

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SECRETARY ARNE DUNCAN

SUBJECT: THE STATE OF THE AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

MODERATOR: THERESA WERNER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2012

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THERESA WERNER: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Theresa Werner, and I am the 105th President of the National Press Club. We are the world's leading professional organization for journalists committed to our profession's future through our programming and events such as these while fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. To donate to programs offered to the public through our National Press Club Journalism Institute, please visit press.org/institute.

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and those of you attending today's event. Our head table includes guests for our speaker as well as working journalists who are club members. And if you hear applause in our audience, we'd note that members of the general public are attending so it is not necessarily evidence of a lack of journalistic objectivity. (Laughter)

I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and our Public Radio audiences. Our luncheons are also featured on our member-produced weekly Podcast from the National Press Club available on iTunes. You can also follow the action on Twitter using hashtag NPClunch. After our guest's speech concludes, we'll have a Q&A, and I will ask as many questions as time permits. Now I would like to introduce our head table guests, and I'd ask each of you here to stand up briefly as your name is announced.

From your right, Adam Shapiro, Lipman Hearne; Sarah Sparks, *Education Week*; Gene Wilhoit, Executive Director, Council of Chief State School Officers and a guest of our speaker; Carole Feldman, Director News Operations and Finance, Washington National Education Editor, Associated Press; Deb Delisle, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, U.S. Department of Education and a guest of our speaker; Alison Fitzgerald, Chair of the National Press Club Speakers Committee and freelance journalist.

I'm going to skip our speaker for just a moment. Debra Silimeo, Executive Vice President Hager Sharp and Speakers Committee member who organized today's luncheon; Joe Conaty, Director, Academic Improvement and Teacher Quality Programs, U.S. Department of Education and guest of our speaker; Sean Hurd, George Washington University and 2012 winner of the National Press Club Scholarship for Journalism Diversity; Michelle Bazie, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; Peggy Orchowski, Congressional Correspondent, Hispanic Outlook on Higher Ed. Thank you all for joining us. (Applause)

Education drives America. That's U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's message. And he has literally been driving. His annual back to school bus tour just completed; 8 days, 12 states, 48 communities and more than 100 events. Along the way, he's been shooting hoops with students, eating school lunches and even learned the Cupid Shuffle with the kids in Denver. You may be relieved to know, Mr. Secretary, that we will not be showing the video clip of that. (Laughter)

Tireless is a good word to describe Secretary Duncan. He's been at this relentless pace for almost four years. He was one of President Obama's first appointments, and he's been driving an aggressive education reform agenda from day one. It helped to have unprecedented resources. In the midst of the worst economy since the Depression, he's been able to leverage recovery dollars to push for reform and created a competition among the states to get grants linked through their willingness to embrace reforms.

The Race to the Top grants are being used to entice states to embrace a common set of academic standards, use student test scores to help evaluate teachers, and give parents more options when it comes to where their children go to school. For critics, these moves can be seen more like sticks than carrots. Before he stepped into the driver's seat at the U.S. Education Department, Duncan served as CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, one of the nation's largest and most challenging school systems. He closed schools that didn't perform and somehow brought the usually warring education stakeholders together to help raise student achievement.

The recent strike in Chicago is evidence that, like much of the reform agenda, this unions and reform relationship is still a work in progress. His passion for education can be traced back to his childhood in Chicago in the early '60s where his mother started an after school program for disadvantaged kids on the city's south side. A young Duncan was there tutoring and playing basketball and learning how education can help open some pretty heavy doors.

While many people feel that great progress has been made in education, most agree that student achievement still leaves a lot to be desired in the globally competitive economy. Today, Secretary Duncan is here to share some insights from his travels around the country to take stock of the last four years and to look forward. The National Press Club is pleased to welcome Education Secretary Arne Duncan. (Applause)

SECRETARY DUNCAN: Thank you so much, Theresa, and thanks to all of you for taking time out to come to this lunch today. Three weeks ago, we began a cross country bus tour that you heard a little bit about in California to visit schools, to meet with educators and students, to get feedback and listen, and to generally take the pulse of people after nearly four years in office. And I can report that although the hard work of improving schools is difficult and challenging, as we all know, and requires many people to move outside their comfort zones, the mood out there is largely positive. People are working hard, extremely hard. And for the most part, they are working together. They know that it takes strong partnerships to raise standards, to improve performance, tackle dropout rates and strengthen our teaching profession.

Our theme this year was Education Drives America. People everywhere understand that education and the economy are inextricably linked. They know that the path to the middle class runs right through our nation's classrooms. They know that it all starts with high quality early learning programs, especially for children at risk. And they want to see Head Start and preschool programs protected and strengthened.

It continues in K-12 with great teachers and leaders, high standards, and a rich, well rounded curriculum. And more and more states and districts are committed to all of those goals. People know that college is no longer a luxury for the few, but essential for the many. With more than three million unfilled jobs in this country, they understand that we have a skills gap that can only be closed if America does a better job training and preparing people for work.

Whether it's a two year or four year college, trade, technical or vocational training, some form of learning beyond high school has to be the goal for every single one of our nation's children. People also know that it's not just our economic security that's at stake, but our national security as well. A strong military remains our best defense, but a strong educational system is our best offense.

They feel pressure in a recovering economy and they understand that it will take time to dig out of this hole. And they believe that investing in education is the right way to do it, though they rightly worry about where that money is going to come from. School budgets are tight, and that's having a real impact in far too many classrooms. Resources are shrinking for the arts and sports and after school programs. Counselors, school nurses and other support staff are stretched thin or sometimes eliminated all together, and none of that, none of that, is good for children.

