

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SECRETARY ARNE DUNCAN

SUBJECT: SECRETARY ARNE DUNCAN

MODERATOR: ALAN BJERGA, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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ALAN BJERGA: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Alan Bjerga. I'm a reporter for Bloomberg News and the President of the National Press Club. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists and are committed to our profession's future through our programming and by fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. To donate to programs, please visit www.press.org/library.

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and attendees at today's event, which includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists. I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. After the speech concludes, I will ask as many audience questions as time permits. I'd now like to introduce our head table guests.

From your right, Francis Eberle, Executive Director for the National Science Teachers Association. Kyung Sun of the Washington Bureau of the Seattle Times. Sarah Brown Wessling, an English teacher at Johnston High School of Johnston, Iowa, and the National Teacher of the Year. Christiane Amanpour of ABC News, host of This Week with Christiane Amanpour that premieres this coming Sunday. Melody Barnes, Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council. Andrew Schneider, Chairman of the Club's Speakers Committee and Associate Editor for Kiplinger Washington Editors. Skipping our speaker for the moment, we have Debra Silimeo, Senior Vice President at Hager Sharp, and the Speakers Committee Member who organized today's luncheon. Sherry Horsley, Principal of West Carter Middle School in Olive Hill, Kentucky. Katherine

Skiba, reporter for the Chicago Tribune Washington Bureau. Sarah Sparks, a reporter at Education Daily, and Lynn Sweet, Washington Bureau Chief for the Chicago Sun Times and a columnist for APoliticsdaily.com. (Applause)

Our speaker today calls education the civil rights issue of our times, framing reform debates in terms of social justice. To understand the sense of mission, you might look at his childhood in Chicago, where his mother, Sue Duncan, started an urban tutoring program for disadvantaged kids on Chicago's South Side in 1961. Arne Duncan was there tutoring, playing basketball, and learning the value of education, sometimes in stark terms. He once said that education could literally be the difference between life and death. In his words, "The guys who go killed were the ones that didn't finish high school. No one who went to college got killed." He played professional basketball for four years after he graduated Harvard, before returning to Chicago and becoming the longest serving big city school chief in the country.

Then, his friend and president, Barack Obama, cast him to lead the Department of Education. Last year's Economic Recovery Act doubled his department's budget. He's proposing a longer school year, requiring four profit colleges to prove they train students for gainful employment, and closing schools that don't perform. He faces challenges. The Federal Budget Deficit, the achievement gap among white, black and Hispanic students, teachers who say evaluations are based too much on test scores, and critics who say it's futile to cap today's challenges in terms of civil rights, when a two parent family is one of the biggest factors in determining a child's success. Today, he's here to talk about how he's going to address these challenges. Welcome to the National Press Club, Education Secretary Arne Duncan. (Applause)

ARNE DUNCAN: Good afternoon and thank you so much for that kind introduction. The American story is all about extraordinary people who meet the challenges of their time with determination, with courage, and with vision. From the heroes of the American Revolution to the heroes of our transformative social movements, our nation was shaped by bold men and women who overcome resistance, fear, and dissent to build alliances that advance our collective welfare. They include great presidents, brilliant thinkers, and fightful social leaders. And millions of ordinary Americans whose unheralded acts of generosity and courage strengthen us and lift us through the everyday challenges in our communities and the national crises that test us collectively.

Throughout our history, the American spirit has yet to meet its match. And in this ongoing American story, circumstances periodically conspire to redirect our course and lead us to a new and a better place where yesterday's problems fade and tomorrow's solutions emerge with great clarity and force. Today in the field of public education, this moment is upon us. And I'm not the first one to say it. From journalists to educators to politicians and parents, there's a growing sense that a quiet revolution is underway in our homes, in our schools, in our classrooms, in our communities. This quiet revolution is driven by motivated parents who want better educational outcomes for their children.

They know how critical education is to succeed and compete in the global economy. And they insist on the very best. And they're willing to sacrifice to make that happen. It's driven by great, great teachers and educators and administrators who are challenging their defeatism and inertia that has trapped generations of children in second rate schools. They know that every single child can learn in a school culture where parents are engaged, teachers are respected, and principals are empowered. It's driven by elected officials, community leaders, and stakeholders outside the school system who value education enough to fund it adequately and give generously of their time and energy and their resources. They know that quality education, more so than ever before, is a big cornerstone for a strong economy in the 21st Century.

It's driven by foundations and entrepreneurs that see the kind of fresh new thinking that every sector of society needs in order to change and grow and improve. They're fronting real money and enlisting smart, creative people willing to try new approaches to educating America's underserved children. I'm especially honored to be part of an administration that is playing a modest role in sparking this quiet revolution. We arrived at Washington at a time when America was deeply divided over the proper Federal law in educational policy. No Child Left Behind forced some hard conversations around issues like accountability and achievement gap. But also triggered some negative consequences.

It cost states to lower their standards, mandated impractical remedies, and [00:17:54] the wrong behavior amongst some educators who put standardized testing ahead of a well rounded curriculum. Rather than trying to reform at the local level, NCLB has had long standing frustration with Federal overreaching. In February 2009, with the economic crisis at hand, the President signed a historic law to stimulate the economy and among other things, rescue states facing unprecedented budget cuts. The \$786 billion dollar American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included \$48 billion dollars to help save or create 400,000 jobs, most of them in education. Literally staving off an education catastrophe in our nation's classrooms.

