

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Obama Chooses Basketball Buddy to Shape Education Policy, 12/19/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/us/july-dec08/edsec_12-19.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. How might the election of Barack Obama affect education policy?

2. What is the Department of Education?

3. Why do states and local communities have more control over what goes on in your school than the president or Department of Education?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. Who is Arne Duncan?

ANSWER

Arne Duncan is the former chief of Chicago public schools and has just been picked by President elect Barack Obama as his Secretary of Education.

2. What are some highlights of Duncan's career as chief of Chicago public schools?

ANSWER

He was credited with turning around several troubled Chicago schools and raising test scores. He created a five-year teacher contract that built in raises for each year in order to boost staff stability in schools. Subsequently the graduation rate has jumped nearly 6 percent and 53 new public schools have opened during his tenure, reported the Chicago Tribune.

3. Why does Mr. Obama think that the secretary of education is important?

ANSWER

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

4. What does the secretary of education do?

ANSWER

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.

5. What is the legacy of the Bush appointed Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings?

ANSWER

The most important policy from President Bush's administration was the No Child Left Behind law, signed in 2002. Secretary Spellings was a chief author of this bill.

6. When is the law up for renewal? Why is this important?

ANSWER

No Child Left Behind is up for renewal in 2009, this is important because it means that Secretary Duncan can have a big effect on it.

7. What is the reform movement and what is a teacher union?

ANSWER

The reform movement is a movement in education that is often accused of being anti-teacher. It is represented by school chancellors such as Michelle Rhee of Washington, D.C., who has fired many principals and teachers and experiments with different ways to improve student achievement.

Teacher unions are unions which exist to provide teachers with better pay, training and job stability.

8. If the secretary of education is not in charge of funding schools what is his or her role?

ANSWER

The secretary of education job is to try to create a political environment where school reform can flourish.

9. How are schools funded?

ANSWER

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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Create a list of things you'd like to improve about your school. What could Arne Duncan and Barack Obama do to help with these issues?

2. After learning a little about Arne Duncan, do you think that he is a good choice for secretary of education? Why or why not?

3. Why are good schools important? Research the quality of schools in the United States compared with the quality in other countries?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.