In our first two years with the Recovery Act and the American Jobs Act, we helped protect the jobs of 400,000 educators. But that money's mostly gone now, and in the last two years, an estimated 300,000 teachers lost their jobs. And unfortunately, there's little appetite on the Hill now to help.

Nevertheless, within the education space, there is enormous energy, what I called a quiet revolution the last time I spoke here. States and districts, schools and communities, are driving more change than ever before around tough, complex issues like raising standards, better evaluation, assessments, turning around underperforming schools and using technology in more creative ways.

Above all, there is enormous enthusiasm at the state level to build more effective accountability systems through the waiver process that we began last fall. And now affecting more than 60 percent of school children in the country and 33 states with about 10 more states currently in the pipeline.

Waivers are not a pass on accountability, but a smarter, more focused and fair way to hold ourselves accountable. In exchange for adopting high standards and meaningful systems of teacher support and evaluation, states set ambitious but achievable targets for every sub group. More children at risk who are literally invisible under No Child Left Behind are now included in the state designed accountability systems including low income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

Finally, local districts decide the most effective way to intervene in underperforming schools. Instead of having to apply rigid top down mandates from us here in Washington.

Under flexibility, states also recognize growth and progress in more and more schools, rather than having to label them as failures even when they're improving. That used to drive me crazy. It was both demoralizing and wrong. And let me cite a couple of concrete examples. Columbus Park Elementary in Worcester, Mass., was among the lowest performing schools in the state under NCLB, even though they were closing achievement gaps. Under the waiver they have now, those gains count for something.

Kingsbury Middle School in Memphis, Tennessee, made gains for nearly all sub groups of students and was actually in the top 5 percent of its state in terms of student growth, student improvement. But under No Child Left Behind, it would have failed to make AYP.

That's not to say that these schools no longer have educational challenges; obviously they all do, they all have a long way to go. But they have achievable targets, a plan to close those gaps and they are getting real results for their children. Contrast that with No Child Left Behind, which set lofty goals for all kids but didn't require high standards. And many states chose to take the easy path. In fact, about 19 states lowered one or more of their standards, and 35 states set proficiency levels in fourth grade reading

at below basic levels under NAPE. Children and families were, in fact, being lied to, told they were on track for success when in far too many cases they weren't even close.

The fact is, many educators didn't take NCLB seriously because it assumed that all children start from the same place and learn at the same rate. And we know that's just not reality. And the record on NCLB is clear; performance is up slightly, and achievement gaps have narrowed somewhat, but not nearly enough. Under waivers, we will accelerate that pace, and you don't have to take my word for it. Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels said, and I quote, "The waiver will make for a fairer system that focuses on what matters most, getting the whole system to perform better in terms of student learning."

And Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper told me that flexibility gives his state the ability to advance a carefully designed and ambitious accountability agenda. All across America today, educators at every level are being more and more creative, pairing good schools with struggling schools, creating smaller, more manageable districts, and building partnerships between both high schools and colleges and between colleges and the private sector.

Today, we are asking so much more of ourselves and so much more of each other and everyone, everyone, is stepping up; parents and teachers and administrators, community leaders, and importantly our students themselves. And let me tell you about a few of the remarkable people we met on that bus trip.

In Silicon Valley where we started, I met a 9th grade English teacher named Caitlin Tucker, who wrote a book on how teachers and technology can work together in the classroom to both empower teachers and to engage students. I met Sal Khan, whose free video lessons, 3,000 lessons he's created, have been downloaded over 196 million times by children across the globe, including our two children. I met Andrew Ng, who runs Coursera and Sebastian Thrun, who runs Udacity offering free college courses online to students everywhere.

In Sacramento, I met with California mayors and school superintendents who were working together to align city services for their schools needs and speaking collectively on behalf of their city's children. In Reno, we held a town hall at a state university for students desperate, desperate for the American dream. And they wonder why their country, our country, denies education to children of undocumented immigrants.

Our senior leaders met with Native Americans in Elko, a turnaround school in Salt Lake City and a community college in Wyoming. Along with two U.S. Senators and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, we ate locally grown produce at a school in Denver, and even as you heard, tried to dance the Cupid Shuffle. That won't happen again. (Laughter)

We visited the historic site in Topeka, Kansas, where Linda Brown's lawsuit demanding the right to attend her neighborhood school forever changed the course of public education in America. We talked about our historic commitment to equity and acknowledged the promises still unmet in the hope of *Brown v. Board of Education*. And if we're serious about closing the achievement gap, we have to get much more serious about closing what I call the opportunity gap. And as a country, quite frankly, we're not even close.

With my good friend NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, we went to the National Teachers Hall of Fame in Emporia, Kansas, and held a town hall there with some amazing future teachers. In Kansas City, we met with parents of ELL students. The bus continued through the eastern part of the country visiting Illinois and Indiana and Kentucky. And AFT President Randy Weingarten joined us in rural West Virginia, McDowell County.

We visited Roanoke and Richmond before concluding back here in Washington with a rally, a college fair, and a great concert. All told, we did over 100 events in a dozen different states involving the entire senior staff of our department and countless partners in big cities and small towns all across the country. And our teacher ambassador fellows, an amazing group, did 50 additional round tables with their classroom colleagues.

The trip was a powerful reminder for all of us that the real work for improving schools simply doesn't happen here in Washington, but in cities, in towns and communities all across America where parents, teachers, and community leaders work together towards a common goal.

