

DeVos Asks the Education Establishment to 'Rethink' Schools

The education secretary is on a multistate tour highlighting innovative approaches to learning.



Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos slammed the established "education system" Tuesday, kicking off a "Rethink School" tour to highlight innovative ways educators are meeting the needs of students in K-12 and higher education.

"It's time to rethink school," DeVos said to students at the Woods Learning Center in Casper, Wyoming, Tuesday morning, where she began the weeklong

tour.

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"For far too many kids, this year's first day back to school looks and feels a lot like last year's first day back to school," she said. "And the year before that. And the generation before that. And the generation before that."

She continued: "Most students are starting a new school year that is all too familiar – desks lined up in rows, their teacher standing in front of the room framed by a blackboard. They dive into a curriculum written for the average student. They follow the same schedule, the same routine – just waiting to be saved by the bell."

"It's a mundane malaise that dampens dreams, dims horizons and denies

futures," she said.

The tour will take the secretary through schools in Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri and Indiana. DeVos is slated to visit a variety of schools, including traditional and charter public schools, religious and other private schools, home school cooperatives, traditional four-year colleges and universities, as well as community colleges and other career-focused certification programs.

"There are so many new and exciting ways state-based education leaders and advocates are truly rethinking education," DeVos said in a statement. "It is our goal with this tour to highlight what's working. We want to encourage local education leaders to continue to be creative, to empower parents with options and to expand student-centered education opportunities."

DeVos kicked off the tour at [Woods Learning Center](#), a school that serves elementary and middle school students using what it describes as a "teacher-powered" model that does not employ a principal. Students enrolled in the school move through lessons at their own pace using a competency-based learning model.

Later on Tuesday, DeVos will head to [St. Stephens Indian High School](#) on the Wind River Reservation, a school that's under the jurisdiction of the [Bureau of Indian Education](#). The school's website underscores its goal of preparing students with skills necessary for living in modern society while also maintaining the values of its American Indian culture and heritage.

"For decades, the United States has been stuck in the middle of the pack when compared to the rest of the world," DeVos said to students at the Woods Learning Center. "Think for a moment what it would be like if at the next Olympics, Americans didn't win one gold medal. Or if no American won any medal at all."

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"We wouldn't settle for that, would we," she asked. "But that's exactly what we do when it comes to education. We don't even get to the platform – or even in the top 10."

Her speech Tuesday morning is just the latest example of DeVos pushing for increased educational choices for parents – the topic on which she's spent the most political capital thus far.

The tour doesn't specifically focus on private school choice, of which DeVos has been an ardent supporter and has used her bully pulpit to press Congress and state legislators to enact. But it will address those policies, likely in Indiana, where the state has operated a private school scholarship program for low-income families since 2011.

Notably, the tour comes as lawmakers in Washington get to work on a [tax reform proposal](#) that so far has steered clear of any type of private school tax credit scholarship – widely thought to be the most serious vehicle for [federal private school choice legislation](#).

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