

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH SECRETARY ARNE DUNCAN

SUBJECT: WHAT'S AHEAD IN EDUCATION POLICY?

MODERATOR: JOHN HUGHES, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: THE HOLEMAN LOUNGE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT

DATE: WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30, 2015

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**JOHN HUGHES:** (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome. My name is John Hughes. I'm an editor for Bloomberg's First Word, that's Bloomberg News's breaking news desk here in Washington. And I am the President of the National Press Club. Today we welcome Education Secretary Arne Duncan. He will speak to us about spending more money at schools with the highest poverty rates in an effort to reduce the incarceration rate. This will be a fascinating speech and we're so happy that he's making news today at the National Press Club.

But first, I want to introduce our distinguished head table which includes club members and also guests of the speakers. When I call your name, please stand briefly. From the audience's right, Miguel Gorman, Chief Media Officer for the OECD; Jamie Sheen, CEO of naisA Global; Tom Brune, Washington bureau chief of *Newsday*; Ashley Kearney, a teacher at Anacostia Senior High School in Washington, D. C.; Carol Feldman, education editor for the Associated Press; John King, Delegated Deputy Secretary of Education; Donna Leinwand-Leger, breaking news editor at *USA Today*. She's also a past president of the National Press Club and she chairs the speakers committee for the club. Debra Silimeo, executive vice president at Hager Sharp, and the NPC speakers committee member who organized today's lunch. Thank you, Debra; Rob Runcie, superintendent of Broward County Schools in Florida; Angela Greiling-Keane, White House correspondent for Bloomberg News, and a past president of the National Press Club.

Megan Benfatti, digital content manager for Discovery Education; Nik Apostolides, deputy CEO of the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center and a member of the National Press Club speakers committee. (Applause)

In addition to our guests here in the Holeman Lounge, I want to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences, as well as those watching on the live stream on our website Press.org. You can follow the action on Twitter as well. Use the hashtag NPCLive. That's NPCLive.

Well, Arne Duncan grew up in Chicago, his mother started an urban tutoring program for kids from low income families on Chicago's south side. Young Arne was there, tutoring, playing basketball and learning the value of a good education in stark terms. Later, he would head the Chicago school system. He became friends with the future president named Barack Obama.

Duncan, and agriculture secretary Tom Vilsack, are the only two remaining members of President Obama's original cabinet. Since being confirmed for his post on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Duncan has changed education policy in important and sometimes controversial ways. States are increasing the rigor of their academic standards. They are turning around their lowest performing schools, and they're opening new charter schools. These reforms were triggered by funding available through the Race to the Top and waivers given under the No Child Left Behind Act.

After a legislative overhaul in 2010, the Department of Education is now the lender and guarantor for billions of dollars in student loans. Duncan has used regulatory power to hold for profit colleges accountable for preparing students for jobs rather than loan defaults. He just unveiled a college scorecard to give students access to more federal data about colleges to help inform their search.

He has been a lightning rod for some of the more controversial issues in education. This include the Common Core state standards, annual testing, and what role the federal government should play in education. Both major teachers unions in one way or another have suggested that he might need to resign. As Congress considers reauthorizing No Child Left Behind, some lawmakers are working to limit the levers of power that Duncan has used to enact changes when Congress was gridlocked.

As I said, he has a fascinating speech topic today. And so it's now our turn to get an education. Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm National Press Club welcome to Education Secretary Arne Duncan. (Applause)

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Thank you so much. It's great to be back. And I want to start by telling you something that I'm not proud of. Early in my time as the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, we set out to make our schools safer places for our children and adults. We knew that too many of our students were going to jail. So I went to the police chief there and asked if we could find out what time of day or night our kids were getting arrested.

I figured if we knew when the arrests were occurring and it was after school that I suspected, we could target an intervention to keep kids more engaged in those after-school hours. And if this was happening late at night, we'd have to challenge parents to step up and actually parent and keep their kids safe and at home and off the streets.

What I absolutely didn't expect was the actual answer; that the majority of the arrests were occurring during the school day in our school buildings overwhelmingly for nonviolent misdemeanors. Those calls to the police to put kids in jail, we were the ones making them. We were responsible. We met the enemy, and it was us. I know no one, none of our teachers or principals or administrators had set out to criminalize the behavior of our students, or to start them down a path towards incarceration.

But those were the facts, and they're bound up with another set of facts. The fact that America has less than 5 percent of the world population, but more than 20 percent of the world's inmate. The fact that America today locks up black people at a far higher rate than South Africa did during the height of apartheid. The fact that young men of color are six times more likely to be incarcerated than their white peers. The fact that one out of every three black men, one out of every three in America, is predicted to go to prison at some point in their lives, while just one in five of them receives a college degree.

Facing the facts on incarceration leaves us with no choice. We as a country must do more to change the odds. You can try to reduce those statistics with just numbers on a page, but there are people behind those numbers in Ferguson, in Baltimore, in New York, and hundreds of other places. And if you spend some time in those places with real people who have real families, you'll be left with no doubt, we have to do more.

And that's why I want to lay out an idea today that'll strike some as improbable or impractical, which I think is essential. It's about setting a very different direction as a society, a different priority, one that says that we believe in great teaching early in our children's lives rather than courts and jails and prisons later.

And let me tell you why this is so important to me. In close to seven years as the Education Secretary, I've had the chance to spend a lot of time bearing witness to great teaching and learning and meeting amazing young people who are finding ways to share their unique talents with their community and with the world. But I've also met a lot of young people whose lives have followed a very different trajectory. I think a lot about those young people who we as adults have not done the right thing by. And honestly, their stories haunt me.