Our job for the last 3 ½ years has been to support that hard work, to support bold and courageous reform at the state and local level. And that's what *Race to the Top* was all about. We offered the biggest competitive grants in our department's history and 45 states raised standards and 33 states changed laws in order to compete and to accelerate student achievement. And what was a fascinating lesson in the power of incentives, we've actually seen as much reform in states that didn't receive a nickel of our money as in states that received tens of millions of dollars. The fact that 45 states have now adopted internationally benchmarked college and career ready standards is an absolute game changer. Virtually, the entire country has voluntarily raised expectations for our children.

At the same time, states are doing more than ever before to strengthen the teaching profession. We started a national conversation with thousands of classroom teachers to think boldly about how to create real career pathways, evaluate and support each other based not simply on a test score but always, always in multiple measures. How to boost their pay, attract the next generation of great talent and ultimately transform the entire profession.

To further elevate teacher, we joined with national teachers unions and associations representing superintendents and school boards to together publicly embrace

a new set of bold reform principles. We've redefined labor management collaboration as a tool for school improvement and increasing student achievement.

And our partners are absolutely stepping up to meet that challenge. Literally today, the NEA is announcing a new effort to train the next generation of STEM teachers, building on its successful pilot program in New Jersey. And I want to salute Dennis and his team for their commitment in helping to fill that area of critical need. Thank you so much. Our first term set an ambitious pace for change. And as America looks towards the future, we all have to make sure that all of this change proceeds in a logical way that will deliver results.

I also know that some educators feel overwhelmed by the speed and by the pace of change. Teachers I speak with always, always embrace accountability and a fair system of evaluation. They want feedback so they can get better and so they can hone their craft. But some of them say it's all happening too quickly and not always in a way that is respectful and fair. They want an evaluation system that recognizes out of school factors and distinguishes among students with special needs, gifts and backgrounds. They don't want to be evaluated based on one test score, and I absolutely agree with them. Evaluation must be based on multiple measures.

When it comes to building systems of evaluation and support, teachers must be at the table shaping those terms. And that's exactly what they did in Jefferson County, Colorado where management and labor came together to develop a performance pay model based on a robust system of evaluation. They established new leadership roles for teachers that allow them to earn more and both stay in the classroom and do what they love and have a greater voice in how their schools are run. That's both common sense and revolutionary at the same time.

And just last week, we announced almost \$300 million in grants to support performance pay and new models for teacher leadership and advancement. The winning proposals had the input and support of management, teachers, and labor leaders. We continue to hear frustration with standardized tests. Two consortia of 44 states are currently developing new assessments that will be better aligned to what teachers are teaching and better measure critical thinking skills. But obviously, we're not there yet.

Some people also want all of us, collectively, to do more to address poverty and I share that concern as well. I grew up working with children in poverty and in Chicago 85 percent of my 400,000 students lived below the poverty line. I know the kinds of social and emotional and academic challenges facing our children, their families and our schools. By far, my biggest concern, my biggest worry in Chicago, was for my children's safety and far too many lost their lives due to senseless violence in their communities.

Together, we absolutely must do more to serve low income children and we must find the bipartisan will to address their needs and close that opportunity gap. Honestly, however, that's a challenge in the current political climate. If some members of Congress have their way, programs like Head Start and Title I and IDA could take big, big hits.

And so we need to continue to fight, and fight hard, for these programs that help protect children at risk.

We all know that it's harder to teach in disadvantaged communities and it unquestionable demands more of both teachers and principals. But in the world of today where we don't always have all the supports we might want or need, none of us can shrink from this responsibility to educate all children no matter what their circumstances. In fact, that exact challenge is what drives so many of us in our daily work.

Clearly, not everyone is cut out for this hard work. But those who are deserve our deepest respect and appreciation. And I just want to salute one more example where committed educators have made heroic progress with disadvantaged students. Emerson Elementary School improvement is one of over 1,300 schools across the country to receive a federal School Improvement Grant, what we call a SIG grant. It was one of the lowest performing schools in the entire state of Kansas. Almost half of the students there were learning English for the first time.

With this grant, Emerson brought in new school leadership and made other staffing changes and also made a big investment in parental engagement. School officials knocked on doors, talked to parents at home, and organized data meetings to show parents exactly how their children were performing. In their first year, Emerson made double digit gains in reading and math. And after two years, their progress not only got them off the list of struggling schools, but earned them the status as a reward school under our flexibility plans.

All told, two-thirds of our six schools made gains in reading and math in the first year of the program. They did this with the same students, and in many cases the same teachers under new school leadership. Hundreds, hundreds of schools are proving that we can improve student achievement and overcome poverty, family breakdown, and other factors, if we focus on the children, engage their parents and empower our teachers.

Above all, what I picked up on our bus tour is a tremendous abiding faith in the power of education to change lives for the better. People know that education is not only the best way to end poverty and to build a strong future, it's really the only way. And the choice facing our country today is pretty stark. I believe we're at a fork in the road. Some folks see education as an expense government can cut in tough economic times. President Obama and I see education as an investment in our future, the best investment we can make especially, especially, in tough economic times.

America's too far behind other countries in terms of math and science. Top students from around the world are more likely to be bilingual or even trilingual than our children. And today, we're 14th in the world in terms of college completion when one generation ago, we led the world. One of the big factors impeding our economic recovery is the lack of education. And that's why millions of jobs remain unfilled even in a tough economy. Some 90 million adults in America have basic or below basic literacy skills

and a quarter of our children never complete high school. What chance do they have to contribute in today's economy?