It included \$17 billion dollars for Pell grants, to send more young people to college and meet the national goal of producing the highest percentage of college educated workers in the world by 2020, by the end of the next decade. The President clearly recognizes that America must educate her way to a better economy. And as he has said, the nations that out-educate us today, will out-compete us tomorrow. Included in that Recovery Act, was by the standards here in Washington, a relatively small provision authorizing the Department of Education to design and administer competitive programs aimed at improving education in four core areas of perform. Standards, teachers, data, and school turn around. With a budget of just \$5 billion dollars, less than one percent of total education spending in America, this minor provision of the Recovery Act has unleashed an avalanche of pent up educational reform activity at the state and inter-level battle.

Forty-eight states voluntarily collaborated to raise the bar and create common college and career right standards solving one of the biggest drawbacks with NCLB,

without a federal mandate and without a federal dollar. So far, 29 states have adopted those standards and even Massachusetts, universally viewed as having the highest standards in the country, unanimously voted to adopt those standards last week. I want to single out Gene Wilhoit, who's here and the Chief State School Officers and Raymond Chipak(?), of the National Governor's Association, Dane Linn, who have done extraordinary work in driving this agenda. Their partner's been Brenda Welburn of the State School Boards Association, and collectively their leadership at the local level has helped to make this happen. And I also want to salute our governors and legislators for their work on Race to the Top. Forty-six states and the District of Columbia brought together labor unions, school superintendents, and elected officials to compete for Race to the Top funds.

In support of these applications, 13 states altered laws to foster the growth of good charter schools and 17 states reformed teacher evaluation systems by including among other things, student achievement. I've learned many, many things since I came to Washington, but I have to admit, I was actually a little surprised to learn that we have states that have laws prohibiting the use of student achievement in teacher evaluation. They have laws in the books against that. Because of Race to the Top, those laws in states are all gone. Best of all, these bold blueprints for reform bear the signatures of many, many key players at the state and local level that drive change in our schools. The winner to Race to the Top will be held accountable for those commitments but every single state, every state that applied will benefit from this consensus building process to drive reform.

Much of the federal dollars we distribute through other channels can support their plans to raise standards, to improve teaching, to use data more effectively, to support student learning, and to turn around finding the underperforming schools. Two states, Delaware and Tennessee, won grants in the first phase of Race to the Top. Here today representing Governor Jack Markell from Delaware, and Governor Phil Bredesen from Tennessee, are the visionary chief state school officers. Doctor Lillian Lowery of Delaware, and Doctor Tim Webb of Tennessee. If I could please ask them to stand. Let's give them a round of applause. (Applause)

I want to salute them and their entire state for setting a new standard of commitment and courage in public education. They're the pioneers and they're showing us together how to move forward. In a few minutes, I will announce the finalists for the second phase, and they'll be invited to address our review panels in early August. The second phase winners will be announced in September. In the coming weeks, we will also announce the winner for the Investing in Innovation Fund, also known as I3. We received 1700 applications from districts and non-profit partners all across America. One of the largest responses we've ever received in the history of the Department of Education. We will also be distributing teacher incentive fund grants for districts willing to try new conversation programs that reward excellence in the class room or provide incentive to teaching hard to staff schools and hard to staff subjects. The biggest single thing we can do, is it get great teachers into struggling schools. Whatever it takes, including incentive pay and other ideas.

Meanwhile, states all across America are also distributing \$3.5 billion dollars in school improvement grants to districts that are willing to dramatically intervene in their lowest performing schools. And to those who say this work can't be done, I invite them to visit schools like George Hall Elementary in Mobile, Alabama or Roxbury Prep in Boston. Schools dismissed at the bottom to the top, thanks to committed leadership and dedicated staff. Go to Urban Prep in Chicago, an all male, all African-American high school, there are places at school where only 4% of incoming freshman were grade level, and approximately 60% of students historically were dropping out. They just had their first graduating class. 107 young men. 107 graduating. 107 going off to four year universities. (Applause)

When we made the decision to transform that school, I received a call from a man named Don Stewart, some of you may know him. Former President of the Chicago Community Trust and the Former President of Spellman College. And he told me that when he was going to high school and he was in eighth grade, his mother would not let him attend that high school 50 years ago, because that high school was so bad at that time. It took us half a century to have the courage to change and to create Urban Prep. There's simply no excuse for that. And I wonder how many Don Stewarts we lost over those 50 years because we failed to provide real educational opportunities. So there's also money for new charter schools and other innovative learning models, as well as funds for states to develop better data systems. Lastly, \$350 million dollars in Race to the Top Funds are set aside for groups of states to develop new, more comprehensive assessments. All told, nearly \$10 billion dollars is going out in the coming weeks to support education reform driven at the local level. Over and above, the billions of dollars we distributed in form of the grants to support low income students and other special populations.

It's been a remarkable year and a half. And among other things, I've learned much about the proper federal hall in supporting education reform. I think it comes down to a few basic things. The first is the bully pulpit. The President and I have both used a megaphone our position affords to challenge everyone in the system to get better. Absolutely starting with ourselves and continuing with parents and students, educators, elected officials, and colleges of education. I've been to 37 states and literally hundreds and hundreds of schools. I've held large and small meetings with thousands of parents, teachers, students and administrators. I have yet to meet one person who is satisfied with the status quo. Everybody knows that we have to get better. I have tried to give voice to their concerns by telling the truth as I have heard it from people all across the country.

The truth is a quarter of our students did not graduate from high school. That's 1.2 million students dropping out of high school each year and there are no good options, as you know, for them. That is morally unacceptable and economically unsustainable. The truth is, too many teachers are unprepared when they enter the classroom and the system fails to identify and reward good teachers. It supports also potential, or when necessary, cancel out of the field those teachers who are just not suited for this challenging, challenging profession. The truth is too many schools, including some charter schools, are simply not providing students with an education that prepares them for college and

careers. And they need to change the way they do business or they need to go out of business. The truth is, there are indispensable inequities in our school system in terms of funding, teacher quality, access to rigorous curriculum, and student outcomes. Half a century after Brown versus Board of Education, this is an epic in justice in our society. We will target these schools for enforcement under civil rights laws, but it falls on elected officials, school administrators and other stakeholders across the spectrum to confront education inequities.

