

## Extra Feature Story

### **Obama Chooses Basketball Buddy to Shape Education Policy**

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**President-elect Barack Obama has chosen his long-time basketball partner Arne Duncan, the chief of Chicago public schools and a man with a reputation of reform, as his Secretary of Education.**

As head of the country's third-biggest school district since 2001, Duncan was credited with turning around several troubled Chicago schools and raising test scores.

He pushed to boost teacher quality, something Obama stressed during his campaign, and he created a five-year teacher contract that built in raises for each year in order to boost staff stability in schools.

The graduation rate has jumped nearly 6 percent and 53 new public schools have opened during his tenure, reported the Chicago Tribune.

"When it comes to school reform, Arne is the most hands-on of hands-on practitioners," Obama said at a news conference Tuesday.

"He's not beholden to any one ideology, and he's worked tirelessly to improve teacher quality," the president-elect said.

Obama also discussed some of the challenges Duncan will face.

"If we want to out-compete the world tomorrow, then we're going to have to out-educate the world today," Obama said.

"Unfortunately, when our high school dropout rate is one of the highest in the industrialized world, when a third of all fourth-graders can't do basic math, when more and more Americans are getting priced out of attending college, we're falling far short of that goal," he said.

#### **The Secretary of Education**

Education in the United States is primarily a state and local government responsibility, but the Department of Education still has an important role to play.

The department establishes policies relating to federal distribution of funds for education and collects data about the nation's schools to make recommendations for improvements.

The most important policy from President Bush's administration was the No Child Left Behind law, signed in 2002.

The law, which is up for renewal in 2009, emphasized standardized testing as a tool to evaluate the performance of schools.

## **Reformers vs. Unions**

In 2006, Duncan called on Congress to double funding for No Child Left Behind, though he has called for changes to it. As secretary of education, he will have to consider the interests of students, teachers and principals.

Although there are many ideas about how to fix schools, there are two major forces currently at cross-purposes in distressed school districts.

One is the reform movement represented by school chancellors such as Michelle Rhee of Washington, D.C., who has shaken up the system, fired many principals and teachers and experiments with different ways to improve student achievement.

The other is the teacher unions, which exist to provide teachers with better pay, training and job stability.

Duncan is known as someone who experiments, but has managed to remain friendly with teacher unions.

## **Federal vs. State and Local**

However running a city school district, and managing the Department of Education are very different.

"The federal Department of Education is at least three or four steps removed from your child's classroom. And it's very hard for Arne Duncan or anybody to have a big impact on what's going on at the local level," Michael Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute told the NewsHour.

"The best the federal government can do is to try to create a political environment where school reform can flourish.

Education falls outside of Washington's authority because of the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which states that "The powers not delegated to the United States by the constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people."

Because education is not delegated in the Constitution, it falls to the states by default. That responsibility is also reflected in funding.

Of an estimated \$1 trillion being spent nationwide on education at all levels for the 2007-2008 school year, about 88 percent comes from State, local, and private sources.

States typically provide a little less than half of the funding, local governments contribute about 44 percent of total, and the federal government contributes about 9 percent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

**-- Compiled by Talea Miller for NewsHour Extra**

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