In fact, some say our dropout crisis has the impact of a permanent national recession and the loss of human productivity and potential is staggering. Clearly, this is not a time to retreat. Going forward, our education goals build on what we've already accomplished; high quality early learning for children particularly in disadvantaged communities. State driven accountability that demands progress for all children, more local decision making and fewer mandates from us here in Washington. More support in training for principals and teachers to translate high standards into practice. More personalization in the classroom and greater student engagement. A stronger partnership between teachers and technology. A new generation of math and science teachers recruited from our top universities and from the private sector. Passage of the Dream Act so that the talent and potential of our dreamers can benefit the entire country.

Reforming career education programs in high schools and in community colleges and strengthening their ties to the private sector. Closing the skills gap and helping millions of unemployed or underemployed adults join the 21st century economy. And finally, we need to take a hard look at the entire system of student aid, the Pell shortfall, our many grant and loan programs. More than a dozen different tax credits and ask how we can not only simplify but also help drive college affordability and completion. The goal can't simply be access, it has to be about attainment as well.

We have obviously had an ambitious agenda over the past four years. And now is the time to double down on what we know is working, steadily moving forward while staying laser-like focused. We all hope Congress will work together in a bipartisanship way and join us in this effort. And above all, we must continue to pursue the national goal set out by President Obama of being, again, the most educated nation in the world with the highest percentage of college graduates.

There are real signs of progress. College enrollment among Hispanics is up 25 percent in recent years. College completion is also rising. We are not alone in this effort. And also just today, the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities together announced a broad new commitment to boost the number of bachelor's degrees awarded by 3.8 million by 2025. That's a huge step in the right direction.

Meanwhile, nearly 10 million students use federal Pell grants to attend college this year, up from just 6 million a couple years ago. Americans are desperately, desperately hungry for a quality education and willing to do just about anything to get one. They know what's at stake for them, their futures and for their family.

And let me tell you about Regina Flores. She dropped out of high school, but with Pell grants, she went back and eventually earned physics and math degrees from Columbia. And today, she works at a Fortune 500 company in New York. Sandra Louie

is a war veteran who used Pell grants to earn a four year degree from the University of California San Diego. Today, she's a chemical engineer.

Emanuel Mavrakis [?] grew up in poverty in Los Angeles. He started in community college, graduated from UCLA with degrees in microbiology and molecular genetics, and went on to Harvard Medical School where he graduated summa cum laude.

We came to Washington to fight for Regina and Sandra and Emanuel and the millions of students, the millions of students, like them who just need a chance to prove themselves. They are all out there in big cities and small towns. I met people like them everywhere we went. They give me hope and they inspire me and my team to work harder. They're ready to invent something new and remarkable, to find a cure for cancer, to start a new business, to become a school teacher and build a stronger America. They're not asking for a handout; they want a hand up. They will work hard, they will give it everything they have, and we owe them the same. We owe our children so much more. Education shouldn't be so hard. School children shouldn't fear for their safety. They shouldn't have to worry about being hungry.

Schools should not have to choose between arts and sports or after school activities and summer school to balance their budgets. Teachers should not be isolated in their classrooms and forced to teach to a test. Young people should not have to complete their education saddled with huge debt. But too often this is the reality in America today. And to change these realities, we must rise above the partisan politics. We have to set aside the tired old debates pitting reformers against unions. And we have to discard the ugly and divisive rhetoric of blame and all of us have to become much more self reflective.

We have to unite behind the cause of public education and recognize that the solutions don't come from one party or one ideology. They come from people of good will, teachers and principals, parents, business and community leaders, all joining together supporting each other and creating the right conditions for learning. They come from elected officials and school boards with the courage to tell the truth, especially when it carries real political risks.

It comes from students themselves, like a group of fantastic young leaders I met with yesterday finding their own voices and demanding the education they want and need and deserve. And finally, it comes from all of us, you and me, challenging ourselves and holding ourselves accountable. We don't have a minute to waste. Thank you so much, I'm happy to take your questions. (Applause)

MS. WERNER: Although some states have applied for waivers to NCLB, several big states have not including Pennsylvania and Texas. Are you still considering a waiver program for districts?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: We're still considering it, we're still working with-- again, we have about a dozen states currently we're going through the process with.

When we get to the back end of that, we'll see where we net out. But again to see at the end of the day 40, 45 states step up here showing tremendous, tremendous leadership has been a huge step in the right direction. Once we finish with states, we'll figure out what we do with districts.

MS. WERNER: American school children attend school the lowest number of days of any developed country. We are the only ones who still have a three month summer vacation. What can be done about establishing a national school hour standard and a system run by states and local jurisdictions?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I usually get booed by kids when I talk about this and cheered by adults. But, I've said repeatedly, repeatedly, our day is too short, our week is too short and our year is too short. And I think our children are as smart, as talented, as creative, as entrepreneurial as children anywhere in the world. We just have to level the playing field. And when children in China and Singapore and South Korea and other places, India, go to school 30, 35, 40, 45 more days than our children, think of the cumulative impact of that kindergarten through 12th grade. So what we're doing doesn't make sense. It's hard to expand time in tough economic times. But we have to think really creatively of not just how we expand the school day, but how we expand how our buildings are used. Bringing in nonprofits, bringing in social service agencies, YMCAs, Boy's Clubs, having our school buildings be open 12, 13, 14 hours a day. And if we do that and where schools really become the centers of the community, our kids do fine.

When we have schools going the opposite direction, going to four-day weeks, shortening the time, getting rid of foreign language and P.E. and dance and drama and music, we're really cutting off our nose to spite our face. It makes no sense whatsoever.