The achievement gap is unacceptable. Education is the civil rights issue of our generation. It's the only way to make good on the American promise of equality. And the truth is that states of low standards have been lying to children's families for years, telling them they are ready for college or for work when in fact, they're not even close. Many adults who attend college today need remedial education and half of them drop out. Overall, just 40% of young people earn a two year or four year college degree. The US now ranks tenth in the world in the rate of college completion for 25 to 34 year olds. We were first a generation ago, and we want to be first again. That's why we ended federal subsidies for banks in student lending programs and shipped in billions and billions of dollars into increasing Pell grants without going back to taxpayers for a dime.

That's why we fixed the student financial aid application. It was so complicated, a lot of students simply gave up. And that's one more barrier to access that we have eliminated. We're competing with students from around the world, and the truth is unfortunately, we're beginning to slip further behind. Among developed nations, our eighth grader trail students in ten countries in science and our 15 year olds in the bottom quartile in math. So whatever else we do at the federal level, our first responsibility is simply to tell the truth. And it also gets to the second big lever of change, which is transparency. And I credit NCLB for disposing America's dirty laundry. But we need to go further and show what is and what is not working. The big game changer is to start measuring individual student growth rather than proficiency which is in our blue print for reauthorizing the elementary and secondary acts.

We have to use that information to drive student instruction and accountability at every level. Classroom, school, district and state. If we know how much students are gaining each year, if we know how much they're improving, we will know which teachers and principals are succeeding, which ones need more help and support, and which ones simply are not getting the job done. We will also know if the best teachers are distributed equitably among schools or whether the poorest kids in the most disadvantaged communities who are the first behind are consistently taught by the least experienced and the least effective teachers. If you go to any chronically low performing school, I promise you, you'll find less experienced teachers and high teacher turnover. Go to any high performing school, you'll find the opposite. Stability, a mixture of experience and youth, and a professional teaching culture.

Too many states today are not built to measure growth which is why we need better assessments and better data systems. We also need to look at a range of other indicators; graduation, college enrollment and completion rates, the more innovative

metrics, like the rate of freshman on track which is a confirmation of attendance and grades and that helps us attack the dropout rate back in Chicago. Another big lever of change is the one I mentioned before, and that is incentives like Race to the Top. Nothing moves people as quickly as the opportunity for more funding, especially in tough budget times like today. When I was in Chicago, our teachers designed a program for performance pay and procured a \$27 million dollar federal grant, the largest grant our school district had ever received. It would have taken us frankly years to bargain this program with our unions. But with a grant in hand, they signed on together with us in weeks. That program was created by teachers, for teachers.

In Chicago's model, every adult in the building, not just teachers but clerks, and janitors and social workers and cafeteria workers, all adults were rewarded when the school improved. It builds a sense of teamwork and it gives the whole school a common mission. It can help to transform, support a positive school culture. Today, there are dozens and dozens of districts with performance pay programs. There are a hundred more districts competing right now for our teacher incentive fund dollars. Educators all across this country want to get better, they want results, and they want the opportunity to try new approaches to learning.

So, as we look at the last 18 months, it's absolutely stunning to see how much change has happened at the state and the local level because of these incentive programs. And that's why we're asking Congress to continue Race to the Top, I3, SIG, TIF and the Congress Neighborhood Programs. And let's not get sidetracked in a false choice between competitive and formula funding because we absolutely need both. Our blue print in our 2011 budget requests both called for fully funded formula programs like Title 1 and IBA, homeless, migrant, rural and English language learner programs. Even with increases in competitive funds and our proposed 2011 budget, 80% of our K- 12 programs are formula programs. Our blue print often, visions are more humble and realistic, federal rural and driving reform. We're a long, long way to hear the nation's capitol from our nation's classrooms. And if we've learned one thing from NCLB, it's that a one size fits all remedy, generally doesn't work.

In fact, those one size fits all tend to spite for creativity and innovation at the local level. NCLB prescribed tutoring for an entire school, even if only one subgroup was struggling. It prescribed choice for millions of children in thousands of schools, even though there are very few available options. We want to change the accountability system in two important ways. First of all, we want our whole states, districts, superintendants and school boards accountable. We can't put it all on schools. They don't operate in a vacuum, but as part of a system. There are ranges from highly supportive to highly dysfunctional. We want to stop labeling so many schools as failures, it's demoralizing counterproductive, and just plain wrong.

Instead, we want to recognize and reward high achieving and high growth schools, offering them cares incentives that we know will help drive reform and help accelerate their rate of progress. For schools in the middle which face a variety of challenges from stagnant dropout rates to stubborn achievement gaps with a particular

[00:01:03] gives them much more flexibility to improve while holding them accountable for results. We can point them to success but we can't mandate solutions. They have to figure that out at the local level, and I'm absolutely confident they will do that much more consistently than we ever could from here in Washington. The only place where we are explicitly prescriptive is with the 5% of schools. Schools that chronically underperform year after year after year. Not the 95% of schools, any states, but that bottom one in 20, where things simply aren't working for children.

