

Testimony, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

March 17, 2010

Thank you Chairman Harkin, Senator Enzi, and members of the committee. It's an honor to be here today.

I want to thank each of you for your hard work on education. I believe that education is the one true path out of poverty. It is the great equalizer in our society. As the President said in his weekly address on Saturday, there are few issues that speak more directly to the long-term prosperity of our nation than education. Education is one issue that can rise above ideology and politics. We can all agree that we need to educate our way to a better economy.

We currently have an unprecedented opportunity to reform our nation's schools so they are preparing all of our students for success in college and careers.

Today, the status quo clearly isn't good enough. Consider the following statistics:

- 27% of America's young people drop out of high school. That means 1.2 million teenagers are leaving our schools for the streets.
- On a recent international tests of math literacy, our 15-year-olds scored 24<sup>th</sup> out of 29 developed nations. In science, our 15-year-olds ranked 17<sup>th</sup> out of 29 developed countries.
- And just 40% of young people earn a two-year or four-year college degree.
- The US now ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in the world in the rate of college completion for 25- to 34-year-olds. A generation ago, we were first in the world but we're falling behind. The global achievement gap is growing.

Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we have built the foundation for reform. All states are reporting the progress they're making on four areas of reform: raising standards, developing and recruiting excellent teachers and leaders, using data to inform instruction, and turning around our lowest-performing schools. In the Race to the Top fund, we have identified 16 finalists for the first phase. We've invited all of the finalists to present about their plans and will be announcing the winners in the first week of April. The winners will blaze the trail on reforms that will improve student achievement for decades to come.

To promote reforms in every state, I am committed to working with you in 2010 to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It's been more than 8 years since Congress last reauthorized ESEA through the No Child Left Behind Act. That's the longest gap between reauthorizations in the 45 year-history of ESEA. We all recognize that NCLB has its flaws. The time to fix those problems is now.

My staff and I have reached out to listen and learn from people across the country, and to hear what they think about NCLB. My senior staff and I visited every state on our Listening and Learning Tour. We met with parents, teachers, and students themselves. We've

engaged in conversations with stakeholders representing all sections of the education community.

In all of our conversations, we've heard a consistent message that our schools aren't expecting enough of students. We need to raise our standards so that all students are graduating prepared to succeed in college and the workplace. We've also heard that people aren't looking to Washington for answers. They don't want us to provide a prescription for success. Our role should be to offer a meaningful definition of success – one that shows teachers and students what they should be striving for.

With those lessons in our mind, we have developed our Blueprint for ESEA reauthorization. We have shared that with you, Mr. Chairman, I ask that the Blueprint be entered into the record of this hearing. In this Blueprint, you'll see that everything is organized around our three major goals for reauthorization.

- 1.) Raise standards.
- 2.) Reward excellence and growth.
- 3.) Increase local control and flexibility while maintaining the focus on equity and closing achievement gaps.

All of these policy changes will support our effort to meet the president's goal that by 2020, America once again will lead the world in college completion. In particular, the ESEA will set a goal that by 2020 all students will graduate ready to succeed in college and the workplace. We will build an accountability system that measures the progress that states, districts, and schools are making toward meeting that goal.

We have a comprehensive agenda to help us meet that goal. It starts with asking states to adopt standards that prepare students for success in college and careers. Governors and chief state school officers of 48 states are doing the tough job of setting these standards in reading and math. In our proposal, we call on states to adopt college and career ready standards – either working with other states or by getting their higher education institutions to certify the standards are rigorous enough to ensure students graduate ready to succeed in college-level classes or enter the workplace.

But standards aren't enough. We'll need a new generation of assessments that measure whether students are on track for success in college and careers. We will support the effort to develop those tests so they will measure higher-order skills, provide accurate measures of student progress, and give teachers the information they need to improve student achievement.

These standards and assessments are key parts of our effort to redefine accountability.

Under NCLB, the federal government greatly expanded its role in holding schools accountable. It did several things right – and I'll always give NCLB credit for its important contributions to education reform. It required all students be included in the accountability system – including minority students, students with disabilities, and English learners – and

held schools, districts and states accountable for educating all of their students. It required states, districts and schools to report test scores disaggregated by student subgroups, exposing achievement gaps like never before. We know the achievement gap is unacceptably large – and teachers and school leaders throughout the country are working and mobilizing to address that problem. NCLB was right to create a system based on results for students, not just on inputs.

But NCLB's accountability system needs to be fixed -- now. It allows – even encourages – states to lower standards. It doesn't measure growth or reward excellence. It prescribes the same interventions for schools with very different needs. It encourages a narrowing of the curriculum and focuses on test preparation. It labels too many schools with the same “failing” label regardless of their challenges. We can't sustain momentum for reform if we don't have a credible accountability system that addresses these issues.

Our proposal will make significant improvements on accountability. The biggest and most important one is that it will use student academic growth as the most important measure of whether schools, districts, and states are making progress. I'm more interested in growth than absolute test scores, as long as students are on a path to meet standards.