MS. WERNER: You mentioned the skills gap and millions of unfilled jobs. Should companies take more responsibility for on the job training?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I think companies are taking more responsibility, but I think this is one where we in education have to really look in the mirror. And the fact of the matter is that far too few young people are getting the skills they need, middle school, high school, community college, four year universities, to go into the world of work. And I can't tell you how many CEOs that I've met with and the President's met with, who say we are right now trying to hire in this country in tough economic times and we can't find the employees with the skills we need. And so companies need to do more, but we in education, I think, are far from getting a pass on this. We have to really step up.

One quick anecdote, and I won't tell you which state, but not on the bus tour, in a previous visit, this is a state where I met with about a dozen local CEOs, sort of a manufacturing community, and a dozen local superintendents. So these are all people desperately invested in their community. Asked the CEOs how many of the graduates from the school systems were ready to go into the world of work and they said less than 50 percent. And the room got real quiet. I asked how often the CEOs and superintendents

got together to talk about these challenges, the room got more quiet and someone said, "When the Secretary comes to town." So these are people who all desperately care about their kids, their community, they simply weren't communicating. That has to stop. That has to stop.

MS. WERNER: A member of our audience, their child's school is aggressively purchasing technology such as promethean boards. Is there any evidence that all of this technology improves learning?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I don't know the specifics on promethean boards, I do think the idea of having our children and our teachers having access to great technology and the chance to learn and pursue their skills and passions 24/7 any time, anywhere, any place, rather than just having the chance to learn six hours a day five days a week, nine months out of the year. I think this is a game changer. I think it's a huge piece of our equity agenda, whether it's inner city urban or rural or remote or Native American reservations, having those kinds of opportunities to learn I think are hugely, hugely important.

The world is changing, there's another big area where as a country we are going to lead or we are going to be a laggard. I think we should be moving from print to digital absolutely as fast as we can over the next couple years. Textbooks should be obsolete. Other countries are moving very aggressively in this way. A small number of districts, and I always cite Mooresville, North Carolina, is doing an amazing job in this area. But again, this has to become where we go as a country.

MS. WERNER: You've given a massive amount of money and incentives to states for early learning programs, new accountability systems, general reform efforts, NCLB waivers, et cetera. How would you evaluate your return on investment?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I think it's still early, but we always talk about Race to the Top which \$4 billion, sounds like a lot of money, is a lot of money; \$4 billion is less than 1 percent of what we spend on K-12 education this year. We spent closer to \$700 billion. So for about a half of one percent, I think I can make a pretty compelling case that we've seen more change, more creativity, more reform, more innovation, not, again as I said before, not just in states that receive money, but across the country in the past two or three years than over the past couple decades. So we're thrilled with where we're going, but clearly a lot of unfinished business ahead of us.

MS. WERNER: Can you provide specific budget amounts as to what the administration considers adequate funding under Title I to support parenting involvement?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: So this is an area where I would give us a low grade. And I think one area where we haven't done enough is around parental engagement. And that piece is so hugely important and critical. I think there are some areas where our department has historically underinvested. This is one of them. Historically, we've had

about \$135 million to put behind parental engagement. We're actually asking Congress in these tough economic times to double that investment, to \$280 million. And we don't want to create parental engagement programs here in Washington. What we want to do is to invest and to take to scale local parental engagement programs that are making a real difference in student achievement, not just bake sales or whatever. But where what you're doing as parents are leading to higher graduation rates and lower dropout rates and more students going on to college.

So I think we have not done enough. We're trying to be very self critical in that area and want to do a heck of a lot more than we have in the past.

MS. WERNER: The federal government has been piling dollars onto the already sky high education budget. Should giving states greater control over their education dollars allow them to implement the changes they see fit to advance student learning?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: So two things. I've been clear. I think we under-invest in education in this country. Now, we have to make sure we're getting the return on our investment, we have to invest not in the status quo, but in the vision of reform. But where I see art and dance and drama being eliminated, when I see summer school being eliminated, when I see extra curriculums being eliminated, when I see schools going to four day weeks, none of this is going to help us, again, have the most educated, best educated workforce in the world.

So we have to continue to invest, we have to continue to drive reform. We absolutely want to give states and districts more flexibility and our theory of change, and where we sort of differ dramatically from No Child Left Behind, No Child Left Behind was very loose on goals, 50 different goal posts, 50 different standards. Many got dummed down, very tight, very prescriptive on how you get there. I just think that's backwards. From a management standpoint, we're trying to flip that on its head. Be very tight on goals, internationally benchmarked, college and career ready standards, hold people accountable for getting there, but give them a lot more flexibility and room to move.

As you travel the country, it's a big, big country, I'm learning the hard way my geography, we can't begin to have all the answers from here in Washington. Local parents, local community members, local teachers, they know what's best. Hold them accountable to a high bar, give them a lot more room to move, that's sort of fundamental to how we're thinking through the waiver process.

MS. WERNER: A National Education Policy Center report just came out this week saying that the federally supported turnaround schools aren't working because parents, teachers and school communities are treated as an after thought. Do we need to do a better job involving stakeholders rather than a top down approach?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: We absolutely need to involve everybody, top down, bottom up, involve parents. I would vigorously disagree with the opening statement there.

When I look at two-thirds of schools in the first year showing real progress, when I look at 20 to 25 percent of those schools in the first year showing double digit gains in reading and math, there's some extraordinary progress going on there. Some of these are As, some are Bs, some might be Ds and Fs. But for the first time, for the first time in our country's history, over a thousand schools that have been chronically underperforming, sometimes for decades, we are challenging the status quo and doing some very different things.