We have two thousand high schools that account for half of America's dropouts. Those 2000 high schools also produce 75% of our nation's dropouts from minority communities, our African-American and Latino young men and women. Many of these dropout factories are graduating fewer than half of their students. They're in crisis, they're denying our children education, and we have a moral obligation to take dramatic action and to do so with a real sense of urgency. And we know what it takes. Great principals and great teachers, a professional learning culture where everybody takes responsibility from parents to students to educators. We all must be held accountable for these outcomes and we all must take responsibility for challenging the status quo that actually helps to perpetuate cycles of poverty and social failure.

We have learned from NCLB that if we don't mandate real consequences in these struggling schools, nothing will change and none of us should accept that. We have reached this stage of education reform after decades of trying, failing, succeeding and learning. We're building on what we know works and doesn't work. And while there is still some honest policy disagreements among chief stakeholders, there's far more consensus than I think people realize. Consider our system of teacher evaluation which both frustrated teachers who feel that their good work goes unrecognized and ignores other teachers who would benefit from additional support. Everyone agrees that teacher evaluation is largely broken. 99% of teachers today are rated satisfactorily and most evaluations ignore the most important measure of a teacher's success which is how much the students have learned that year.

Teachers also worry that their job security and salaries will be tied to a result of a bubble test that is largely disconnected from the material they are teaching. So let me be very, very clear. No one thinks test scores should be the only factor in teacher evaluations and no one wants to evaluate teachers based upon a single test on a single day. But looking at student progress over the course of a year in combination with other factors like peer review and principal observation can lead to a culture shift in our schools where we finally take good teaching as seriously as the profession deserves. We also agree that the current generation of assessments don't really measure critical thinking skills and that testing only for reading and math ignores many other critically important subjects. Over emphasis on tested subjects narrows the curriculum if teachers and principals believe that the only way to show progress is to teach for that test. But if we have better assessments that measure student growth and critical thinking skills in many subjects, we can stop assessing whether students are just matching the basics and get a much fuller picture of student learning and achievements.

The bottom line is that if we want different results we have to do things differently. Not just talk about it, but actually do it. Higher standards and better assessments as important as they are, are only the first steps. States and districts will also need to redesign curriculum to meet those higher standards. And even if districts, states' tight, tight budgets, we still need to better train our teachers and support them and recruit new ones who will help our students reach those higher standards. And here again, the warriors of the quiet revolution are way ahead of the curve. And some of them are here today and I want to call them out.

Sarah Brown Wessling is from Iowa and she's the National Teacher of the Year. She's been in the field for only ten years and already she's at the head of the pack. I had the pleasure of spending some time with her earlier this year, and her commitment to every single one of her students was absolutely stunning. Sarah can you please stand? Give you a round of applause. (Applause)

Sherry Horsley is the principal of West Carter Middle School in Olive Hill, Kentucky which is another amazing turnaround story. And her superintendent, Darlene Gee is also here today. In five years, she boosted math scores by 50% and reading scores by 25%. Today, it is one of the top middle schools in the state. Sherry, can you please stand? (Applause)

We have some great superintendents here as well. Doctor William Cummington from Kansas City who was faced with some very, very tough budget decisions that were neglected for years by that district, but he's determined to turn crisis into opportunity and right size logistics so they can improve. Terry Greer is here from Houston. He is pushing hard on school turnarounds and has a bold plan for evaluating teachers using multiple years of data on student growth. And we have Andrea Salanzo from Baltimore, who is also turning around struggling schools and making significant gains in test scores. I'd like to ask William, Terry and Andrea, all please stand. Thank you so much. (Applause)

Beyond them, there are literally thousands and thousands of innovative educators all across America using technology in new ways to improve learning education. From business running programs in Alaska, to an online PD program in Iowa called the Hartland Area Education Agency, to an online charter school in Utah called Open High. I want to salute some of America's labor leaders who are also defined to conventional wisdom and low expectations of others and showing how labor can be both a partner and a leader in driving reform. Dianne Donahue is the President of the Delaware Education Association. She was part of the team that won the first Race to the Top grant. In her words, she signed on to the plan because, "The Delaware plan offers us an opportunity to change the culture in our schools and in our classrooms. Linking student growth to evaluation is the linchpin of this reform plan." What she and Lillian Lowery will do together for education in that state is going to impact the entire country. I'd like to ask Dianne to please stand. (Applause)

In New Haven, the union overwhelmingly approved a new teacher contract that allows new principals in turnaround schools to select their own staff and an evaluation

system that factors in student growth. Interestingly, one new provision empowers teachers to evaluate their principals. In Prince George's County, Maryland, the local union partnered on a performance pay program that is so popular, the local chiefs did a video counting the benefits. [00:08:36] County is now working with its union on school turnarounds to pull great teachers into the mediate schools. And in dozens of other cities, from [00:08:44] to Pittsburgh to Denver to right here, in DC, union leaders and administrators are moving beyond the battles of the past and finding new ways to work together.

And I urge union leaders, administrators and school boards all across America to follow the example of their reform minded colleagues and have a much more open mind toward common sense reforms. They have nothing to fear from charters or from incentive pay or from more thoughtful systems of teacher evaluations. The only real threat to them and the only real threat to all of us is academic failure. I also challenge reformers to stop blaming unions for all the problems in American education. If unions were the only problem, then in all of our right to work states and all of our charter schools, they'd be outperforming the nation. And we know that's not the case. That's the old frame.

In the new frame, people are working together and everyone is moving outside their comfort zones to give children a better chance in life. Real change is driven by people willing to give their lives for a cause. People like Dr. King, who I think about every single day. He never let up in his fight for justice and equality. When he sat in a Birmingham jail, his colleagues in the movement told him to slow down and to use the court system. The answer's very simple. We can't wait. Today, people can't wait. They're fed up with schools that don't work. They see pockets of success and remarkable excellence and they ask, "Why doesn't that exist everywhere?" And there's simply no reason why it can't. Recently, President Obama said that we can't rebuild our economy on the same pile of sand. Similarly, we can't rebuild our public education systems on the same old system of rules and regulations.

