

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
FOREIGN RELATIONS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

April 23, 2018

The Honorable Betsy DeVos
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary DeVos:

The Broward County School Board recently held public meetings where alarming claims were raised about the school board's discipline and school safety policies, many of which were also highlighted by national media outlets. Given the gravity of the situation, I respectfully request for your department to review this new information and, to the best of your abilities, determine its veracity. This includes, but is not limited to, various reports that allege:

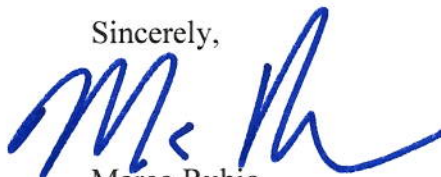
1. For a number of years, the Broward County School Board had access to \$100 million for school safety improvements – less than \$6 million of which was spent.
2. When determining awardees for certain grants, the U.S. Department of Education (the department) gave preferential treatment to school districts with discipline policies that discouraged schools from reporting certain violent behaviors to law enforcement.
3. The department awarded federal grants to Broward County, in part, because of the county's revised discipline policies to end the "zero-tolerance" policies in an effort to reduce the number of school-based arrests.
4. School Resource Officers were directed not to arrest students for certain felonies.
5. In 2016, Broward County schools had the highest ratio in Florida of cases involving weapons – with about 15 cases for every 10,000 student – despite the Broward School Board reporting that arrests were on the decline.
6. Claims that schools were intentionally classifying violent acts and felonies as non-violent acts or misdemeanors in order to prevent a referral to law enforcement.

When considering the Department of Education's knowledge of Broward County's school discipline policies, I ask for any information available regarding the department's decision to financially reward a school that knowingly allowed students to return to schools after being convicted of serious crimes, including "rape, murder, attempted murder, sexual battery or [a] firearm related" offense. Additionally, was the department aware of whether this policy required the parents of other students to be notified that their child would soon be attending school with a student previously convicted of rape, murder, attempted murder, sexual battery or a firearm related offense?

Last week, I held an extensive discussion regarding school safety with the focus on preventing another Parkland tragedy. It was clear that all parties, from the federal government to local government and school volunteers, want to help children excel. Unfortunately, local schools are not always equipped with the expertise necessary to protect children. Educators are not security experts and many are in need of technical assistance as to how to update school safety and security within older school buildings, or construct new buildings that strike the appropriate balance between security and ensuring students have a welcoming learning environment. To that end, I ask you to develop a plan of action to determine whether the department would be able to develop a specific division of experts able to provide states, counties and/or schools with the necessary technical assistance to improve safety in existing structures and best-practices in school safety when constructing new buildings.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator