

# 'My Heart Is With Kids': U.S. Education Sec. Betsy DeVos Speaks Out on Faith, Schools

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, who is a key player in the nation's ongoing discussion about school choice and academic reform, is a devout Christian with a lifetime commitment to her faith.

And in a recent interview with *The Pure Flix Podcast*, DeVos dove deep into her biblical roots, her passion for education and her perspective on potential reforms.

"I was fortunate enough to be born into a family that raised me to make my faith my own," she said. "I had exposure from my first memories to weekly church services."

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While DeVos was brought up in a Christian home, it wasn't until her teen years that her faith was more firmly rooted.

"My faith really became my own when I was a late teen, early 20s," she said, adding that she has since had continued challenges that have helped her learn and grow. "I'm grateful to have had that foundation."

The Trump-appointee went on to note that faith is "foundational to everything" she does, explaining how her views about individual value translate to the educational realm.

"I firmly believe every single child is a uniquely created individual with great potential and there are too many kids that are just not able to develop that full potential, because they are in a place that simply is not cultivating that for

whatever reason,” DeVos said.

Listen to DeVos share her faith journey and her passion for education:

She noted that there are many teachers across the U.S. who are doing a wonderful job, but added her belief that the system, as it currently stands, doesn’t meet diverse needs.

“Kids are different,” DeVos said. “They learn differently and a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach does not work.”

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She spoke to her own experience in K-12 education and expressed her wish that she had been more fervently challenged, and opened up about what led to her personal passion for reforming the contemporary educational system.

DeVos said it all started when she began to volunteer at a local Christian school and saw firsthand some of the “choice” issues at play.

“My passion around education really grew when my oldest son—who’s just about 38—was starting kindergarten,” she said. “My husband and I knew we were going to be able to send our children wherever we wanted to, but I started getting involved with a small Christian school [and] the more I did ... the more I realized that, for every family that had their child there, there were probably 10 or 20 other families in that neighborhood who longed to have their children in a place like that.”

DeVos said she and her family soon started supporting scholarships to help students attend such schools, and that she realized it is a “policy issue,” as many families simply lacked the economic ability to make the same choices.

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"[I realized] those families [didn't] have the economic means to be able to make that choice," she said. "And yet their children are every bit as special and precious as mine are. So that really spurred my interest in what I refer to as 'education freedom'—school choice, very broadly."

DeVos also spent 15 years as an in-school mentor for at-risk kids, an experience she said was "very formative" and beneficial. She's still in touch with one of the students—a girl she started working with in the first grade; she is now a college sophomore.

"I'm very proud of her," DeVos said. "I continue to encourage her to be everything God meant her to be."

These experiences helped inform DeVos' educational worldview and her penchant for reform. Her goal, she said, is academic freedom for all.

"We enjoy freedom in almost every other area of our life," she said. "And yet the K-12 years for almost a century and a half here have been very much a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach and it's time to change that."

DeVos added, "When you think about the fact that young people today represent 100% of our country's future ... we need to make sure that every single one of them has the opportunity to fully develop their gifts and talents innate in them."

While she said she never had any expectation that she would become U.S. education secretary, she didn't hesitate to take the opportunity when it arose.

But DeVos said making change is an uphill battle.

"Big, large, complex systems and organizations don't change easily and they don't recognize uniqueness and they don't recognize differences in how you learn," she said. "It is a system that exists to really serve itself, not do what's best

for individual children.”

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DeVos also had a message about teachers who might find that the system they’re working in “isn’t working for them”—that they will be “highly valued in a system of freedom and choices.”

As for the controversy that has surrounded her policy recommendations, she was candid and yet resolute.

“There have been a lot of misconceptions, misperceptions sown about me, but the reality is that my heart is with kids,” DeVos said. “And I’m for them and for their futures and I’m for their parents to have the kind of opportunity to make the choices that I was able to make for my kids.”

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