Tanya Domi: Hi, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to the Thought Project recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences and sciences.

Tanya Domi: In this space we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting edge research. Informing New Yorkers and the world.

Tanya Domi: This week's guest is David Bloomfield, Professor of Educational Leadership, Law and Policy at Brooklyn College in the Graduate Center. Professor Bloomfield specializes in educational law, school district management, school reform and legislative matters. Welcome David to the podcast.

David Bloomfield: Thank you very much.

Tanya Domi: David, you were just in Washington D.C. for an anti-tax bill protest. Do we know how this tax bill's gonna affect education in America?

David Bloomfield: We are beginning to understand and it's not pretty. Ted Cruise at the last minute was able to get into the senate bill, the ability of parents to establish a saving's account tax free. Savings accounts for private school and even home school expenses. Which we'll probably draw, if it's enacted would drive a lot of families out of the public school system. Which themselves would be denuded of funding because lack of Federal funds on the one hand. And because of the way the bill treats property taxes. Which is how education gets funded in America.

Tanya Domi: And this seems to be a tactic that really goes beyond charter schools. Now this is a really big hit on public ed, is it not?

David Bloomfield: Exactly right. It helps the Betsy DeVos for profit private school sector, which I think is a big winner here. As well as the traditional private school system and home schoolers. This is war on public education and as we've seen, that's true not only K through 12, but higher ed as well.

Tanya Domi: That's terrible news I think. Speaking of Betsy DeVos, who's the US Secretary of Education, you just published an op ed in Education Week that's getting a lot of attention regarding her actions on deregulating [relias 00:02:43]. In essence a prohibition to discrimination that have been regulated up until this point. Why don't you tell us about that.

David Bloomfield: I wrote an article a while back saying that Betsy DeVos' real power was the power to do nothing. And she's proving that power is quit powerful. She is rescinding old guidance. Guidance is a regulatory power that administrations have that don't have to go through Congress. They don't even have to go through regular administrative procedures. And by either not enforcing or
rescinding the guidance, she's able to really give the folks who might do harm a free reign.

David Bloomfield: And that is free reign about sexual assault. It's free reign for racial and ethnic discrimination. It means that we are in the wild west of educational practice.

Tanya Domi: Yes and she's representing the Trump effort to really roll back anything that Obama advanced for example. On Tran students in American schools, revoking the gender application of title IV. To protecting them from discrimination.

Tanya Domi: And most recently and very disturbingly actually, her efforts to roll back on disabled students that's really under the Egis of the American's With Disabilities Act.

David Bloomfield: Not only the American With Disabilities Act, but with IDEA, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act. And this has always been a sore point. You might remember at her hearings, she didn't even seem to understand what IDEA required. And she said that private schools, going back to that issue, wouldn't have to enforce that law in terms of their own educational requirements.

David Bloomfield: That means that private schools could simply not admit disabled students or not give them the proper appropriate services called for in the act.

Tanya Domi: It seems like a, I think a really stupid political move on behalf of the Republican Party. Disabilities doesn't discriminate in terms of party affiliation, so there's gonna be Republican families that have disabled children that might be denied access to education as well. That's pretty sobering actually.

David Bloomfield: What we see about this administration and this Congress is it's more like grab and go. They have the power now. They have the majority, they have the cabinet. And they're taking what they can for their particular constituency. Which is more big business than it is main street.

David Bloomfield: And so I don't think that they really care at this point. They can try to brand it any way they want. But people understand that in terms of healthcare, in terms of education. In terms of urban assistance, in terms of discrimination of all sorts, this is a libertarian crew who think that big business ought to have the right of way.

Tanya Domi: And speaking of private education and charter schools, right here in New York City, under the leadership of Eva Moscowitz, she's really advanced charter schools here. And now that this new politics in Washington, how do you think that will affect the charter school movement in New York City and actually in New York state itself?

David Bloomfield: I think there's gonna be more funding for charter schools again. Eva and other charter school Operators have this shape shifting approach. When they want to
be called public charter schools because they take public money, they configure themselves as part of a public school system. But as we know, they want to have free reign from the regulations, including IDEA and others. That restrict the ability of public schools to do whatever they want.

Tanya Domi: And charter schools, I mean New York City, the schools fall under the Mayor. And right now there's a big standoff between the Mayor and the Governor on priorities in terms of education probably. I'd like to hear your thoughts about really maybe how they differ. And actually in that regard, does Governor Cuomo play a big role in shaping K through 12 education in the state of New York? What's his record here in your view?

David Bloomfield: I think that the battle between Cuomo and the Mayor in general is a huge issue. In education it actually has receded as Cuomo has his sights on the Presidency and is moving somewhat leftward from where he was early in the administration.

David Bloomfield: Early in the administration he was really pushing charter schools hard. He was testing, he was pushing test based accountability hard. Not so much anymore. And so I think we don't see the kind of divisions in education that we see in other areas of public policy.

David Bloomfield: The Governor has a great deal of power in two respects. One he signs legislation, he proposes legislation and he's been quite effective early in the administration at pushing those accountability measures through statute and through the budget process.

