

Q&A with Miguel Cardona
Transcript

MEYER/VALANT: How do you assess the early days of the Trump administration when it comes to education and, specifically, the U.S. Department of Education?

CARDONA: I mean, it's no different than what I was saying, I was sounding the alarm before the election that there's an effort to privatize and monetize K-12 education. And that will further exacerbate the haves and the have-nots. I'm a big fan of school choice. I chose a technical high school when I was going to high school—I had choice, I'm a product of choice. I don't agree with using public dollars of underfunded schools to pay for choice for a select few.

A couple reasons why, there's many. Number one, you're taking from a pot that pays teachers 25% less than what they get paid in other professions with similar degrees. So, whoever's left in the public schools is going to get a lower quality product. That's number one. Number two, the unregulated private market knows children with autism are harder to teach, they cost more money. Children with mental health issues are harder to teach, they cost more money, children that are two grade levels below in their reading and math require more money. So, if profit is what we're after, those kids are not appealing to me. We're creating a system of have and have nots, and we need to look no further than higher education with these for-profit institutions that I spent four years going after. ITT, Corinthians, a lot of these for-profits that took advantage of veterans, they took advantage of first-generation college students, like I was, to sell them something, put them in debt for the rest of their life, and the diploma's not worth the paper it's written on. So that's where we're going with K-12. And dismantling the Department of Education is basically taking out the oversight, so that could happen at the K-12 level. So, moving the civil rights office somewhere under DOJ, so that special education students who are not getting what they deserve under their IEP under IDEA, there's no body to watch that. Rural communities who rely only on their public schools will not have an office that is going to make sure that in rural Kansas they're going to be able to get a free and appropriate public education. So, dismantling the public education's department is really a strategy to make sure that public education kind of becomes monetized without checks and balances. That's what's happening, it's part of a bigger plan.

And the attempt was there in the first four years. They were just unsuccessful. They started with higher education, and they were going to work their way down, but we were able to put in regulations that prevented that and go after those, and then we were able to really talk about the importance of public education. And I'm a big believer in choice. As a parent, every parent should have choice, whether it's public or private, parochial, but it shouldn't come at the expense of the kid who only relies on what the public school offers, like I was 40 years ago.