There's Brandon, who at the age of 11 wrote graffiti on the bathroom wall of his Denver elementary school. His school called the police and Brandon's act of vandalism quickly became a criminal matter. Brandon was sentenced to what they called community service alongside adult offenders. And he told me, "I was definitely the only 11 year old picking up trash on the side of the highway." Simply mind boggling. That experience also left Brandon with a criminal record. And years later, when he set out to become a police

officer, the department turned him away because of that one youthful mistake. I talked to him just a few days after he got that news and he said, "It killed my sense of hope."

There's a young boy from Broward County schools who racked up almost 30 behavior referrals and received his first battery charge as a seven year old after having an anxiety attack after the death of his grandfather. And there were the young men I met recently in an Illinois prison which I visited a few weeks ago together with Father Pflieger. These young men were locked up for a variety of crimes they had committed during their childhood years. They didn't make any excuses or dodge responsibility. But many of them told us that from an early age, they had to take care of their families, lacked meaningful job options and felt completely alone in a world where nobody seemed to care about them or believe in them.

And what did all these young people have in common? They all made bad choices, both large and small. For many, when they needed support, it simply wasn't there. One of them told us, "I just got tired of seeing my mother cry every night." For some, the system found ways to push them out rather than help them out. And as Father Pflieger later wrote, all of them were examples of unrealized potential. Every day, as a society, we allow far too many young people to head down a road that ends in wasted potential. And sometimes, we're complicit in that journey to nowhere.

We need to do more to change that. Let's fix our priorities in a way that says something very different about what we expect from our kids. The bet we're making now is abundantly clear. During the last three decades, state and local correctional spending in this country has increased almost twice as fast as spending on elementary and secondary education. Please take a moment and ask yourself what does that say about what we believe?

Leaders at the state and local levels have the power to change that, to place a bet on getting it right with kids from the start and on the power of great teaching to transform the life chances of our children. I'm not pretending for a second that schools can begin to do this alone. They cannot replace broader efforts to deal with poverty and hunger and homelessness and other social ills that affect our young people. But the facts about the impact of great teaching are simply too powerful to ignore.

In all my travels, I haven't yet met a parent who needed to be convinced that it was important for his or her child to have a great teacher. Parents everywhere intuitively know and understand what research also tells us. A mountain of evidence makes clear not just that teachers are the most important factor in a school, but also how important they actually are. So much so that kids who have great teachers end up with months more learning each year than kids who don't.

And the benefits of a great teacher prove out in life, not just in school. A single year with an excellent teacher, rather than an ineffective one, just one single year, has been shown to have benefits in lifetime earnings of a quarter million dollars or more for that class and a measurable impact on the likelihood of attending college or having a

child while you're a teenager. The link between an education, or a lack thereof, and incarceration, is powerful.

More than two-thirds of state prison inmates are high school dropouts. And an African American male between the ages of 20 and 24 without a high school diploma or GED has a higher chance of being imprisoned than in being employed. Today, our nation's schools suspend roughly 3 ½ million kids each year and refer a quarter of a million children to the police every single year. And the pattern's even more troubling for children of color, particularly boys, and for students with disabilities.

We cannot lay our incarceration crisis at the door of our schools, but we have to do our part to end the school to prison pipeline. That's going to force us to have some difficult conversations about race, and I'll get to that in a moment. But I want to start by talking about bold new steps our states and cities can take to get great teachers in front of our neediest kids.

Everyone here knows it can be challenging to recruit and keep fantastic teachers in the schools where the needs are the greatest. The rewards of this work are extraordinary, but it's also an incredibly hard job. So here's an idea for how to put a new emphasis on schools rather than on jails. If our states and localities took just half the people convicted of nonviolent crimes and found paths for them other than incarceration, that would create savings of upwards of \$15 billion every single year. If they reinvested that money into paying the teachers who are working in the highest need schools and communities, they could provide a 50 percent salary increase for every single one of those teachers doing that hard, but incredibly important, work.

Specifically, if you focus on the 20 percent of schools with the highest poverty rates in each state, that would give you 17,640 schools. And the money would go far enough to increase salaries by at least 50 percent. And there would be plenty of money left over to give principals in those schools the raises that they deserve as well. I've long said that great teachers and leaders deserve to be paid far, far more. With a move like this, we're not just making a bet on education over incarceration, we're signaling the beginning of a long-range effort to pay our nation's teachers what they are worth as the nation builders that I believe they truly are.

That sort of investment wouldn't just make teachers and struggling communities feel more valued. It would have ripple effects on our economy and on our civic life. Obviously, this isn't the only way you could redirect funds to attract and keep more great talent in our most challenged schools. Another plan, you could take just a quarter of that \$15 billion in savings and use it to support teacher leadership, creating five positions in every one of these high poverty schools for accomplished teachers who would mentor their peers and give those teachers each \$25,000 pay increases.

And there are lots of other ways to go about this, and ultimately local leaders and educators will know what's best for their kids in their community. But the bottom line is

we must do more to insure that more strong teachers go to our toughest schools and stay for the long haul.

Right now, in far too many places glaring and unconscionable funding gaps create all the wrong incentives. To take just one example, and there are many, the Ferguson-Florissant School District in Missouri spends about \$9,000 per student per year. Just 11 miles away in Clayton, funding is double, at about \$18,000 per student. How is that a plan to give every single child a fair start? What does that say to the teachers in Ferguson about how they're valued? What's the cumulative impact of such a massive disparity of opportunity over 13 years of a child's education?