We have to change the rules, we have to eliminate the excuses, and we have to hold ourselves accountable. Great teachers and great principals all across America are producing miracles in the classroom every single day. They're doing society's most important work. They are the heroes of the quiet revolution. And our job is to fight for them, to empower them, and support them. That's why we're here. Thank you so much. (Applause)

Thank you, and before I take questions I would like to announce the finalists of our second round of the Race to the Top competition. We told you during phase one that we were setting a high bar. Of the 41 applicants of phase one, there are 16 finalists and all of them with scores of more 400 points. In phase two, we have 19 states over 400 and the average score rose by 23 points. The improvement and reform we saw from states between rounds one and two was absolutely inspiring and I know how hard that progress and work is. All 19 will be invited back as finalists. They include all of the finalists from phase one that did not win. Their preliminary scores will be kept confidential until the process is complete, but here's the list of finalists in alphabetical order. Arizona,

California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and South Carolina.

As you know, we have about \$3.4 billion dollars to distribute under the second round of Race to the Top, which should be enough to fund about ten to 15 states depending on the size of the winner. But as I've said many, many times before, this isn't just about the money. This is about working together and putting the needs of children ahead of everyone else. This entire process has moved the nation in advanced education reform. Children, particularly disadvantaged children, are the big winners here because we have all learned so much more about how to find common ground around the things that we know will make a difference in the classroom. I congratulate our governors, our chief state school officers, elected officials, superintendents, principals, teachers, and parents. They are all doing remarkable and revolutionary work and they understand that we all need to get better and they're showing the kind of courage needed to get that job done. Thank you, I'm now happy to take your questions. (Applause)

ALAN BJERGA: And thank you for your address today, Secretary Duncan, and for choosing the National Press Club as the place where you would make this announcement. I know there are a lot of states that are very excited right now. A lot on your plate and coming here was one of the many things that you're doing advancing your education agenda this year. In a couple of months, you have an education summit that's coming up. What do you think about education summits? Like the ones that were held under the Bush and Clinton administrations. What is the value of such a summit and what do you hope to accomplish at the one coming up?

ARNE DUNCAN: I say all the time both jokingly and seriousl, the best ideas of an education are never going to come from me and never going to come from Washington. They're always going to come from great teachers and great educators, great principals, great superintendents at the local level. And the more we can share those ideas, the more we can get conduit for best practices, the more we can get people working together, the fast we're going to improve the country. So by bringing together smart, talented, committed folks to share ideas, to talk about what's working, what's not, I think it's to come between those at a different level. I don't think we can have enough of those conversations. I'm not just interested in Delaware and Tennessee doing a great job, I'm interested in Delaware and Tennessee helping the next generation of Race to the Top winners do a great job.

And I want the second round of winners to help the third round of winners the following year get better. We're all in this together. I think anytime we have these conversations, there's only upside with it.

ALAN BJERGA: You speak a lot of the value of civil rights and civil rights as an education issue. Some civil rights groups have called for you to change your approach to the interventions required for chronically underperforming schools. Have your

thoughts about your options evolved over the course of these competition rounds for Race to the Top.

ARNE DUNCAN: I think that the biggest challenge that we're all facing is in these very, very tough schools where students and the kids of Englewood High School in South Side Chicago for at least five decades, where students didn't have a chance, is this tremendous resistance to reform. And I think we and the civil rights community, all of us are committed to getting dramatically better results. When we talked about these dropout factories, 2000 high schools producing 75% of our dropouts from minority communities, we have a moral obligation to do much better.

And so we are being a little tough minded here. We're challenging the country to think very differently but also challenging the country to understand how quickly these schools and students can turn around. There are folks who will tell you that schools can't get better until poverty in the neighborhood goes away. I think it's absolutely the reverse. I think the only way we end cycles of poverty is by creating great educational systems. I have tremendous respect for Mark Morialis, the Urban League and Ben Gellis at NAACP and Reverend Al Sharpton had great, great conversations working together much better engaging our parents. And Ben Gellis and the NAACP had some phenomenal ideas on that. I spoke at this conference two weeks ago and incorporated many of those ideas in our blue print. I'm speaking tomorrow at the Urban League of Mark Morialis, and we're continuing to partner very, very closely to make sure every single student in this country has a chance to get a great education. That's what it's all about.

ALAN BJERGA: Did any state stand out in its approach that had more students with higher proportions of non English speakers. How heavily did states approach to these students weigh on your decisions?

ARNE DUNCAN: Obviously everyone here knows we have an increasing population around the country of English language learners and states that one of the first rounds, states that are finalists in the second round are taking these challenges very, very seriously. And we have a population that's increasingly becoming majority minority and our ability to close achievement gaps, our ability to get first generation folks going to college the opportunity to be prepared for those kinds of chances. We can't do enough to drive that. Thelma Melendez, who runs our K to 12 agenda in the Department of Education was a former GLL student. She had teachers tell her why college wasn't for her, went off and did very well in college, got a PHD, was awarded with-- the superintendent of the state of California before recruited her. So, the Thelma's of the world, the doctors of the world, I talked about there are lots of students who may not have been born in this country, may not have had English as a first language, have extraordinary potential. And we all have to be committed to helping them fulfil that tremendous potential.

ALAN BJERGA: More questions dealing with civil rights. Last year, you visited an Indian Reservation. You were shocked by the poverty and made a commitment to the education of Native Peoples when you said, "If we can't help those children, then I

will feel as if I have failed.” The National Center for Education Statistics just released scores for Indian students and there has been little progress. What efforts are currently underway to help Indian and Native students, especially in schools on reservations?