The data's really interesting. Lots of other studies. I don't know, that one in California talked about how much this is working in California. The data's important to look at, but it's really important, I encourage a lot of journalists here, go out and talk to real kids and real teachers in the community and find out what they think. As I've visited dozens of these schools to hear the stories of students, young people themselves, telling the before and after pictures, it's fascinating. And this is tough, tough work. And again, the media hasn't covered it enough because people aren't yelling and screaming at each other. The media loves controversy. People are doing some really, really hard stuff that never happened before. And because they're doing it together, it doesn't get covered.

Dennis and I went out to a district not too far from here where they had made some very, very significant changes. Moved the principal out, moved out half the staff, head the local union stood up in a public meeting this big, said, "This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do, but I had to do it. It was the right thing for kids." And that kind of courage, those kinds of stories, don't get told. I would encourage those of you in the room who are interested in this to go talk to real people, real kids, real parents, real teachers, real principals. Ask them how this is going.

MS. WERNER: You said we haven't seen the results from the reforms yet. What is the timetable for achievement?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: We have to hold ourselves accountable every single year. So there are some things that, again, we can look at. We can look at the 25 percent increase in Hispanic enrollment in college; that's a big deal. But that enrollment has to equate at the back end to completion. On the turnaround effort, today we have 700,000 less kids in what are called "dropout factories" than just a couple of years ago. That's a huge step in the right direction. We still have far too many kids there.

College completion is up. High school graduation is up, dropout rates are down. But none, none of these numbers are where we want them to be. And ultimately, I want to be held accountable, our team wants to be held accountable for, again, leading the world in college graduations by 2020. That's the north star of our work.

MS. WERNER: The Obama Administration has pushed aggressively to implement common core national education standards. Isn't this an overreach of the federal into state and local authority?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: Far from it. And what's really important for people to understand is all these standards have been voluntarily adopted by states. And the goal is not common. I like common; what I love is high. And what we had historically, just in the past couple of years I talked about, we had 18, 19, 20 states, a pretty high percent of our country including Illinois, where I'm from, where states literally dummed down standards under No Child Left Behind to make politicians look good. And I'll just say this one is really personal. This is a real moment of truth. When I was leading the Chicago Public School System, at the time we didn't sort of fully understand this and we had the consortium on school research. John Easton, who now runs IES for us, we were each year celebrating the increase in the number of students at proficiency and we thought we were doing a really good job.

And John came each year to our staff retreat and brought a whole bunch of data showing those children who were at proficiency on the state standards were woefully, woefully, unprepared to graduate from high school, let alone go to college. And in fact, because the state standards were so low, we needed to be looking at how many students were at the advanced level. So here we were thinking we were doing a really good thing for our kids and for our communities, and we weren't even in the ball game. We weren't even close. It was a real moment of truth.

And so where you have states, so many states that dummed down standards, that is just such an insidious thing for kids and for the country. The fact that we have high standards, college and career ready standards, don't have to be common. We partnered with Virginia right here. Virginia proved to us that their standards were high, not part of common core. As long as these are high standards, that's what we're about.

MS. WERNER: Many of the children currently benefiting from school choice are those in the worst performing schools and from low income families. Why does the administration continue to oppose private school choice?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I just think we need to be investing in strong public schools, and I think the vast majority of children in our country, 90, 95 percent, always have and always will go to public schools. So I have no problem whatsoever if the private sector, philanthropy, wants to scholarship kids and send them to a great faith-based school or private school, that's fantastic. But I think we as education leaders have to be a lot more ambitious than that. I think that's why the turnaround agenda is so important. I think too often in the past, we've sort of helped two or three kids escape and allowed that neighborhood and that community and all the other kids to stay there and drown. That can't be good enough; we have to help every single child be successful. And again, this turnaround effort is not designed to save a handful, but help every single child in those historically underperforming schools do much better and do better with a real sense of urgency, not five years from now, now.

MS. WERNER: Who won in the Chicago teacher's strike and who lost? Can we expect more such strikes?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I honestly think everyone won. And no one wanted the strike, that was not something-- teachers didn't want that, the administration didn't want that. Obviously, I had friends on every side of that issue. My sister's kids are in the system, my brother's kids are in the system so it was a really personal one. But despite the tough acrimony, at the end of the day they got to a contract that I think was very fair and respected teachers and valued them as professionals. I think it helped to drive the reform agenda. It's better for students, longer days. And so they got to a great point.

And again, I could be wrong, I could be naïve, time will tell, but I don't think we're going to see a whole bunch more strikes. I think people want to work together. Again, the media love the controversy. We do these labor management conferences every year where we have hundreds of districts come in, folks working together in really, really creative ways. We'll have a test. D. C.'s contract is coming up pretty soon, Newark's contract is coming up pretty soon. We'll see what happens. I'm very optimistic where that will go.

MS. WERNER: We have a high school student with us today that says that she has noticed there is a lot of emphasis on math and science. How do we make sure that subjects like history don't take a back seat when they are so important to moving our nation forward?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: So for me it's not always either/or, both/and. We desperately need a lot more STEM focus and so I don't want to apologize for that. We need to continue to drive that agenda, and we know so many jobs of the future, that's where they are. But I always talk about a well rounded, world class education. And so one of the things under No Child Left Behind that we really fought against was a narrowing of the curriculum, a focus on reading and math. Science, social studies, foreign languages, P. E., dance, drama, art, music, all those things, got shunted to the side partly due to No Child Left Behind, partly due to tough budget times.

So what we want is, again, just a world class, well rounded education; history in there, foreign language in there, the arts, music, P. E., all those things that keep children engaged in school, give them a reason to be excited. That has to be the norm, not just in high school, but in elementary and middle school as well.