David Bloomfield: More importantly, he really controls the amount of state aid that goes to districts. And how much state aid goes to individual districts and that's really greatest power the Governor and the Legislature, they really don't historically care about educational policy. They really care about how much money goes to every district in the state. It's called the runs, because that's how legislatures are elected outside of New York City. Which funds its education out of the general fund.

Tanya Domi: But coming back to New York City for a minute, seems like the Mayor has done a good job on Pre-K. That was a campaign promise he made and essentially delivered on. That is a standard that is New York City prides itself on. Seems like he's really taken a lot of victory laps on Pre-K. What's your view on that?

David Bloomfield: What healthcare is to Obama as the signature issue and a progressive policy, that's what UPK, Universal Public Pre-School Education is for de Blasio. It's a generational innovation. It's extremely important and he delivered not only in terms of the promise of quantity, but of quality.

David Bloomfield: And we seem to have very good pre-K and it's moving downward, which is extremely important. Down to the three year olds. The most difficult part of the
original plan was it was four years olds. And most middle, or at least upper middle class families who can afford it, are sending their kids to Pre-K at two. But it's a great success and he deserves all the accolades that he's received.

Tanya Domi: And speaking of the Mayor, he appointed Carmen Farina to be the Chancellor. There's some discussion out there in the media or maybe rumors being reported that she might retire. What do you think about that? And if she does retire, who's one of the top candidates who would take her place in your view?

David Bloomfield: It's generally thought, except maybe by the Chancellor herself that she will retire soon. She had retired before she was appointed Chancellor and came out of retirement to do this job. This very had job, requiring a lot of energy for now four years.

David Bloomfield: Whether she stays or goes will not only be her decision, but the Mayor's. If she goes the thinking right now is that there's no heir apparent from within the system. And therefore, it may be one of the big city Superintendents who's out there. Somebody from Baltimore, Boston, Los Angeles. Probably not Chicago, which has its own problems with public education. But it's a question now of who it might be and it's a free for all.

Tanya Domi: Interesting. But there is some big problems in New York City public schools. One's very segregated, it's considered one of the most racially segregated systems in the country. And talk to us about the renewal programs, the renewal education approach that this Mayor has taken. And what's going on with the renewal schools?

David Bloomfield: The Mayor was stuck with a problem when he came in. And this relates to the time when Cuomo was really pushing an accountability agenda. He had to name a certain number of failing schools. Those are the schools with low test scores. Bloomberg before him closed schools with low test scores. De Blasio ran against that policy because it was a lot of pushback. And so he developed an idea of renewal schools, particularly tied to community schools and social services provided by those schools. That's a long term program of improvement and he only really had about three years. And he promised three years of stark improvements and he hasn't delivered on that.

David Bloomfield: That is an area of difficulty for the Mayor. He was just re-elected so it's not particularly a voter issue. But he still struggles to show that he really can improve schools and not just close them.

Tanya Domi: New York City's of course one of the largest public school systems in the country. What do you think of where it stands as a model or not in the country? I'd say it has probably one of the most diverse student body populations in the country. It's the largest school system. How does it rank in your view compared to the bigger systems like LA, Chicago for example?
David Bloomfield: We need to talk about money. New York is advantaged by its vast wealth, and so it has plenty of money for the schools. It has a huge upper middle class to draw on and so the schools in New York City are different than many of the other much more segregated cities in the country.

David Bloomfield: We do have a huge problem with segregation and this goes back to the renewal schools. What de Blasio won't do, hasn't done is to really attack the segregation that we have. Its income segregation, it's racial segregation and he tends to concentrate the poor, the Black, the Brown in certain schools and the wealthier and the Whiter groups in other schools.

David Bloomfield: We would have a much better school system if we would attack that problem. But politically he just doesn't want to go there.

Tanya Domi: Interesting. When you talk about the vast monetary resources of New York City, now we're looking at this tax bill. This tax bill is proposing to not allow states like New York or tax payers can deduct their local in state taxes. Cuts to schools, the proposal to give money to home schools and charter schools as you're saying and is contained in this bill.

Tanya Domi: We're at a crossroads? Are we not? If this tax bill is passed and of course we don't know all the details yet. I'm not even sure members of the House and Senate know the details of it. Where do you think we go from this point? I mean you went, you participated in a protest against the tax bill. There's a lot that really weighs in the balance when it comes to education. Is there not?

David Bloomfield: There's plenty to worry about. New York City probably will fair better than most in some ways. We don't depend on the property tax so much. Although the income tax is also part of this deduction issue. We have the financial industry that seems to be humming along, that provides a lot of income which other cities don't have.

David Bloomfield: I worry less about New York City than the rest of the country. But we will be hit hard and we have to worry that there may be an economic downturn. Which coupled with the tax changes would really hurt New York.

Tanya Domi: David Bloomfield, great to have you today. It was really interesting conversation.

David Bloomfield: Thank you very much.

Tanya Domi: Thanks for tuning into the Thought Project and thanks to our guest, Professor David Bloomfield.

Tanya Domi: The Thought Project was produced in partnership with CUNY TV located at the Graduate Center in the heart of New York City. With production, engineering and technical assistance by Sarah Fishman and Jack Horowitz.
Tanya Domi: I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.