ARNE DUNCAN: That visit was one of a couple-- I’ve had some amazing visits around the country, but that’s one that I will never forget. It was a Northern Cheyenne territory in Montana. And I thought I knew poverty on the south side and west side of Chicago, but on a reservation the unemployment rate was 70% and the high school that we visited, talking to teachers, they could remember one student in the past six years-- one student going on to college. So how do you ever create opportunity there where failure is the norm? And so there’s a number of things that we have to do to increase the quality of education in disadvantaged communities. Particularly in the Indian reservations. One is we have to partner very creative ways with the FCC and with the Department of Agriculture. Having much great access to technology is huge. There’s a young man I stayed in touch with who is extraordinarily bright who’s a freshman there who was just begging for higher level opportunities and didn’t feel challenged.

So making sure if they aren’t offered in school, but online. The chance to take AP classes, chances to get college credit while in high school is hugely important. Another huge challenge is how we get great teachers and great principals to stay and serve those communities. When I heard repeatedly there’s a constant turnover. Teachers go for a couple years, build their resumes and move on. So thinking creatively about teacher housing, thinking creatively about using some of these school improvement grants to pay teachers more to work in underserved communities. And what I can’t emphasize enough is while Race to the Top has gotten all the press, and that’s fine, \$4 billion dollars there. We’re putting \$4 billion dollars behind the bottom 5% of schools. That’s a massively disproportioned investment. And whatever it takes, we want folks to do.

So it takes ten grand or 16 grand or 20 grand to get a great science teacher to work in an underserved community or a disadvantaged community, on an Indian reservation, do it. If it takes 50 grand to pay a great principal to go serve that community, do that. If you need more time for teachers to plan to work together, use those resources to do that. If students should be in school ten, 12, 14 hours a day, do that. So resources are put on the table, what we need now is creativity encouraged at the lower level. And we think not just in Indian country but in rural communities, remote communities, and inner-city communities, you’re going to see a lot more innovation, creativity that I think will hopefully change the country.

ALAN BJERGA: You mentioned you traveled a lot. I think yesterday you were at the Delaware State Fair. Friday, you were at the Delaware State Fair. You were talking about the administration outreach towards 4HFFA rural schools and you just alerted to that in your last question. Are there too many rural school districts? Is consolidating the way to a better education in small towns?

ARNE DUNCAN: I think that’s really a local decision and I think you have many states who obviously are in very, very tough budget times and thinking through HR

practices, thinking through the purchasing of textbooks, thinking through technology, thinking through payroll systems, finding ways to work together to reduce some of the administrative costs to get the [00:20:55] dollars into classrooms. I think everyone, not just in rural communities but in urban communities, need to be thinking about how to do more with less. That's the reality. How do we become much more efficient and use technology. How do we use that to drive more productivity and timing revenue. So I think all of us, you know, maybe because of the tough times it's going to slow down innovation, not just in rural communities but across the board. We all have to find ways to do more with less. That's just the reality and that's a peak of the equation but it's much larger than that.

ALAN BJERGA: And several questions dealing with grade inflation. One problem teachers face in dealing with underperforming students is pressure from parents to adjust grades upwards. How can teachers enlist the support of parents in the process of educating their children rather than facing such parents as adversaries.

ARNE DUNCAN: Let me even take it bigger than that. I can't say this strongly enough. It's this idea of higher standards. True college and career ready standards is an absolute game changer and what this means by definition is more and more states adopt, Tennessee is dealing with this right now. By definition, when you raise the bar, guess what? Test scores are going to go down. And that's a hard thing for politicians. That's a hard thing for the public to understand. Our collective challenge is that's the truth. And we have to give political cover and we have to help those with courage who are doing the right thing, step up and do that. So whether that's the state level, whether that's the district level, whether that's at the individual teacher level, we need to all be communicating that our students are competing in a global economy. And they're not competing down the block or in the district, even in the state for jobs, they're competing with children in India and China and we need to have a common measuring stick, we need to level the playing field and give every student the chance to be successful.

And this is easier said than done, but what we have to do collectively, is we have to reward courage, not what is politically expedient, not what helps for your few political points by grade inflation or dumbing down standards which we're seeing. We have a lot of folks with some tremendous courage, and we have to collectively make sure we keep shining a spotlight on them encouraging others to follow through. So that's a good-- teacher level, principal level, district level, state level, all across the board we're seeing a fundamental breakthrough and we have to do everything we can to keep that movement going forward.

ALAN BJERGA: Here in Washington, School's chancellor Michelle Rhee faced tough criticism last week when she severed almost 200 teachers for performance issues. At a time when it's challenging to find quality teachers to staff inner city schools, what can you say to teachers who face new standards for performance and do you support Chancellor Rhee's actions?

ARNE DUNCAN: I think what happened here in DC a couple of months ago was a breakthrough labor agreement between the District and the teacher's union. I can tell you 85% of teachers voted for the agreement. As part of that agreement was a teacher evaluation system. And to me again, at some point, they were looking at growth and gain and how much the student's improving. So the details of that they'll work out at the local level but the larger point to your question is, I think in our country we've had very few incentives and lots of disincentives for the hardest working and most committed teachers and principals to work in underserved communities. Be that inner city urban or be that rural. And we talked the most about the achievement gap. I'm convinced the only way we close the achievement gap is by closing what I call the opportunity gap.