Under our plan, we will reward schools that are making the most progress. At the same time, we will be tough-minded in our lowest-performing schools and schools with large achievement gaps that aren't closing. All other schools will be given flexibility to meet performance targets working under their state and local accountability systems. If we get accountability right, we'll provide the right incentives to increase student achievement and I'm confident America's teachers and principals will deliver.

I would like to focus on the important work of teachers and leaders. The teaching and learning that happens in schools every day are what drives American education. We spend a lot of time talking about reform – about the proper federal role – about the cost of education and the need for more funding – about competitive versus formula – and those are all important debates to have.

But we can never lose sight of the impact our decisions have in classrooms where teachers are doing the hard work every day of helping our children learn.

We believe there is a lot in our proposal that teachers will like. We know that there is a lot under current law that teachers don't like. Most teachers believe that we have a broken system of accountability. Many teachers believe their evaluation and support systems are flawed. We need a system of accountability that is fair. We need better evaluation systems that are honest and useful and elevates rather than diminishes the teaching profession.

All told, we are requesting a record \$3.9 billion dollars to strengthen the teaching profession – an increase of \$350 million dollars. We begin with the understanding that teaching is some of the toughest and most important work in society and we are deeply committed to making it a better profession for teachers. To start with:

We are encouraging the development of high quality teacher preparation programs. Today, many teachers tell me they are underprepared for what they face in the classroom. They have to learn on the job.

We are encouraging the development of meaningful career ladders and stronger efforts to retain the great teachers we have. From newly-hired teachers to tenured teachers to master teachers, mentors, department heads and principals – we need to rebuild education as a profession with real opportunities for growth that sustain a teacher’s craft over a career, not just a couple of years.

We want to encourage schools and districts to rethink how teachers do their jobs – how they collaborate, how they use their time outside the classroom and how they shape professional development programs. When adults have time to collaborate and solve school problems they are going to be more productive and they will get better results for our kids. Teachers need to be at the center of those efforts.

We are also investing in principals to create better instructional leaders, so that teachers have the leadership they need to do better work.

As for teacher evaluation systems, our goal is a system that is fair, honest and useful – and built around a definition of teacher effectiveness, developed with teachers, that includes multiple measures – not just a single test score. Teachers need great principals for support, and we will also ask for fair evaluation systems for principals.

We want to use these systems to support teachers in their instructional practice and to reward great teachers for all they do – including advancing student learning. We also want to reward them for working in high-need schools.

As I mentioned, we will change accountability system to make it fairer. We will we start by holding not just schools and teachers accountable for student success, but districts and states, as well. Teachers can’t teach and principals can’t lead when they are not well supported at the local and state level.

We want to stop mislabeling thousands of schools as failures. Instead we want to challenge them to close achievement gaps with targeted strategies designed by teachers and principals together.

Similarly, everyone should get credit for helping students who are way behind catch-up, even if they do not yet meet standards – as long as they are on a path to get there. A teacher whose students start the year three grades behind and their students advance by two grade levels should be applauded – not labeled as a failure. That includes districts, principals and teachers. This is a shared responsibility.

We want to give many more schools and districts the flexibility to improve by focusing much more on the lowest-performing schools and those with the largest achievement gaps

that aren't closing, while giving teachers and principals of the other schools more flexibility and incentives to succeed.

We are also calling for assessments that measure deep learning, not test-taking skills – assessments that can engage and encourage learning, and provide teachers with meaningful, quick feedback.

And we want students, parents, teachers, and communities working toward a meaningful bar, and to support them in getting these. The goal of the K-12 system has to be to prepare students for the next step -- college and a career. The system needs to be focused on that goal. Dumbed-down standards means we are lying to children – giving them false hope and undermining the high standards teachers have for their students.

We're calling for over \$1 billion to fund a complete education, because a whole child is a successful adult. We want schools investing in the arts, history, science, languages and all of the learning experiences that contribute to a well-rounded education.

Finally, we're also seeking \$1.8 billion dollars to support students by encouraging community engagement and support and exposure to other positive adults. Teachers cannot do it alone. They need parents, community leaders, social service agencies and other supportive adults in the schools helping to reinforce a culture of learning and respect. A parent is a child's first teacher.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss our comprehensive reform of the ESEA. This will be one of the most dramatic changes in the law's history. It will fundamentally change the federal role in education. We will move from being a compliance monitor to being an engine for innovation.

The urgency for these reforms has never been greater. Our children and our future are at risk, so let us together do the difficult but necessary things our schools demand, and our children deserve. We know that schools can transform the lives of children. We see examples of schools serving high-poverty populations that are accelerating student achievement. We need to reward them and hold them up as examples for others to follow.

I thank you for all you have done and all you will do to make education America's highest priority and greatest legacy.

We need to work together to continue that legacy and deliver a world-class education for every child.

Thank you.