Program Oversight Needed" found that Homeless Liaisons only have about 2 hours a week to spend with students experiencing homelessness, what do you believe is an adequate investment to sufficiently carry out the duties of a LEA and SEA homeless liaison, and how will you insure this investment is made?

ANSWER: In general, I believe it is best to defer to the judgment of state and local officials about how best to implement education policies and spend their education dollars. As the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Labor, Education, and Pensions has noted, "Washington, D.C. should not be a national school board."

If confirmed as Secretary, I would welcome the opportunity to share data and research from the Department of Education with state and local officials seeking to improve educational opportunities for homeless students. I will travel the country to identify best practices and successful programs and then disseminate that information to encourage others to try adapting these successful approaches to their unique circumstances.

And I also hope that states and local leaders will think outside the box and innovate, looking for new solutions to vexing educational problems. I know of your long history in advocating for homeless students and I look forward to working with you to help states and school districts more successfully meet the needs of these vulnerable students.

Personally, I have helped support an organization in my hometown focused on helping homeless minors, including homeless LGBT youth. This nonprofit organization has been helpful in providing a safe and stable place to meet the basic needs of these vulnerable youth. It is clear, for these youth, basic needs must first be met before educational goals can be realized.

94. In May 2016, Senators Murray, Hatch, Wyden, Grassley, and Franken sent a letter asking for joint guidance and technical assistance for states, school districts, and child welfare agencies to implement the new foster care requirements under ESSA. The Department of Education

responded promptly, providing helpful guidance to implement the new law. Will you maintain this guidance and provide technical assistance as requested by this joint group of Senators?

ANSWER: If confirmed, I will carefully review all existing guidance to ensure it serves as a helpful tool to states, local school districts, teachers, school personnel and others, and not as a hindrance to state and local efforts to follow the laws. Foster care children face unique challenges in accessing a high-quality education and I am eager to help states continue to develop or improve policies that prove effective at helping foster students succeed.

95. As a result of the monumental changes made for students in foster care under ESSA, the Department of Education designated a staff person solely in charge of implementing the foster care portfolio. Will you continue this practice if confirmed as Secretary of Education?

ANSWER: If confirmed as Secretary, I will carefully review the personnel policies and staffing responsibilities within the Department.

### Higher Education

61. As you may know, Michigan, North Carolina, and Louisiana are a few of the growing number of states to designate a "single point of contact" on college campuses for homeless and foster youth. These contacts help homeless and foster youth navigate higher education and connect them to college and community resources. In light of the tremendous success of the single point of contact model in these states, do you support requiring all institutions of higher education to designate such a contact?

ANSWER: Foster care and homeless youth face unique challenges in accessing postsecondary education, and I am eager, if confirmed, to help states and institutions of higher education continue to develop or improve policies that prove effective at helping foster and homeless students across our country.

62. Due to the complexity of the unaccompanied homeless youth determination process, many homeless students must go to great lengths to prove that they are homeless and to obtain the required documents to do so. Large numbers of homeless youth report that this documentation is often lost or discarded between academic years, causing them great difficulty in maintaining their eligibility for financial aid. Do you believe that institutions of higher education should retain all required documents for continuously enrolled students that are unaccompanied and homeless?

ANSWER: The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act will provide an excellent opportunity to consider ways to more effectively support homeless students, address their unique challenges in accessing postsecondary education, and help states and

institutions of higher education develop or improve policies that are effective at helping these vulnerable students.

63. Homeless and foster youth often lack the financial resources they need to stay enrolled in higher education, and are at a greater disadvantage than other low-income students due to their extreme poverty, lack of family support, and histories of trauma. Work-study programs can help these students earn additional financial resources and stay in school. Do you support policies that would require institutions of higher education to prioritize work-study opportunities for homeless and foster youth?

ANSWER: Foster care and homeless youth face unique challenges in accessing postsecondary education, and I am eager, if confirmed, to help states and institutions of higher education continue to develop or improve policies that prove effective at helping foster and homeless students across our country. The reauthorization of the HEA will provide an excellent opportunity to look at these issues and consider ways to more effectively support homeless and foster students.

64. Homeless youth face unique barriers to accessing the higher education that is their best hope of escaping poverty. A May 2016 GAO report found that burdensome financial aid program rules and extensive documentation requests can hinder the ability of homeless youth to access federal supports. This same report found that limited academic preparation, family support, and awareness of resources make it harder for homeless youth to pursue college. What will you do to ensure that financial aid administrators understand the specific vulnerabilities of homeless youth, and do not force homeless youth to provide unnecessary documentation of their status?

ANSWER: The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act will provide an excellent opportunity to consider ways to more effectively support homeless students, address their unique challenges in accessing postsecondary education, and help states and institutions of higher education develop or improve policies that are effective at helping these vulnerable students.

67. The Department's Student Loan Ombudsman is a neutral, informal, and confidential resource to help students resolve disputes about their federal student aid. Sometimes, unaccompanied homeless youth encounter difficulties in completing the process of accessing their financial aid due to conflicts with their college or university financial aid office over the homeless youth determination process. For example, some students are asked to provide documentation that is not required by law or guidance and which would be impossible for those students to obtain-placing them in a terrible position that often leads to the students dropping out. Do you commit to utilizing the Ombudsman group to help homeless youth resolve these disputes and access their financial aid?

ANSWER: If confirmed, I will look closely at the role of the Student Loan Ombudsman and evaluate if there are changes needed to better assist homeless youth in accessing financial aid.

68. Unaccompanied homeless youth and foster youth face numerous barriers to staying enrolled in higher education, including a lack of housing between terms, including winter and summer breaks. This is often a problem even at colleges and universities that offer on-campus housing, but close these facilities between terms.

a. Do you support policies that would require institutions to have a plan to secure housing for unaccompanied homeless youth and foster youth between terms and academic years?

b. What additional resources such as financial aid, counseling, and tutoring services do you believe should be offered at the institutional, state, and federal levels to support unaccompanied homeless youth in higher education?

ANSWER: The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act will provide an excellent opportunity to look at these issues and consider ways to more effectively support homeless and foster students. If confirmed, I am eager to support homeless and foster care youth as they address their unique challenges in accessing postsecondary education and to help states and institutions of higher education continue to develop or improve policies that are effective at helping these vulnerable students.

The complete list of questions for the record submitted by Senator Murray, and Betsy DeVos' answers, may be found here:

<http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/Murray%27s%20QFRs%20%28003%29.pdf>