Today, far too much great talent leaves our toughest schools, or never arrives at all. Let's step back and challenge everything and make that work the pinnacle of an educator's career. Let's invest more in the adults who have dedicated their lives to helping young people reach their full potential. And let's place a new emphasis on our young people as contributors to a stronger society, not as inmates to warehouse at an annual cost far above what it costs to educate a child.

I'm not naïve at all about doing all of this overnight. And for those already in the system, we can't just walk away from them. We also have to invest in education and career training and treatment and support programs that help young people who are locked up become contributing members of society. And that's why we're so proud to be starting the Second Chance Pell program to give those who are incarcerated a better chance at going to college and transforming their lives.

To be absolutely clear, I want to repeat that we're talking about savings that come from alternative paths and involve only nonviolent offenders. This is not about being soft on dangerous criminals. This is about finding ways consistent with wise criminal justice, to reapportion our resources so we prevent crime in the first place. And I'm not suggesting that this is an either/or with other investments we know we must make both inside and outside of education. But I am convinced that making a historic bet on getting education right from the start would pay massive dividends for our families, our communities, our society and ultimately for our nation's economy.

According to a McKinsey report from 2009, the achievement gap between the United States and other top performing nations is depriving our U.S. economy of more than \$2 trillion in economic output every year. A separate study found that a 10 percent increase in high school graduation rates would reduce murder and assault arrest rates by approximately 20 percent. And a 1 percent increase in male graduation rates will save up to \$1.4 billion in the cost of incarceration. So you don't have to be a liberal romantic to like the idea of investing up front in our kids. A hard nosed look at the bottom line will lead you to the same conclusion.

I recognize that what we have laid out might be a little bit ambitious. But if we're serious about eliminating the school to prison pipeline, a shift in funding is only part of what we need to do. In truth, there's a lot more that we have to get right. As I've said the

need goes way beyond education. What we have to do to take on poverty, to deal with violence, to support families, to promote integration of both our schools and our neighborhoods, to expand jobs, improve healthcare and so much more, all of that, all of that is part of the solution.

But in our schools, reducing the number of young people who end up behind bars fundamentally is about changing the odds for our most underserved students. That means following through on the difficult and vital work of turning around chronically underperforming schools and helping educators continue crucial progress in cutting high school dropout rates and improving those graduation rates which today, I'm proud to say, are at historic highs.

It means insuring that all students including and especially those in low income communities of color have access to high standards, aligned to expectations for the real world and challenging coursework that prepares them for college without having to lose time with remediation. It means expanding the opportunity of quality preschool whose power to reduce incarceration is well established. It means giving teachers the preparation and support they need to succeed, especially in high need schools.

And it means insuring that children go to school free from fear whether from gun violence or bullying or racial or sexual harassment or assault. None of this work is new, but all of it is essential to changing those odds.

Unfortunately, some in this country would have us move in exactly the opposite direction; by cutting the funds that states and districts desperately need to make opportunity real for our kids. That's exactly what Republican budget proposals would do. As compared to President Obama's budget, they would cut funds for vulnerable students, support for teachers, job training, and preschool opportunities that we all know help our young people become productive citizens. This work and these investments are the foundation upon which long-term academic success can be built.

Taking the essential steps to expand what we know works in education, that should be a no-brainer. But there's more, there's more than just budgets and policies. Perhaps the hardest step of all is taking an unsparing look at our own attitudes and our own decisions and the ways they are tied to both race and class. In the wake of Ferguson and Baltimore and elsewhere, this has become a central discussion for many in America and rightly so, if belatedly. Those of us in education simply cannot afford to stay on the sidelines.

And let's recognize up front that this is among the hardest conversations that we can have in education. People enter this field out of love for students, and the genuine desire to see them excel and thrive. Yet, we also know that suspensions, expulsions and expectations for learning track far too closely to race and class. As the author, Ta-Nehisi Coates recently pointed out, our high rates of incarceration, our high numbers of high school dropouts and our high rates of child poverty are not unrelated problems.

As was true for me and my colleagues back home in Chicago, sometimes the facts must force a tough look inwards. This is not just about explicit, obvious bias. Indeed, sometimes when a genuinely transparent moment of bias arises, the whole country stops and takes a breath. A child holds a clock and we see a bomb. But more often, it's far subtler stuff buried in invisible privileges and expectations we're not even aware that we hold.

A psychology professor named Philip Goff is working with police departments and school districts to help officers and educators become more aware of the implicit biases that we all carry within ourselves. What Dr. Goff and others are discovering is that when we become more aware of the biases that we carry, and we all carry them, we can learn how not to act on them.

It's painful to admit that one's own actions might be causing harm, particularly for us as educators who come to this work from such an altruistic place. When I found out what was happening in our schools in Chicago, it was like a punch in the gut, but it forced us to analyze and then change adult behavior in many of our schools and the students we served were better off for it. All of us have work to do, all of us.

Not by asking teachers and principals to put up with more misbehavior or feel less safe themselves. Quite the opposite. We know learning requires order and unacceptable behavior is unacceptable behavior. Instead, we need to do the hard work of comprehending our own biases and building supportive structures that help all children reach their full potential. And that's what they're trying to do in Broward County. I'm thrilled to have my good friend, Superintendent Bob Runcie here with us today. Three years ago, as he put it, our default response had become law enforcement. But hitting rock bottom was their wakeup call and it led him to insist that Broward County find ways to keep kids in classrooms and out of courtrooms. They listened to community groups and grass roots organizations who have been challenging that status quo for a long time.