And folks who use local resources and we're begging them to use our resources to create a very different opportunity structure so the best teachers, the hardest working teachers and principals are attracted and stay in those communities that need the most help. And that could happen in DC, that could happen in inner city communities around the country. That can happen in rural communities. If there's unprecedented resources on the table, folks have the chance to be very, very creative and figure out what's the right local solution to getting great talent where we need it most. And if we're serious about closing achievement gaps, we will take this on in an unprecedented way.

ALAN BJERGA: DC was one of your 19 finalists in Race to the Top. Are actions such as the firings last week the sort of thing that will help DC with this and future competitions? (Laughter)

ARNE DUNCAN: Well, I think it's a Race to the Top. And I don't think anyone's going to fire their way to the top. I think what DC is having honest conversations and there's tough conversation changes. DC's having honest conversations, trouble to find, DC's also putting huge amount of resources on the table through award excellence. And I think as a country, we fail to reward excellence. We're fail to provide support in the middle and we're fail to those ones that are simply not working after support and mentoring, we fail to move them onto other professions. And, so where we have districts, including DC, they're trying to be much more thoughtful, much more comprehensive. They're doing this in partnership with unions, rewarding excellence, [00:25:31] in the middle and having honest conversations where it's simply not working. I think we need to have more of that.

ALAN BJERGA: A lot of focus on education policy tends to go K through 12, but education is of course more and more including college education. This questioner asks, "State support for public universities is under pressure in many jurisdictions. Is the federal Department of Education assisting at the undergrad and grad level?"

ARNE DUNCAN: \$36 billion dollars in programs I thought was pretty good step in the right direction and obviously these are tough times for not just, you know, K to 12 but higher ed. We're continuing to urge universities to find ways to contain costs in busting tough budget times. And, I think clearly we still have the best system of higher education in the world. Something we should be very, very proud of. What we need to

continue to do have is dry out completion rates on the higher education side, so it's not just about access, it's really about attainment. It's pretty interesting as you look at colleges and universities, they're not too dissimilar to high schools. Some do a remarkable job of building a culture around completion, and doing a great job of supporting first generation college-goers and English language learners. And others frankly don't do a good enough job there. And something we want to continue to do is to find ways to try and spotlight on those universities that aren't just getting students in the front door, but helping them come out the back end.

And all of our work, and this is the heart of it, all of our work is simply behind that presence 20/20 goal. That's our North Star of trying to lead the world in percent of college graduates. So we need to keep down tuition. We need to continue to increase access. We have to be focused not just on access but on completion.

ALAN BJERGA: Does the U.S. need more vocational education, especially when many college graduates can't find jobs?

ARNE DUNCAN: We do. It's a great question. I'll take it at two levels. If we're serious about reducing dropout rates at the high school side, giving students a chance to work with their hands, to build their technical skills, to find apprenticeships which is going to lead to very high paying jobs. If any of you have paid a plumber lately, you know they're doing pretty well. These are great jobs.

And I think this is one of the areas where it's interesting. I think in the 1960's we probably did a much better job. This is a country, and somehow we lost our way a little bit. And so I think vocational and technical education is a range of options for high school students are going to keep a lot of students engaged and involved in school and give them a reason to complete.

And then beyond that I think we had a huge push on the community college's side, and a \$2 billion dollar investment there. And it's not just, you know, 15 and 16 year olds, but it's 28 year olds, and 48's and 58 year olds going back to retrain and retool. So green energy job, healthcare jobs, technology jobs, there are many, many folks who are getting back on their feet through the community colleges. As they do I think our country is going to get back on their feet.

So both at the high level and at the community college level I think we can do a much, much better job in terms of vocational and technical training.

ALAN BJERGA: Recently proposed Department of Education regulations would create a new federal definition of a credit hour. Is it truly necessary to federalize academic measures that have historically been left to the accrediting agencies, the states and in the end into the agencies?

ARNE DUNCAN: I think what we're looking for there, and there's larger issues we're doing around gainful employment, which this doesn't get at. But I think we're just

trying to have a clear definition. And it's been very, very difficult for some students to transfer between two year universities and four year universities, and having some consistency in making sure those transfer agreements are much easier so students aren't losing credits as they're trying to complete (sic) and trying to get ahead I think would do a great service to students.

ALAN BJERGA: One of the things that tends to go when budget cuts are made in school, one of the first things tends to be arts funding. Several people asked, "How valuable do you feel it is to integrate the arts into core subject instruction?"

ARNE DUNCAN: It is hugely, hugely important. And let me take a moment on this. Probably the biggest complaint I heard about NCLB as I've traveled the country, urban, rural, suburban, it didn't matter in the setting, was about a mailing of the curriculum, sort of a teaching to a test. And yes, reading and math are hugely important foundational, but so is science, so is social studies, so is financial literacy, so is art and music, and dance and drama, and PE, physical education. Recess, I think we need more recess in our schools.

So this idea of a well rounded education is hugely, hugely important. And you're right, often when folks are hit with tough budget times, those things that are seen as extra get cut. Well, I don't think art is an extra. I don't think social studies is an extra. I don't think PE is an extra. And you know, most folks in this room would understand, if you want to drive up math scores, one of the best ways to do that is through music. And it's not about every student going to the Jaffrey Ballet. It's giving students a reason. It's like the vocational technical conversations—giving students a reason to be engaged in coming to school. And it's often those extracurricular and after school programs banned in dance and drama and debate team, and chess and yearbook that give students a reason to come to school.

So one of the biggest proposals in our FY11 budget, which we want to do through reauthorization, is we want to put a billion dollars behind what's called a well-rounded education. And to me this can't just be at the high school level. This has got to be for six and seven and eight year olds. And our young children have to have a chance to develop their skills and their interests and their sense of self esteem. And I worry tremendously about this area of the curriculum, which doesn't give our students a chance to blossom, doesn't help them develop their creative skills. And I think frankly puts them in a competitive disadvantage with the rest of the world. And so making sure every single student has access to a well rounded education is hugely, hugely important.