MS. WERNER: It seems public schools are becoming more socialist. In South Carolina, the kids bring their school supplies to a giant bank and then teachers distribute so no one feels left out. What is your opinion of this? (Laughter)

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I never thought of South Carolina as socialist.
(Laughter and applause)

MS. WERNER: How do you reconcile the lack of growth in student achievement with the existence of the impact teacher evaluation plan which evaluates teachers in large part by student test scores?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: If it's a D.C.-specific question, I think D.C. is making real progress. Now, D.C. has as long way to go, but by any measure progress over the past couple of years has been real and measurable. And D.C. not too long ago was one of the most dysfunctional school systems in the country. This is one who was always fighting for more money. D.C., frankly, had a lot of money. It was not being spent wisely, it was not being spent well. And D.C., I think, is on a very, very different trajectory today. Unfinished business by any measure, but by test scores, graduation rates, dropout rates, I think there's a sense of hope and optimism and change here that simply didn't exist a couple of years ago.

No one reason for that, but having meaningful evaluations to support teachers, identify great talent, learn from that talent, help those in the middle, deal honestly with those where it's simply not working, I think that's where the country needs to continue to go. We have to value and honor teachers as true professionals where we treat everybody the same. That's an assembly line model, that's an outdated model in my mind of what the profession needs to be.

MS. WERNER: U.S. college education tuition rates are some of the most expensive in the world. What specific plans does your administration have to reduce the cost of college?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: This is a really hard one. This is one I worry a ton about, and more and more middle class families are starting to think college isn't for them, it's for rich folks. It's not just in disadvantaged communities where I hear this. So I always talk about shared responsibility. We want to continue to invest very, very heavily at the federal level. Talked to Pell grants, didn't talk about keeping staff or interest rates down. We're doing a lot to reduce debt payments at the back end. But I'm going to be really clear, we can't do it by ourselves. States have to invest, 40 states, Republican and Democrat, 80 percent of the country, cut funding to higher education last year. When I go talk to the National Governors Association, I push all the governors very, very hard. That is the wrong thing to do.

And universities themselves have to do a much better job of keeping down tuition and building cultures not just around access but around completion. And so what we have proposed is a Race to the Top for higher education to try and incentivize everybody to come to the table and play, states to invest, universities to behave in a smarter way.

We've also pushed a very, very strong transparency agenda. We have the best system of higher education in the world; six thousand, seven thousand institutions of higher education. What we don't have is enough young people with real information knowing what's a grant, what's a loan, what's the right major for me? What are the completion rates of the different universities? And we hope by creating much greater transparency that young people will vote with their feet. They'll go to places that are doing the right thing in terms of cost, doing the right things in terms of graduation. Good actors will get more customers, more business. Bad actors will get less. We think that will hopefully move the country in the right way.

MS. WERNER: Community colleges train workers and they also do a magnificent job providing the first two years of a B. A. How can you change the perception of community colleges as inferior grade 13?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: So we tried to do a huge, huge amount on community colleges. And I think hopefully there's an unprecedented spotlight on the pretty spectacular work that community colleges are doing. And Martha Canter, my Under Secretary, is the first community college president to ever be in that position, and that was not by accident, that was by design. With the Department of Labor, we've invested \$2 billion behind community colleges with real public/private partnerships where real training leads to real jobs.

I've visited, I don't know, dozens and dozens of community colleges. And I have to say, it's one of the joys of my job, is getting out and going to all types of schools. Some of my most inspiring visits are to community colleges. You see 18 year olds, you see 38 year olds, you see 58 year olds. You see people from all walks of life, you see people from all over the world. They're all trying to better themselves, they're all trying to take the next step up the economic ladder. So we're in this for the long haul. We're going to continue to invest, we're going to continue to shine a spotlight. And as the country gets back on its feet, it's going to be in part, in large part, I think, by community colleges helping individuals and families get back on their feet.

And community colleges, talk about the end of the bus trip, at Roanoke, Virginia, Virginia Western Community College, they've become this economic engine for the entire region. They're not just helping some people going there, they're really driving economic vitality. That's the role we see many community colleges play and we want to continue to invest and be a great partner.

MS. WERNER: What steps should be taken through financial literacy or other programs to insure that students and parents understand their loan obligations?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: It's a great topic and one that's near and dear to my heart. I actually got my start in public education setting up a small elementary school in 1995 on the south side of Chicago that had a financial literacy focused curriculum. And we think particularly in disadvantaged communities, these are things that aren't talked about at the dinner table. Parents don't have enough experience. And we've seen more and more states adopt financial literacy graduation requirements. That's a step in the right direction. We're finding really creative ways to integrate financial literacy into social studies, into science, into math; again, not starting in high school, but in kindergarten, first grade, second grade. There are huge benefits there.

I think the whole mortgage crisis our country went through was in part due to the lack of financial literacy. So we're paying a huge price for this, getting everyone to understand how this is interesting, how it's relevant, how students become much more engaged in their learning. This is not why we did it, but the math scores at Arrow

Community Academy are off the charts in part because students are understanding the relevance of math. There are huge dividends here. The President actually has a council on financial literacy and we're trying to think how we get this access of this kind of information to a lot more young people.

MS. WERNER: Should President Obama be reelected, is the administration committed to move forward through Congress the implementation of the Comprehensive Dream Act?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: So when President Obama is elected, we are absolutely committed to moving forward on the Dream Act. And quite frankly, that's one of the huge frustrations, that we haven't got that done. And this is one that was really personal to me. In Chicago, many of my students there happen to be undocumented, had worked amazingly hard and gotten great grades. Had been community leaders, and then somehow as a country we slammed shut the door of opportunity for them. And Senator Durbin, as you know, helped to lead the effort early. At that time, then-Senator Obama partnered with him. And we have to get this done. We have to get this done. And the fact that we're leaving so much talent on the sidelines today makes absolutely no sense to me whatsoever. This isn't the right thing just to do for the Latino community, for their families, this is the right thing to do for our country and we have to get that done. We have to get it done.