And now, just three short years later, in partnership with folks like Dr. Goff, and thanks to the educators and staff at those schools who are willing to do this hard, hard work, disciplinary incidents have been reduced by a quarter and school-related rates in three years are down 63 percent. Part of the reason has to do with new systems the school district has put in place. But the bigger change had to do with the way people saw themselves and the problem they were trying to solve. It's difficult work, challenging centuries of institutionalized racism and class inequality. But I firmly believe a hard look at ourselves is a critical part of becoming the nation we strive to be, one of liberty and opportunity regardless of the circumstances of your birth.

And as many of you know, this work is deeply personal for me. As you heard earlier, I grew up in Chicago and formed some of my deepest relationships playing pickup basketball on the south side there near the after school tutoring program my mother started in 1961. For the young men I played ball with, there wasn't a lot of margin for error and not a lot of second chances. Some of them, thanks to my mother and others, ended up on a path towards a strong education and that helped shape their lives in



profound ways. Porky Lyons became a doctor, Ronald Raglan went on to help me lead the Chicago Public Schools. Another, who never met his dad and whose mom was largely absent, tutored me at my mom's center for years starting when he was just a teenager and I was eight or nine years old. His name is Kerrie Holley, and today Kerrie Holley is a chief technology officer at Cisco and was named one of the 50 most important black research scientists in the country.

But so many others from that neighborhood, just as smart, just as full of talent and potential and promise and energy, ended up on a very different path locked up or dead. Tragically, what they lacked was what every child needs; educational opportunity, support and guidance. We cannot stand by while another generation of young people from Chicago to Denver, from Baltimore to Ferguson, faces the same choices.

And that's why we're in the fight we're in, to make opportunity real for those who were born without advantages and who have lived and grown up with struggle and fear. And that's why I so strongly believe, as does President Obama, that we must be a nation of second chances. That's why we have to try new ideas. It's why we have to do everything that we possibly can. All the ideas I've talked about today are part of the same fight. Yes, it's about educational and economic opportunity, but it's bigger than that. It's a fight to increase social mobility, it's a fight for social justice. And the stakes could not be higher. For far too many of our children today, this fight could literally mean the difference between life and death.

Our children and our country deserve a different bargain, a different set of priorities. And when we bet on the extraordinary potential of all of our children, when we bet on the transformative power of great teachers, we cannot lose. Thank you so much, and I look forward to your questions. (Applause)

**MR. HUGHES:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary. As I mentioned in the introduction, you have used Race to the Top and ESEA waivers to create change. Why aren't you using those programs to create the kind of change you're proposing today?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** I think it's a really fair question of how we trade incentives for states to think very differently about their resources. The truth is we don't have those dollars anymore. We have a pretty dysfunctional Congress that isn't investing much in education. So those are resources that came largely from the stimulus act that was going back to very early on in the administration. But I think the fair question is what can we do across the administration to try and incentivize states and communities to step up and think very differently about how they allocate their taxpayer resources.

**MR. HUGHES:** Have you gotten any indication from any states or localities that they are interested in this kind of approach you lay out? And will they lobby for some kind of funding shift? And does your department have an outreach strategy to reach out and further these goals?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Well, we're just getting started today, so we don't have it all baked yet. But I will say part of the reason we're talking about this now is there's been an emerging sense of bipartisan support for this. And whether you're on the far left or the far right, there's this tremendous acute awareness that mass incarceration hasn't worked. We're spending huge amount of money each year to warehouse folks and they come back and the vast majority repeat and go back in. And we look at whether it's 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 thousand dollars per year to lock someone up and relatively pennies on the dollar to educate at the front end. I'm trying to flip this, is just so hugely important. So I do think there is a growing recognition for folks who might not agree on anything else, that we have a broken system now and there might be greater willingness to try things differently.

And again, what we're trying to drive home here is we'd love to give every teacher across the nation a raise, every principal a raise. But if we focus on those communities where the children have the greatest need, where frankly long term when we fail to educate the vast majority get locked up. If we could make a real difference there, I think you'd change this for decades to come.

**MR. HUGHES:** This questioner says an independent study by Public Policy Institute California says that similar prison reform efforts haven't realized savings. What's your response to critics who say \$15 billion won't be saved. Or, to put it another way, how confident are you in those figures that when you spend the money on the education in the districts it will translate to that savings?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** So you have to sort of break down the components of this. If you're choosing, again, repeat for the third time, nonviolent offenders, not violent ones, nonviolent offenders, if you're not locking them up again at 40 or 50 or 60 thousand dollars, whatever it is per year, that will create a minimum of \$15 billion of savings. So we can demonstrate that.

The question is, are you willing to reinvest that \$15 billion in savings in great teachers, in great principals, in struggling schools? And that's a policy choice, a political choice, that leaders have to make. And we would argue that long term if you do that, rates of incarceration will go down dramatically.

**MR. HUGHES:** What would have to happen logistically on local and state levels to execute this reallocation? How would they carry this out?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Well, it takes leadership across the board. But, again, just step back-- the fact that we lock up more young black men here in the United States today, at a higher rate than under apartheid in South Africa, it's stunning. The fact that young men have a greater chance of being locked up than getting a college degree. And where there's a will, there's a way. And so if we just look at the facts-- again, this is not about liberal do-gooders or just hard-nosed Republicans who want to save taxpayer money, regardless of what perspective you come at, there's no one, no one, who can defend the current system. If you can't defend the current system, do you want to tweak it

around the edges or do you want to do something transformational? Do you want to do something revolutionary?

