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Betsy DeVos Campaigning for and Helping to Fund an End-Run Around the Michigan Governor and Michigan Constitution

When Ms. DeVos served as US Secretary of Education, she demonstrated no respect for state constitutional provisions for K-12 education. Her laser-focused agenda was to privatize public education as required by all State Constitutions.

In her private life, she is continuing her privatization campaign as indicated by her campaign to collect sufficient signatures to petition into law a voucher plan the Governor of Michigan vetoed. The legislature of Michigan can enact the petition and it would become law without the Governor's signature.

Ms. DeVos was a danger to public education while in office and still is as a private citizen.

Betsy DeVos touts voucher ballot initiative that could circumvent Whitmer's veto DeVos family, org. have kicked in \$375K

BY: LAINA G. STEBBINS - FEBRUARY 2, 2022 2:51 PM

Former U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, an avid and longtime proponent of school choice, headlined a virtual kick-off Wednesday for a GOP-supported ballot measure opponents argue would suck funds out of public schools.

"I trust parents and I believe in students. Unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be a shared value in Lansing," DeVos told parents and supporters during the "Let MI Kids Learn" Facebook livestream Wednesday morning.

"I've been told what many of you have been told over the years: 'Sit down, go away. This isn't your role. You're not the expert, we're the experts. Leave it to us,'" said DeVos, a former Michigan GOP chair who ran the U.S. Education Department under former President Donald Trump. "Well, I happen to believe that the best expert for a child is that child's family. ... It's why I believe that we have to change the power structure in education and give students and families more control."

DeVos joined a panel of pro-school choice parents during the virtual event to launch the Let MI Kids Learn initiative. The ballot initiative was unveiled by Republicans in November to create a school voucher-style system that would use public tax dollars to fund private education.

Opponents argue the plan violates the Michigan Constitution. In 1970, voters passed the Blaine Amendment, which prohibits public money from going to private schools. And opponents to these bills say they violate that constitutional amendment.

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The DeVos family already had given the measure \$350,000, plus \$25,000 from the DeVos-backed Great Lakes Education Project, the Detroit News reports. Other big donors include Get Families Back to Work, which has the same address as the Republican Governors Association, and gave \$800,000. The State Government Leadership Fund, an offshoot of the Republican State Leadership Committee, also contributed \$475,000.

The initiative came after Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer vetoed voucher-style education bills earlier that month that would have given tax credits to Michiganders who contributed to a scholarship program for non-public schools.

But now, since the Let MI Kids Learn ballot drive has been approved by the state Board of Canvassers, supporters — including the powerful right-wing DeVos family — can begin drumming up support and collecting signatures.

If the group successfully collects 340,000 signatures, the GOP-controlled Legislature will be able to vote the petition into law instead of voters deciding in November. Whitmer's signature is not needed for this to happen, nor can the Democratic governor veto the measure.

"I'm more fired up now than ever. ... It's hard to believe anyone would oppose this opportunity," DeVos said Wednesday.

Democrats and groups like AFT Michigan — a union which represents 35,000 educators and healthcare providers in schools across the state — oppose the measure and others like it, arguing they redirect public dollars from already-struggling public schools to fund tuition for private educations.

The Michigan Parent Alliance for Safe Schools (MiPASS) also opposes the initiative. Members released a statement Wednesday blasting DeVos for "exploiting the pandemic to push her charter school agenda."

"Now is not the time to be siphoning money from community schools and giving it to for-profit charters and that is exactly what the DeVos initiative will do," said Katie Deck, a Livingston County parent and MiPASS organizer.

"Furthermore, it is deeply concerning that DeVos is partnering with conspiracy theory driven groups like Moms for Liberty that have been terrorizing school board members, employees and teachers. Now is the time to bring people together to support our kids and classrooms, not tear them apart."

Moms for Liberty is a conservative nonprofit organization that has been fighting against mask and vaccine mandates across the country, including in Michigan. Several hundred members

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from the group's Livingston County chapter were booted by Facebook in December for reportedly sharing disinformation about COVID-19 and bullying.

The group has also called for parents to participate in a "mass exodus" from public schools.

DeVos, one of Trump's most controversial cabinet picks, hails from West Michigan. She and her family have been longtime champions for school choice and have led initiatives to promote it across the country while donating millions to conservative candidates and causes.

The Dick & Betsy DeVos Family Foundation has also donated millions to both charter and Christian schools. Dick DeVos unsuccessfully ran for governor as a Republican in 2006.

"Students don't have to be held hostage any longer and schools that needlessly remain closed or stuck in schools that don't offer the courses they want to take. Parents don't have to send their kids to schools that don't care what mom and dad think," DeVos said.

Currently, there are virtually no COVID-19 restrictions in the state. Still, some schools and businesses are choosing to close down due COVID-19 surges.

During the virtual event Tuesday, DeVos asked parents on the panel questions about what made them want to homeschool their children or move them to a private school before urging supporters to spread the word about the petition.

To one parent who spoke about her son struggling to find what he can offer to the world, DeVos said, "I hope you don't beat yourself up over that lack of opportunity for your son. But I hope that you will turn that into advocacy for really recognizing that we need to have wide ranges of options and menus for students to pursue and exposing them to them at a much younger age."

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