

# Duncan urges extended time, creative use of stimulus funds

By Sarah D. Sparks and Frank Wolfe, *ED Daily*, 3/25/2009

Former Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan has not yet reached the 100-day mark as education secretary, but with Congress' passage of the stimulus and the FY 2009 omnibus spending packages, he's already well over the \$100 billion mark.

So far, Duncan still operates with a skeleton crew — many top-level positions remain unfilled — and he admitted to *Education Daily*® that his staff is still working to develop additional guidance and a process to streamline the thousands of waiver requests he expects from districts receiving Title I and stabilization money from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Yet the new secretary is determined to use the largest increase to federal education spending in more than a generation to patch not just local budget gaps but also a much-criticized hole in NCLB: the lack of effective, large-scale improvement strategies for the schools that the law has identified as needing dramatic turnaround.

Duncan sat down with *Education Daily*® to talk about the vision for education reform and what he hopes to see from states and districts going forward.

## **Q: What education reforms do you want to see during your administration?**

**A:** We're pushing real hard around more time. That means lots of different things, but really it's a recognition that six hours a day, five days a week, nine months out of the year doesn't quite work. It's really trying to redefine fundamentally what it means to be a school. So I think it means a longer day; I think it means all the values and principles around community schools: art, drama, academic enrichment, GED, [English as a second language], family literacy nights. Really engaging the community: health care clinics, early childhood, the whole gamut. Making school the center of family life.

What I worry about a lot is summer reading loss. You have kids who don't have a lot of books at home and aren't read to. People around the country have experienced this — it's nothing unique to Chicago — but you get kids to a certain point in June, and when they come back in September, they're further behind than when they left you three months ago. It's heartbreaking. I'm not saying we need to do more of the school day in the summer, but it's all the opportunities that middle class kids have, to develop a skill or interest, to get drama or athletics, to get tutoring or be read to.

I'd love to get a hell of a lot more fifth- and sixth-grade kids on college campuses. When I grew up, my dad was a college professor, and I was in that environment every day. You feel like you belong; you feel like that's part of who you are.

**Q:** *When you get state applications for the stimulus, what are you going to be looking for?*

**A:** Despite the tremendous financial pressure that states and districts are under — and that is real, and it is devastating — but despite that, we can't just be satisfied with filling budget holes. We have to use this money to try to leverage change, to push a reform agenda and try to get dramatically better. So, whether it's thinking about time in different ways, thinking about talent in different ways, thinking about great professional development for continuous improvement, what we want is folks investing in strategies that have demonstrated ability to really make a difference. There have been a lot of people out there doing really innovative things that they haven't been able to take to scale. It's been in little pockets — one school, two schools. Here's an

opportunity, if you're really creative and thoughtful, to really drive some significant change despite the tough budget times.

**Q:** *During your tenure, do you see performance pay becoming the norm in school districts nationwide?*

**A:** I think we've been really clear that we want to find new and creative ways to reward excellence, and I think there needs to be a lot of careful work around what that means, and teachers should be involved with that conversation. ... There are some things you just can't do. You can't create competition between teachers, and a lot of these programs have failed because of that. It can't be a zero-sum game ... it's got to be incenting everyone to move in the same direction. As you know, many teachers don't have a test score tied to their particular work. The librarian doesn't, and the librarian can play a huge role in driving student achievement.

One thing I liked about what we did at home was we rewarded everyone in the building — custodians, security guards, lunchroom attendants — and really built a culture in which every adult in the building was driving student achievement. In schools that are taking off around the country, that's what you see, and we're really trying to recognize that and reward that.

**Q:** *How do you see that happening?*

**A:** I want to put a little bit more money on the table, but if that's all you're doing, you're kidding yourself. You're going to have no impact. You'll waste your money, and [teachers] are going to [leave] anyway. But if you give great teachers a chance to shape, and build a culture, and do it collectively, you have a chance to do something special. Getting critical mass into historically underserved communities is something that's going to be really important. I think there are a lot of potentially great pipelines for talent, but it's getting a critical mass of that talent to go in together that will give you a real opportunity to succeed.

Teachers go into this for the most altruistic of reasons, but if you ask a phenomenal teacher to go into a dysfunctional situation, no amount of money in the world is going to make them do that. So you have to think about: How do you change the culture? How do you bring teams of folks in together? How do you engage the community? How do you think about turning around both neighborhood high schools and their feeder elementaries at the same time to change the opportunity structure for a whole neighborhood, not just a single child or family? There's lots of room to be creative here.

[Also,] I want to think differently about areas of shortage: math and science, foreign language. We have 50 English teachers for every job available, and math and science vacancies. That doesn't make sense, so let's put some money on the table and try to get more people to go into math and science. Let's put some money on the table to get folks with other credentials to go back to school to get their math and science endorsement to become math and science teachers.

So, it's rewarding excellence, it's trying to get excellence into the toughest communities, and it's trying to meet areas of critical need.