And often you've heard the saving a crisis creates an opportunity. We have a real crisis in our country. We are destroying families, we are destroying communities, we're leaving far too much potential on the sidelines. We need that potential, we need that brain power, we need that creativity. Talent is much more evenly distributed in our nation than opportunity. And so if political leaders come together and say we need to make a very different bet, a very different investment, they have an opportunity now that may not have existed in the past.

**MR. HUGHES:** The administration announced Pell Grants for people in jail. Is there any news you can share on that program? For example, how much money we're talking, how many inmates will be affected, any benchmarks like that?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** No, it's too early. And again, it's one of the things I'm just so proud of our team's work and it took sort of two years to work through all the mechanics of this. But we have the ability through experimental excite [?] authority to create these opportunities. What we have actually now-- I think it might be due next week, it might be October 1<sup>st</sup>-- due October 1<sup>st</sup>, we have sort of an RFP out to universities who want to partner with correctional facilities to provide classes in prisons. And so we will see relative to the overall Pell spend, this will be far less than one percent, so this is not big, big money. But it's a huge opportunity.

For those who didn't see the *Wall Street Journal* article a couple of weeks ago, inmates from a jail were being taught by Bard College, won a debate from students from Harvard. Pretty interesting. Pretty interesting.

**MR. HUGHES:** The Higher Education Act was recently revised to reinstate federal student aid for high school dropouts enrolled in career pathways programs. Given the number of dropouts who end up incarcerated, should this ability to benefit program, which is currently limited, be expanded to reach more dropouts?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Yeah, so I said in the speech whatever we can do to give people second chances, and if they need them, third chances. And if we don't do that, again the cost to society of warehousing them, of incarcerating them, far exceeds any second or third chance. To be clear, Pell grants are under \$6,000 a year. Locking folks up is often around \$60,000 a year. So it's 10 percent. And I know which way I'd rather invest. So the more we can be creative in giving more folks who didn't get an education the first time giving them a second, and if they need it a third, chance to graduate from high school and then go on to some form of post-secondary education, we should absolutely be challenging ourselves to be creative there.

**MR. HUGHES:** Does the administration have any plans for something big and meaningful on college affordability planned before President Obama leaves office? This questioner says the free community college plan isn't going anywhere and hasn't moved

the needle much for families trying to afford college. Is there anything the administration can or will do to address college affordability as part of the Obama legacy?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** I'm trying to figure out how to print money. I haven't figured that one out. (Laughter) So it's not as easy as we wish. So a couple things. We're going to continue to work with Congress on this free community college idea. And be very clear, that piece is hugely important. Having access to free early childhood education is very important on the other side. And the K-12 system, I think, has served us pretty well for the past century. I think it's actually inadequate for the next century and we have to start thinking about pre-K through 14 in that continuum. And many other nations around the world have come to this conclusion faster than we have, and it worries me from a competitiveness standpoint that we're behind them.

So what can we do? We can continue to work with Congress to try and make this investment. To be very clear, this wasn't the President's idea, it wasn't my idea, it wasn't a Democratic idea. It came from Governor Haslam, who's a good Republican in Tennessee who's made it free for Tennessee and saw a value in doing that. The idea of expanding significantly early childhood education isn't my idea, or a Democratic idea or the President's idea, it comes from Oklahoma. It's a very, very conservative state. So again, these are not-- there should not be a partisan fight on these things.

But we're going to continue to try and challenge Congress to invest here. We're going to continue to challenge states to hold universities accountable. You talked about the college scorecard to put out, we're trying to get much more information out to young people and their families to make good choices and we hope they'll vote with their feet and go to places that are serious about not just creating access, which is important, but serious about completion. So a number of things we're going to do to continue to try and help people make good choices, to shine a spotlight both on good actors and on bad actors and to get more resources to places that are doing the right thing by young people.

**MR. HUGHES:** This questioner suggests that the administration has pulled back a little bit on that effort to evaluate and rate colleges and universities. Wondering if the administration was bowing to pressure from higher education institutions or what happened there?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** We can be accused of lots of things, I'm not sure if we've ever been accused of bowing to pressure. So, no, that was not part of the calculation. What we actually thought about, there's an interesting process we learned as we were going through it. And it's almost like an old school versus new school approach and the idea of having a federal government do an annual report card, a static thing, and come out with its seal of approval. That used to maybe make some sense, and honestly we don't think it makes much sense anymore.

Data's changing so fast, there's so much information out there. We think the best thing we can do is maximize transparency, get huge amounts of information out there, let both individuals and nonprofits and folks concerned with college success do their own

cuts at the data, create their own in real time analyses, get that information out. And we think that's the way the world is moving. So, this was a different way of doing business in us, but I think the idea of a one time seal of approval doesn't quite make sense anymore. And it will be very interesting to see the amount of-- number of folks who have come to see that website has been stunning, just in the past two weeks since we put it out, two weeks, three weeks, whatever it is. And we're going to try and do a lot more of this going forward. This is just a starting point. So maximizing transparency, maximizing data, and we think that will drive behavior and we think it'll add a level of accountability that a very static annual report card frankly wouldn't.

