

**House Education and Workforce Committee
Hearing on the Budget and Policy Proposals of the U.S. Department of Education
March 9, 2011**

Context: On March 9, the House Education and Workforce Committee held a hearing to receive testimony from Secretary of Education Arne Duncan on the President's FY 2012 education budget request.

Testimony and Q&A Summary: (Witness: Secretary of Education Arne Duncan).

House Education and Workforce Chairman John Kline's (R-MN) opening remarks focused on the increasing national debt and the Administration's budget request, which he said proposes an increase in overall spending as well as in education spending. Chairman Kline also questioned the proper role of the federal government in education, stating that it needs to be less costly and less intrusive, noting that the current system is broken and in need of changes.

In his opening statement, Ranking Member Miller (D-CA) said he is committed to reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) this year, stating that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is outdated and no longer sufficient. Miller also commented on the importance of early learning, and in particular his support for the Early Learning Challenge Fund and its ability to spur innovation and quality in early learning. Lastly, Miller remarked on the importance of Pell Grants and encouraged higher education to focus more intently on completion to meet the Administration's college completion goal.

Secretary Duncan kept his testimony brief, commenting on the critical need to move forward with ESEA reauthorization this year and the Administration's proposal for a fair, flexible, and focused law. The Secretary remarked on NCLB's failures, particularly the notion that the current law does not distinguish among schools and does not match school needs with appropriate interventions. The new law, Duncan stated, needs to strike a balance between accountability and flexibility, and be tight on goals and loose on means. Secretary Duncan also remarked on the need to focus resources on those most in need and that the Department, states, and districts need to do a better job of using resources most effectively.

Discussion focus: Committee Members questioned Secretary Duncan on a variety of issues, with many Members focused on the need to decrease spending and target funds more effectively.

Chairman Kline articulated his support for the Department's consolidation of programs, but expressed his desire for additional consolidation moving forward. Kline questioned the Secretary about IDEA funding, stating that the Department needs to re-prioritize and provide additional funding for special education. In response, Secretary Duncan remarked that children in special education are benefiting from other programs, not just IDEA. For example, every child will benefit

from states raising the bar on standards, and the Department is pushing states and districts to focus on early literacy to keep children from being unfairly placed into special education.

Congressman Petri (R-WI) expressed concern that resources were not being adequately directed toward students that need them the most. Petri stated that school districts need to evaluate their allocation strategies, and that the federal government and states need to make sure that money is spent where it is needed the most.

Congressman Kildee (D-MI) questioned Secretary Duncan about accountability systems and which measures should be included to effectively measure school and district accountability. Secretary Duncan responded that while graduation rates are important indicators, there needs to be additional indicators that measure post-graduation outcomes, such as college readiness, employability, and college completion, as well as the incorporation of climate survey data into accountability systems. Additionally, schools and districts need to measure key leading indicators such as attendance.

Congressman Andrews (D-NJ) asked the Secretary if there was any consideration made to include online learning as a proposed model under the School Improvement Grants program. Secretary Duncan responded that the Department did consider the measure, and that the Department, states, and districts have been too slow in engaging students through the use of technology.

A common theme that emerged during the discussion period was the level of spending on education and the return on investment. Representatives Foxx (R-NC), Roe (R-TN), Hunter (R-CA), Barletta (R-PA), and Kelly (R-PA) all expressed concern for increases in education spending when outcomes for students do not match this growth. In response to these concerns, Secretary Duncan remarked on the level of change that has taken place over the past two years, and that funds are now being driven toward significant reforms and not to maintain the status quo. The Secretary also acknowledged that the Department, states, and districts need to be more targeted with resources and make better investment decisions. Additionally, Duncan pointed to improved outcomes for special education over recent years as an example of the Department's positive return on investment.

Early learning was also mentioned by multiple Members as an area of interest and concern. Congresswoman Woolsey (D-CA) expressed her support for the Promise Neighborhoods initiative and discussed the importance of community services in improving student outcomes. Congresswoman Hirono (D-HI) focused her questions and comments on early learning as well, stating that early learning is an area where there exists a clear evidence-base, and that if Congress is focused on making sure that funds are spent on programs that work, early learning should be the first priority. Congressman Walberg (R-MI) asked Secretary Duncan if the Early Learning Challenge Fund would protect the autonomy of private early learning providers. Secretary Duncan responded by noting that states would choose to apply, and that the goal of the program is to improve quality and access

Access and affordability of higher education emerged as another theme of specific concern to Members, particularly with regard to the Pell Grant program. Congressmen Hinojosa (D-TX), Tierney (D-MA), Loeb sack (D-IA), and Holt (D-NJ) expressed concern with regard to the recent changes in the Pell Grant program. Secretary Duncan acknowledged these concerns, and stated that given difficult budget conditions the Department wanted to preserve Pell funds for the majority of students who use them, and therefore decided to eliminate students' ability to get a second Pell grant in an award year and eliminate the payment of interest subsidies for graduate and professional

student loans. Congressman Hinojosa also articulated his support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic-Serving Institutions, an area where the Secretary also expressed his continued support.

Analysis: A key theme that emerged during this Committee hearing focused on the need to target resources more effectively and to evaluate what works to ensure the greater return on investment of federal dollars. Additionally, Members on both side of the aisle articulated their support for ESEA reauthorization and remarked on the need for significant changes to be made to the current law. However, difficult budget debates, agreeing on the appropriate federal role in education, and conducting oversight hearings focused on Administration priorities may hinder action on reauthorization this year.