

Coastal Point

Meyer taps national expert to lead education department

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Then-Gov.-elect and now-Gov. Matt Meyer announced last week plans to nominate Cindy Marten — Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education under the Biden Administration — to be Delaware’s next Secretary of Education. Marten, he said, will bring a wealth of expertise as a teacher and superintendent, and a passionate commitment to equity and excellence in public education.

“Cindy Marten is a proven leader with a deep understanding of the challenges that students and educators face. She has spent her career working to ensure every student has the tools and resources they need to thrive,” said Meyer. “As Delaware’s next Secretary of Education, Cindy will guide our classrooms into a brighter future where equity, opportunity, and excellence are at the heart of everything we do.”

Marten, he said, has spent her career advocating for policies and practices that help all students succeed — particularly those from historically under-served communities. Her appointment, he said, his continued dedication to transforming Delaware’s educational system “to ensure every child, regardless of background or zip code, has access to a high-quality education.”

“I am honored to join Gov.-elect Meyer’s team and help lead Delaware’s public schools into a new era,” said Marten after the announcement. “I believe deeply in the power of education to change lives, and I am committed to working with teachers, parents, students and communities to ensure all of Delaware’s children receive a world-class education.”

As the Deputy Secretary of Education, she was responsible for K-12 initiatives, while serving as chief operating officer, overseeing a \$230-billion budget and more than 4,000 federal employees. She has more than 15 years of experience as a classroom teacher. She served as superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District, the second-largest school district in California, for eight years, where she implemented policies to close opportunity gaps, support educators and increase graduation rates. Throughout her career, she noted, she has championed community engagement, student-centered learning, and the empowerment of educators as key drivers of success. Marten is also a strong proponent of multilingual education.

Meyer’s administration, he said, will prioritize comprehensive education reform, focusing on increasing per-pupil funding, modernizing the state’s school funding formula, expanding access to early childhood education, investing in universal pre-K, and addressing the teacher shortage crisis by raising educator salaries and improving working conditions. Marten’s leadership will be

instrumental, he said, in moving these goals forward as Delaware works to build an education system that is equitable, innovative, and prepared for the challenges of the future.

State and national praise for Marten

Stephanie Ingram, president of the Delaware State Education Association, which represents more than 12,000 classroom teachers, specialists and education support professionals, said of Marten, “I am grateful to Gov.-elect Meyer for providing DSEA an opportunity to sit down with Deputy Secretary Marten to discuss her approach, philosophy and experience as a classroom teacher, literary specialist, principal and superintendent. Deputy Secretary Marten’s substantial record of working collaboratively with educators and families to improve public education earned her high marks from the National Education Association and other pro-union organizations that have had an opportunity to work with her.

“Based on our conversations,” she continued, “I believe Deputy Secretary Marten will quickly become a strong partner for public educators as we continue working to raise educator pay, improve school climates, reform Delaware’s antiquated and inequitable education funding formula, and ensure all students have an opportunity to succeed.”

State Rep. Nnamdi O. Chukwuocha (HD-1), said, “Cindy Marten is the right leader to deliver for Delawarean families at the right time. It’s time that we turn the page on antiquated funding formulas, district referendums and other failed/outdated tactics that caused our public-school rankings to plummet. Delaware can and must do better for the next generation, and by serving as Secretary of Education to Gov. Meyer, I’m confident Cindy will be the catalyst to create the change we need.”

Freeman L. Williams, retired superintendent of the Christina School District, said, “Gov.-elect Meyer understands that our Black and Brown students have historically been under-served and that every student deserves the resources to learn, grow and thrive. With his choice of Cindy Marten, a national leader in developing equitable educational practices, we will continue the work of creating opportunities for Delaware students, regardless of where they attend school.”

Fleur McKendell, president of the Delaware NAACP State Conference of Branches, said, “Delaware’s education system is in urgent need of a leader who can deliver transformative change, as we are at a pivotal moment where our students, teachers and families are counting on bold action to address long-standing inequities and improve outcomes across the board. This is not a time for small adjustments — it is a time for an overhaul of the systems and practices that have left too many of our children behind.

“U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten brings a wealth of experience, and I am hopeful that she will bring a fresh perspective, innovative solutions and an unwavering commitment to equity-driven policies that ensure marginalized students are at the center of the education reform we so desperately need.

“I look forward to seeing her leadership in action and am not only committed but also eager to work collaboratively with Gov.-elect Matt Meyer and his administration to fundamentally transform and strengthen Delaware’s public education system into one that, regardless of ZIP code or

background, guarantees every student has access to an excellent education that prepares them for a bright future,” McKendell said.

Linda Darling Hammond, president of the Learning Policy Institute and professor emeritus at Stanford, said, “Cindy Marten will be a strong, effective leader who will be able to address all of the education issues facing Delaware public schools, including the urgent need for an equitable funding system. Our research showed that as superintendent in San Diego, she led her district to become a positive outlier, beating the state in student achievement for all student groups, especially the most vulnerable. She is an outstanding choice for the students, teachers and parents of Delaware.”

Kyla Johnson-Trammell, board chair of Women Leading Ed and superintendent of the Oakland Unified School District, said, “The nomination of Cindy Marten as Delaware’s next Secretary of Education is a win for the state’s students, families, educators and communities. Throughout her career, Cindy has demonstrated a powerful commitment to ensuring that every student has access to the resources and opportunities necessary for success. Leadership as both a teacher and superintendent has instilled in her a deep understanding of the real challenges faced by students and educators alike, and the great promise of both.

“I’ve witnessed firsthand her passion for fostering environments where students are encouraged to reach their fullest potential, regardless of their background or circumstances. Across her career, her work to close achievement gaps and support educators, has left lasting impacts on the communities she has served. As she steps into this new role, I am confident that Cindy will bring her bold vision for progress and innovation to ensure that every child is prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow.”

Mike Casserly, strategic advisor to the Council of Great City Schools, said, “Every place Cindy Marten goes, school students are better off. You saw it in the classrooms where she taught, the schools she ran, and the big city district she led. And you saw it at the U.S. Department of Education. Now that she has been nominated for Delaware Secretary of Education, parents can expect a powerhouse leader for higher student achievement and intelligent reform. The state is lucky to have the most experienced and effective educational leader in the nation.”

A background in education, health and wellness

Marten was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the Deputy Secretary on May 11, 2021. Before joining the Department of Education, Marten served as the superintendent of the San Diego Unified School District from 2013 to 2021. She spent 34 years as an educator, holding various roles of increasing responsibility as a teacher, literacy specialist, vice principal and principal. She is the author of “Word Crafting: Teaching Spelling, Grades K-6,” which places an emphasis on literacy as a key to students’ success.

As superintendent, she directed the implementation of the district’s Vision 2020 commitment to a meaningful graduation for all students, with the district achieving the highest graduation rate among big-city districts in California and the fastest reading growth of large urban districts nationwide in 2019.

In addition to her emphasis on academics, Marten has been a champion for health and wellness, implementing an award-winning wellness policy for staff and students. Under her leadership, San Diego Unified received Gold Recognition in the American Heart Association's Workplace Health Achievement Index for efforts to support employee wellness, and multiple San Diego Unified schools received the "America's Healthiest Schools" award from the Alliance for a Healthier Generation.

Before being appointed superintendent, Marten worked for 10 years at Central Elementary School in City Heights, one of San Diego's most ethnically diverse and economically challenged school communities. As a teacher, instructional leader, and later principal, she established a commitment to educating the whole child through an emphasis on social and emotional learning and the arts combined with academic rigor.