MS. WERNER: What would be the biggest difference between an Obama and a Romney administration in education?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I think the choice is really clear, and frankly it's pretty stark. The country is going to have its say on it. We fundamentally see education as an investment and they fundamentally see education as an expense. And if you look at Congressman Ryan's budget and that Governor Romney supported, the cuts to early childhood education, 200,000 less kids in Head Start. The cuts to IDA and to Title I for poor kids, the potential massive cuts to Pell grants, none of this, I believe, the President believes, none of that leads us in the right direction. And so we think of education as an investment in this country or as an expense? And again, I think the choice is really clear. We'll see what the American public thinks.

MS. WERNER: What are the biggest personal and professional lessons you have learned to date from your tenure in D.C.?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: It's obviously a time of reflection and taking stock and seeing where we're at. Honestly, I came to D.C. pretty skeptical of what you could accomplish in Washington. Washington had not always been my friend when I was at Chicago Public Schools and knew some of the limits there. But, the biggest lesson for me is how much is possible. And if four years ago someone would have said 45, 46 states would have higher standards, we'd be supporting and evaluating teachers in very different ways, we'd have more choice than before, what we're doing to elevate and

strengthen the profession, 6 million Pell grant recipients to 10 million, that would have been a dream scenario. I wouldn't have thought all that was possible.

What I constantly feel is how much hunger is out there. People want to get better, they want to improve. We have to be a good partner. I'm actually much more optimistic, much more hopeful today that I was coming here four years ago.

MS. WERNER: What are the key actions proposed for educator recruitment and retention?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: That's a much longer topic, but we're going to have about a million teachers retire over the next four, five, six years, out of 3.2, 3.3. So it's basically a third of our workforce. And our ability to attract and retain great talent over the next couple of years will shape public education for the next 30. So literally a once in a generation opportunity. So we're working hard with Dennis, with Randy, with lots of folks, Gene Wilhoit's been an amazing partner on this. This has to be a movement. I think ultimately, we want to support this movement but frankly this should be led by teachers and that's why we're spending so much time and energy out in small rooms of 8, 10, 15, 20 teachers talking about this.

I've been very public. I think the entire pipeline is broken. We're not attracting enough good people in, the training at far too many schools of education isn't good enough. The mentoring and induction we give them early in their careers isn't strong enough. We don't pay teachers enough, we don't have meaningful career ladders. We don't recognize and reward great talent. So this is not like small, incremental change. This is transformational change. Not easy, lots of status quo we have to get past. But if we do this right, if we do this well and recruit that next generation of great talent in, I honestly think that's probably the biggest gift we can give to the country and the benefits for the country will long outlast our time here in Washington.

So we're spending a huge amount of time and energy thinking about this. The President has asked Congress for \$5 billion to help support this. We're calling it the Respect Project. Lots of information on our website if you want to take a look at it. This one is a big, big deal. We have to do a lot better than what we've done in the past.

MS. WERNER: What advice do you have for future teachers who have a passion for making a difference?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: Come teach. Come teach. And it is hard work, it is challenging. I said earlier it's not for the faint of heart. But if you want to make a difference, if you want to transform kids' lives, if you want to make a difference in disadvantaged communities, there's no better way to do it. There's no better way to do it than the classroom.

And when you talk to teachers who are making that difference every day, they'll tell you they go home and cry some nights and some days they think they're two steps

backwards. But the end of the day, they are making an amazing, amazing difference. And we're going to do everything we can to bring in more folks of great talent to understand what they can do to help children, to help children, to help their communities and ultimately benefit the country as a whole.

MS. WERNER: We're almost out of time, but before I ask the last question, a couple of housekeeping matters to take care of. First, I would like to remind you all of our upcoming luncheon speakers. On October 10th, General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and on October 31st, Rodney Erickson, President of Penn State University.

Secondly, I would like to present our guest with our traditional National Press Club mug.

SECRETARY DUNCAN: Thank you so much. (Applause)

MS. WERNER: Perfect for that little extra caffeine you need to get you through the day. I'd also like to thank our National Press Club staff including its journalism institute and broadcast center for organizing today's event. And I have the last question here. Was there a moment that really stood out for you on your bus tour?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: That's a great question; there were lots of great moments. Probably one that hit hardest for me was being in Topeka, Kansas and thinking about Brown v. Board and what the promise of that more than five decades ago. But, frankly, how far we have to go. And I said in my speech earlier, and I really mean it, I don't think as a country we're yet serious about closing the opportunity gap. And I don't know what we're doing consistently to find our best teachers and our best principals and put them with the children who need the most help, whether that's inner city urban or rural or remote. I don't think we're doing enough to get great technology into their hands. I don't think we're doing enough to strengthen families and communities.

And so both the awesome promise, the awesome potential, but how far we have to go as a country, that hit home in a very personal way being there in Topeka.

MS. WERNER: Actually, I have one more question. So who usually wins when you play basketball with the President, or do you actually let him win?

SECRETARY DUNCAN: I never let him win. I plead the fifth on who actually wins. (Laughter)

MS. WERNER: Thank you for coming today. (Applause)

SECRETARY DUNCAN: Thank you.

MS. WERNER: Finally, here is a reminder that you can find out more information about the National Press Club on our website. Also, if you'd like to get a

copy of today's program, please check our website, www.press.org. Thank you, we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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