**MR. HUGHES:** So we must have some educators writing essay questions so be patient on these.

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** You summarize them. (Laughter)

**MR. HUGHES:** Yesterday, a bipartisan group of governors and education groups told members of Congress to do their jobs and reauthorize the elementary and secondary education act, or ESEA. And they released conference priorities for negotiating a final bill. Those priorities are silent on the role of standardized tests and measuring whether students have mastered state standards. How do you think conferees should update the accountability regime introduced by No Child Left Behind?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** That is a very complicated question. I'll try and give a two-part answer. So we've been very, very clear, we think where states and districts are over-testing, where there's redundancy, when it's duplicative, when there's too much time teaching to a test, they should cut back. And in fact, we've said in the fix to No Child Left Behind, we would love to see a cap on annual testing. And put some money behind places that want to do that the right way.

We also think there's an important role for assessing students learning every single year. And we need to know, not just in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, are students truly on track to be ready for college or not? Take one second on this. By virtually every measure and Massachusetts is our highest performing state academically. So they're number one. And despite that fact, about a third of their high school graduates who go on to two and four year universities in Massachusetts have to take remedial classes in college. That means they're not ready. And if that's true in our number one state, think about what that means two through fifty.

So having high standards and having honest assessments of students ability to hit those standards all the way through, we think there's a common sense and middle ground there. That's a very, very important piece, but that's one piece of a potential fix to the No Child Left Behind law. That law's been broken for a long time. Unfortunately, Congress has also been broken. So you said earlier we provided waivers to states to move them away from the most onerous parts of the law.

We were hoping a couple of years ago Congress would fix the law. We're hoping now. Having Speaker Boehner step down, before that happened, we were maybe 50/50. I can only think our odds of having it pass now probably got worse, not better, which is really disappointing. But I'd be very, very happy to be proven wrong there. And the goal here is to get a strong bill, a bipartisan bill, that would fix the law for children, fix the law for educators, and the President could be proud to support.

I hope we can get there. I think that task, that journey, just got harder in the past week.

**MR. HUGHES:** With so many states opting out of testing, will the U.S. Education Department continue to insist that New York State continue to consider student test scores in evaluating teachers? And if so, how much weight should be given to test scores?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Well, first to be clear, no states are opting out of testing. So every state assesses students. We have a range of 50 states who do different things, but no state has opted out. All we've tried to do, and there's a level of complexity and detail here, is to say that student learning-- you can define that lots of ways-- student learning has to be a part of evaluating teachers. And there are thoughtful ways to do that, there are very unhelpful, harmful ways of doing that. But anyone who says that somehow teacher evaluation and student learning should be divorced from each other I think really demeans the profession of teaching.

And the goal of great teachers is always not just to teach, it's to have their students learn. So what we've asked states to do is to think about how are you measuring student learning and how is that just a piece of how you evaluate teachers? And we always, everywhere I go, please quote me, we all say multiple measures, multiple measures. So anyone who says we're only interested in test scores is not telling the truth.

**MR. HUGHES:** You talked about raising teachers salaries. This questioner asks, aren't teachers forming unions still the best way to raise teacher salaries? And do you think charter operators should remain neutral during union drives?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** I think unions are an important way of raising wages, whether it's in the education sector and others. But I also want to be clear and hopefully it was very implicit in what I've said, is that every teaching job is not created equally. And we have a teacher teaching in Anacostia, as we have here, that's a very different job than teaching in northwest D.C. My home town of Chicago, a teacher teaching in Englewood, or Little Village or Humble Park, that's a little bit different job than teaching on the Gold Coast.

And what we've failed to recognize is that while no teaching job is ever easy, there are very, very different degrees of difficulty. And what we have had is virtually on incentives, no spotlight on those teachers and principals and social workers and counselors who devote their lives to helping the kids most in need. And so we'd love to

find ways-- and again, no one goes into education to make a million dollars. Teachers are the most altruistic people we know. But how we better compensate them, how we better support them, how we give them more respect and how we get great talent to the kids who need the most help.

The most extreme is this horrendous, all over the nation, almost no one is doing this well, but the most extreme example I saw was on a Native American reservation and no child deserves a better chance, or a real chance at education, than our Native American children, where they simply could not find enough teachers to teach in that community. So half their teachers came from Teach for America. And half their teachers came from the Philippines. They could not find American teachers, U.S. born teachers, to work on that reservation. And so as part of a package to get more talent where we need it most, I think compensation and other things have to be on the table in very, very different ways.

Sorry, to fully answer your question, again there are great schools that are led by union teachers, there are not great schools led by union teachers. There are great schools on the other side of that as well. So whether a charter is a union school or not is irrelevant. For me, it's all about what are we doing to improve the academic success of young people? What are we doing to increase graduation rates, reduce dropout rates?

There's amazing examples of union led schools that are doing that, there are amazing examples of non-union led schools that are doing that. We need to support teachers, we need to support educators, we need to compensate them more, pay them better. All of this has to be about reducing academic failure and increasing academic assessment. That's the one battle we've all got to be fighting together.

**MR. HUGHES:** What should Common Core advocates be doing to make sure that state standards don't revert back to the old system inconsistent from state to state?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Yeah, so again the media loves the noise and controversy. But the bottom line is over the past couple years, something unprecedented happened. The overwhelming majority of states in the nation decided we're going to stop dumbing down standards, we're going to stop lying, and we're going to raise standards to try and make sure our children are truly college and career ready. And so what those standards are called, that's up to-- it doesn't matter. But the goal is to keep those standards high. And despite lots of noise and despite lots of press coverage, what the press hasn't covered is how many states now have high standards relative to a couple of years ago.