ALAN BJERGA: Several questions were variations on the question of longer school days, or longer school years. This questioner asks, "Is there any interest in starting K-12 earlier, say age three, or having school days last until 5 p.m., which is similar to some European school systems?"

ARNE DUNCAN: I think school should be open 13 months a year. [laughter] I usually get booed when I talk to students about this. But I think most folks here realize

that our current day of five or six hours a day, and five days a week, and nine months a year is based upon the agrarian economy. And not too many of our children are working the fields these days. And children in India and China are going to school 20 days, 30 days, 35 days more than us.

It's like if you practice basketball, if you practice three times a week versus a team that practices five times a week, the team that practices five times a week is probably going to win more games. So I think this is simply about leveling the playing field. So in all seriousness, I think school should be open 12, 13, 14 hours a day. I think they should be open six, seven days a week, 11, 12 months out of the year. And it's not just more of the same. The whole variety of after-school programs, academic enrichment being at the heart of that. But some things we talked about—dance and drama, and art and music, chess, yearbook(?), robotics, activities for older siblings and parents, GED classes, ESL classes, family literacy nights.

As you guys know our world has changed, our economy has changed. The days in which children go home at 2:30 and mom is there with a peanut butter sandwich, those days are gone. And whether it's a single parent working one, two, three jobs or looking for work, two parent working families, whatever it might be, those hours from three o'clock to six o'clock, three o'clock to seven o'clock are times of huge, huge anxiety for parents. And so we have to keep our schools open longer.

And I'm going to be really clear. People say we can't afford it. Well, it might take a little bit of money, but let me just give you some ideas. In Chicago one of the things we did is we ran some schools from nine o'clock in the morning to three o'clock at night. And then the Boys and Girls Clubs came in, and they ran the school from three o'clock in the afternoon to nine o'clock at night. And we have all these great non-profits and social service agencies around the country. Everybody's struggling financially. My question to them, the Y's, the Boys Clubs, is do we need to keep building new buildings, or do we just need to put them into our schools and put all the money into programs and to children, tutoring and mentoring, not into bricks and mortar?

And all of our schools, we have 95,000 schools in our country, rich neighborhoods and poor neighborhoods, every single neighborhood, every school has classrooms. They have libraries. Almost all have computer labs. They have gyms. Some have pools. These are wonderful, wonderful physical resources, assets to the community. They don't belong to me or to the principal or to the union; they belong to the community. And I think we have to think very, very differently about how we utilize our buildings and the kinds of partnerships we build. And I think keeping schools open longer hours and where they truly become the center of the neighborhood and the heart of family life, and families are learning together, those children are going to do very, very well.

ALAN BJERGA: One quick question about a previous career path that you had followed. LeBron James recently chose Miami heat to play with Dee Wade and Chris

Boche over the Chicago Bulls, Cleveland Cavaliers and other franchises. Would LeBron had made such a decision had he attended college? [laughter]

ARNE DUNCAN: Next question please.

ALAN BJERGA: We will ask one more question, Mr. Secretary, but first a few announcements.

A couple important matters to take care of. First to remind our members and guests of future speakers. On August 19th, Mitch Landrieu, the Mayor of the city of New Orleans, will report on the city's progress and potential. On September 13th the Rev. David Beckman, President of Bread for the World, and this year's recipient of the World Food Prize will discuss eliminating hunger, the people and Congress.

And on October 12th General Norman Schwartz, Chief of Staff for the U.S. Air Force, will be discussing military issues in the war in Afghanistan.

That's our first item of business. Our second is to present our speaker with the one token of appreciation that we will give a speaker here at the National Press Club, our legendary and coveted Press Club mug. [applause]

And now our final question. What is the most important thing that a parent can do, and a teacher can do to get us where we need to be to help children succeed?

ARNE DUNCAN: That's another hour, so I'll try to be very quick. It's obviously very personal, my wife and I have a six year old and an eight year old at home. I think the most important thing we can do as parents is to be engaged, and to be full and equal partners to teachers. And teachers have an extraordinarily hard jobs. And where parents aren't engaged, and where parents are adversarial, teachers can't do this alone. And so our job is to be absolutely supportive of what's going on during the school day. Our job is to create the time and the space after school for our children to read and get their homework done and to be supportive of that.

And I don't think we can overstate how important parental engagement is. We didn't get into this one thing we're looking to do in our budget is to double funding for parental engagement. We think that's a hugely missing link in this education chain. And we want to reward best practices and really engaging parents in non-traditional ways.

I think the most important thing a teacher can do is to just give their heart to the children. And half of education may be about the intellectual part, the brains. The other half is really about your heart. And how much do you really believe that every single child can learn? How much are you committed to going the extra mile? Teachers like Sarah and others, it's not a job, it's a passion, it's a calling. And I absolutely believe great teachers are the unsung heroes in our society. We can't do enough to recognize and reward them and support them. But, this is not an easy job. This is not for the faint of heart. And there are ups and downs, and many days you wonder if you're breaking

through. But those teachers that absolutely believe in their heart that every child can be successful, and is willing to put in the time and energy to help every student reach that potential, that's what great teachers do every single day. And we can't do enough to thank them.

ALAN BJERGA: And thank you, Secretary Duncan. [applause] And thank you all for coming today. We would also like to thank the National Press Club staff, including its Library and Broadcast Operation Center for organizing today's event. For more information about joining the National Press Club, and on how to acquire a copy of today's program, please go to our website at www.press.org. Thank you. Today's meeting of the National Press Club is adjourned.

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