This has been talked about by educators and by governors since the '90s. Governor Clinton worked on this, Governor Riley worked on this. But what you've seen is political leaders across the political spectrum, Democrat and Republican, are now in the process of raising standards. That's a huge deal. That by itself isn't enough. How you support teachers and teaching to those higher standards, how you talk about those higher expectations for children, for families. This is going to be a rocky couple years, it's going

to be bumpy. There's always challenges with implementation. Test scores may go down. That's all okay, it's important to tell the truth, it's important to have high standards.

And the second part of that question is how do we have transparency and be able to look at one state versus the other? For me, again, that makes intuitive sense. We're not competing for jobs in the state of Indiana anymore by itself. We're competing for jobs with Singapore, with south Korea, with China, with India, and knowing state by state how we're doing relative to other states, who's getting better faster, we're all in this together, who's doing a better job in inner city communities? Who's doing a better job in rural communities or remote or North American reservations?

If we can't compare, if we can't talk to each other, it's hard to shine a spotlight on success. And we have to find ways to get better, faster. And I always say for every educational challenge we're facing, I promise you it is being solved somewhere today with extraordinarily committed educators. What we don't do in education enough is to share those best practices and scale what works. So being able to measure and talk and communicate across the nation and across the globe I think will speed up, will accelerate the pace of change which I think we desperately need to do.

**MR. HUGHES:** Couple of similar questions, I'll combine. One asking how the Department of Education can be proactive to make sure what happened at Ferguson and Baltimore doesn't happen again, and I know that's part of what your speech was about today. Another questioner says the department has already issued civil rights guidelines for schools. Is there anything else the administration can or will do to offset the racial bias that fuels the school to prison pipeline?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** So I'll take two sides of it. First, I'll tell you what we cannot do, and I'll just try and be very honest. On the K-12 side, our nation's basically funded at the local level. Money from the federal government is usually 8 to 10 percent of budgets, usually half is from the state and 40 percent is at the local level. So our levers there are not as strong as some might like them to be. But the fact of the matter is, because we are so property tax based throughout the nation-- not everywhere, some important exceptions-- but in far too many places the children of the wealthy get dramatically more spent on them than the children of the poor.

And until we become uncomfortable with that truth, until we really start to believe that black and brown children and poor children actually can contribute to society, then we're going to continue to have huge disparities. I'm not an expert, I spent some time at Ferguson, but Ferguson didn't happen overnight. That was decades of neglect and abuse and mistreatment and underinvestment. Decades in the making, and it finally, finally, finally boiled up to the top.

So, as long as children in Ferguson are getting less than half the money, or half the money spent on them as children in wealthier communities, we're going to have real challenges and we're going to leave a lot of talent on the sidelines and we're going to lock



up far too many of the young people coming from communities like that that we don't have to do.

So until we become uncomfortable with this reality, until we actually challenge it; not talk about it, not admire it, but do something different, we're going to just continue to have huge disparities in educational funding. And to be clear, money is never everything. You heard me talk about a lot besides money. But it is impossible to justify children in poor communities getting half the money of children in wealthier communities.

When I led the Chicago Public Schools, 85 percent of our children lived below the poverty line. Ninety percent of my children came from the minority community and we received less than half the money of districts that were just five miles north of us, Winnetka and Wilmette along Lake Michigan. We actually sued the state, we were unsuccessful. But it's criminal, it's criminal, that our kids and the children we serve have less than half the money.

And again, think about the 13-- not one year-- 13 year impact of having much less resources than other places. So, that's what it's going to take and that's going to happen much more at the local level, it has to happen, than at the federal level. What we can do at the federal level is to continue to try and put out guidance, to continue to try and spotlight leaders with courage like Bob Runcie who take on these issues. And as we challenge everyone else, I just want to keep coming back to this, we have to look in the mirror and challenge ourselves. And that has to be a piece of this.

And where we are doing things that are contributing to these problems, we have to make ourselves vulnerable, we have to ask the very hard questions and try and do something different. That meeting with the police, I will never forget that meeting, it's like it's yesterday. I was stunned, stunned that we were contributing to this problem in a major way. But that was reality.

Two years ago, we announced with Eric Holder as part of our civil rights data collection process, that across the nation we were suspending and expelling three and four year olds, primarily black boys, black and brown boys, from pre-K. I had no idea. Stunning, but that's the reality. And so we either accept that reality, admire those realities or we do something about it. And we have to continue to shine spotlights on leader and courage. We have to continue to put out guidance. We need to challenge local folks to think about is it good enough that the children of Ferguson have less than half the money spent on them as other folks. And if the answer's yes, then we'll just keep going the way we are.

**MR. HUGHES:** This questioner says you have a reputation for being able to work with people of all ideologies. Yet in the past seven years, the debate over education has become more divisive than ever. Why do you think that is?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** I don't even know if I agree with that characterization. Once again, folks love to cover the noise. What they don't cover is the

not noise. They don't cover the fact that the vast majority of states have raised standards. They don't cover that 43, 44 states have waivers across the political spectrum and are working very, very carefully, very well together. Race to the Top gets all the press, that was \$4 billion. We invested \$5 billion, billion dollars more, in turning around the nation's underperforming schools. People said that was hard, that was impossible, can't happen. Poor kids can't learn, black and brown kids can't learn. We've seen huge progress. It's not perfect, a long way to go, but that story's been massively unreported.

So I think honestly, the media's drawn to noise and controversy. The media does not go to collaboration. And there's an extraordinary story just underneath the surface that lots of media folks here-- I'm trying to throw a little not so subtle hint here-- there's just extraordinary stories. Not to go on too long, just went on a back to school bus tour, traveled throughout the midwest, was in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Cedar Rapids union and management working together have thrown out traditional teacher contracts, thrown out length and step increases and is putting all their money behind teacher leadership and investing in great teachers to be master/mentor teachers to keep new teachers coming there.

It is virtually unheard of. Fifteen thousand school districts, we'll be lucky if we have a hundred school districts doing that. No one tells that story. Union and management, both doing things very, very differently. Both challenging each other and themselves. Amazing collaboration. Nobody knows. So, again, I think there's an important debate to be had, that's a great debate to be had.

Not to go on too long on this, I think what we debate is important, and so much of what we debate is small ball. And with the presidential campaign coming up and about two dozen people running for president, just a couple basic questions I would love the media to ask. One, what are you doing to increase investment in early childhood education? Two, what are you doing to reduce dropout rates? Three, what's your plan to increase high school graduation rates? And four, what's your plan to help us lead the world in college graduation rates? And not just what your goals are, but what political capital, what resources, what investment are you willing to make in those four things.

And all the other questions are noise, it's just silly. Everything else, that's all means to an end. And if we could just get folks focused on those and have an honest debate amongst all the candidates about what they want to do on those things, then we should vote on those things. But because we focus on this silly stuff and the noise, it gives politicians a pass to deal with the real hard issues. And I don't blame them, I blame us as voters. That's on us.

**MR. HUGHES:** You mentioned questions you'd like to ask the candidates. In the three hours of the last Republican presidential debate, this questioner says nothing was said about education. It doesn't seem to be a priority issue in the election. Why do you think it's not being talked about on the campaign trail?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Again, I don't blame the politicians, I blame us. And it wasn't-- in the 2012 presidential debates, education never came up, or barely came up. And until we start voting, until we as voters-- things get discussed upon what folks vote on. And until lots more folks go to the voting booth with education being one of the things they're voting on, these things won't be talked about. And if they get talked about, they'll be talked about in a very superficial, surfacey way and not get at the real issues.

And so again, I'm repeating myself, Democrat, Republican, doesn't matter. Lots of great educational ideas along the political spectrum. But until we insist that mayors and governors and Congress folks, folks in the Senate and folks running for president, until we insist they don't just kiss babies, until we insist they not just do photo ops, but actually try and improve education, then we'll continue to just sort of not make the kind of progress we need and the consequences from our country are getting bigger and bigger.

Not to go on too long, our nation now, our nation's public schools, are majority minority. Majority minority. It's a watershed moment in our nation's history. And guess what? We're not going back the other way. So this isn't the right thing to do for the black community or the Hispanic community, this is the right thing to do for our country. And if we continue to marginalize communities and disenfranchise communities and leave that talent on the sidelines, we will not be competitive with other nations who believe in every single child and giving them a chance.

And so there's a sense of urgency, flat world, competing for high wage high school jobs. The only way we're going to keep middle class jobs in our nation is to have the best educated workforce. So again, go back to those principles. What are folks going to do to increase graduation rates, reduce dropout rates, make sure high school graduates are truly college ready? If we're all fighting to get there, then let's have a really healthy debate about what the best strategies are to do that, but we're not even at that point yet. We're debating silly stuff. It's a distraction, it's a distraction. It's counterproductive.

**MR. HUGHES:** Before I ask the final question, I have some housekeeping. The National Press Club is the world's leading professional organization for journalists and we fight for a free press worldwide. To learn more about the club, visit our website [Press.org](http://Press.org). And to donate to our nonprofit Journalism Institute, visit [Press.org/institute](http://Press.org/institute). I also want to remind you about some upcoming lunch programs. Tomorrow, October 1<sup>st</sup>, Latvian President Raimonds Vejonis will address the club. On Friday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Utah Governor Gary Herbert, chair of the National Governors Association, will address a luncheon. And on October 7<sup>th</sup>, Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings Blake, will address the National Press Club.

I would now like to present our speaker with the cherished National Press Club mug. I know you've been here before, so you're developing a collection.

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Thank you so much.

**MR. HUGHES:** They look great in a set of four in the china cabinet. I'd highly recommend that. So final question. I said in the introduction that you were confirmed on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009 so the very first day of the Obama Administration. You're one of two cabinet secretaries left. Okay, we can see the end out there. Is it safe to say now that you're going to stick around until they close the lights-- they turn the lights off on the administration?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Working hard every day, and we have an amazing team and the amount of unfinished business and the President's talked a lot about the fourth quarter and we're proud of the progress that we've made. But there's so much work we need to do, not just for the next 14 months, but for the next 14 years as a nation. I think it's incumbent upon all of us to continue to work really, really hard and try and give our kids a chance. So thank you so much for having me.

**MR. HUGHES:** So one more, sorry. You were the longest serving head of Chicago schools and now you're one of the longest serving Secretaries of Education. When you do step away from this current role you're in, what do you envision next for yourself?

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** I have no idea, and I've always tried to be pretty tunnel visioned and my job is to focus on doing what we're doing every single day. And when it's time to do something else, I'll worry about that at that point. But I think it would be the absolutely wrong thing to do to start trying to figure out what you do next with your life. So I'll worry about that down the road. If anybody has any ideas, let me know. (Laughter)

**MR. HUGHES:** Let's give a round of applause to our speaker. (Applause)  
Thank you for coming.

**SECRETARY DUNCAN:** Thank you for the mug, too.

**MR. HUGHES:** It's great for your collection. (Applause) I would like to thank staff members of the National Press Club and the Journalism Institute for their work in preparing for today's event. For a copy of today's program, or to learn more about the National Press Club, visit that website, Press.org. Thank you very much, we are adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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