



**“RESOURCE ALLOCATION, REINVESTMENT, AND
EDUCATION REFORM”**

OPENING PLENARY SESSION

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

**JOHN PODESTA, PRESIDENT AND CEO,
CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

ARNE DUNCAN, U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

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MR. JOHN PODESTA: Okay. The school bell rang. Good morning, everybody. I'm John Podesta. I'm the President of the Center for American Progress. On behalf of the Center, I'd like to welcome you to our conference, "Resource Allocation, Reinvestment, and Education Reform."

I want to start by thanking Cindy Brown, Raegen Miller, Robin Chait, Melissa Lazarin and our whole education team for not only pulling this conference together, but for the papers that are being released this morning in conjunction with the conference on better teacher recruitment and training, and expanded learning time.

Our conversation today will focus on how states and districts can invest in effective education reforms that lead to long-term education advancement and economic growth, and how the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act can provide an opportunity for them to make a down payment on these investments.

As you know, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was not only intended to buffer the country from the devastating effects of the recession and the financial meltdown that we're experiencing, but to lay the foundation for long-term sustainable, equitable growth.

And that's why, I think, there was such a great emphasis in that bill, passed in February on human capital - on making the right kind of investments to ensure that over the long term our country can succeed. That bill offers an unprecedented opportunity to encourage, bold, innovative, education reforms that will bolster and strengthen America's economic future.

And when you stop and consider how our education system is failing to prepare our students for success in college and careers, I think we can all agree that bold, innovative reform is exactly what's needed today.

Take a look at the facts. Our high school students consistently fare poorly under national comparisons of student achievement. And according to the results from the National Assessment and Education Progress, the NAEP test, we made almost no progress in math and reading achievement in four decades at the high school level. Our fourth and eighth graders have made significant progress in mathematics, but since the early 1990s they've been lagging in making progress in reading. And our domestic achievement gaps remain wide at all levels. Black fourth grade students performed 28 points lower in reading achievement in 2007 than white fourth grade students.

Moreover, our poor education performance and – what I consider a shameful achievement gap are costing the country – in terms of economic growth, which depends on a highly educated and capable workforce. A recent analysis by the McKinsey Global Institute found that our education achievement gaps at home and abroad impose the equivalent of a permanent national recession.

So why do our schools perform poorly? Well, for starters we have a lack of policies for recruiting, training and retaining effective teachers in our schools, particularly the schools in struggling areas of our country. We fund schools inefficiently and inadequately. We do not have rigorous standards, assessment and accountability systems. And we don't enact improvement strategies like expanded learning time to improve the performance of struggling students in schools. In short, our education system does too little to ensure high quality education for all of our students.

Here at the Center for American Progress, our education policy agenda is focused on promoting bold and innovative educational reforms that will dramatically improve achievement for all students, but particularly students living in poverty. These reforms and the ideas that drive them will be at the heart of the discussion today. I'm very glad that you've been able to join us for that.

We're extremely fortunate to have Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to help launch this important conversation. And I'd also like to acknowledge Carmel Martin, who's joined the Secretary in the first row. She actually built the education team at the Center for American Progress before returning to Capitol Hill and is now serving as the Assistant Secretary for Planning Evaluation Policy Development at the Department of the Education. So we're happy to have Carmel back.

Arne Duncan was nominated to be Secretary of Education by President-elect Barack Obama and was confirmed by the United States Senate on Inauguration Day. Prior to his appointment as Secretary, Arne served as the Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools. In the seven and a half years as CEO, he united education reformers, teachers, principals and business stakeholders behind an aggressive education reform agenda that included opening 100 new schools, and expanding the after school and summer learning programs. He closed down underperforming schools. He increased early childhood and college access. He dramatically boosted the caliber of teachers and built public-private partnerships around a variety of education initiatives.

He's using that experience, and the resources that were included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to make change happen across our country and to set off a real race for the top.

So please join me in welcoming the Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

(Applause.)

SEC. ARNE DUNCAN: Thank you so much, John. I appreciate your leadership and CAP's progressive leadership on these issues. And I have to tell you, on a personal note, coming into Washington, where I'm the new kid on the block and have a lot to learn, John Podesta, you've got to know, is an absolute pro. He is an extraordinary guy with great ideas and has really helped make the transition really, really smooth. John, thank you so much, at a personal level, for your support.

I'll keep my remarks relatively brief. I know you have a lot of good questions. I want to have a dialogue this morning and I look forward to getting into the nitty-gritty on these issues.

I came here with a real sense of urgency that we have to dramatically improve education. John walked you through the numbers, and we have to dramatically improve the quality of education for children in this country. And I've spent most of my life now with actual kids, students, and many communities, with students and neighborhoods that have been underserved for decades. So I've seen the devastating impact on communities when we fail to provide quality education.

But we've also seen places of extraordinary hope where when we do the right thing by children, when we have the highest of expectations and we systemically challenge them to be successful, we can do very, very well. And our simple goal is to make sure that every single child in the country has a chance to have a great, great education. We can't wait. We can't be passive. We can't accept the status quo until we get to that point. So we have a lot of hard work ahead of us.

Thanks to the President's generosity and absolute commitment in Congress, we also have unprecedented resources and it's sort of staggering to think about \$100 billion of new money coming into education: \$5 billion allocated for early childhood, almost \$70 billion for K-12, and \$31 billion for higher education to increase access and opportunity – the biggest investment since the GI bill. So probably never in our lifetime again will we see these kinds of monies coming in.

What's a little interesting to me is that states have been slow to apply for the money, and we've only had about 13 states coming in to get their share of the recovery funds. We put out almost \$13 billion to date. Our staff is working unbelievably hard to turn these applications around in nine calendar days. The career staff has been absolutely phenomenal. We have a July 1st deadline. We have 30 states that haven't even applied for resources yet, and we're committed to turn these around as fast as we can.

Even as we go into the summer in hopes of planning for next school year, the states and district and school systems need to have a sense of stability. We don't want to be laying off hundreds or thousands of teachers and taking a step backwards. And so, it's really critical to me that states step up to the plate, if they haven't applied, to make sure they have a chance to access the unprecedented resources and make sure we keep investing in the right things.

But I want to be very, very clear and everyone knows this: While the resources are extraordinarily important, money alone is not going to solve the problem in our country. If we're simply investing in maintaining the status quo, we are not going to get where we need to go. So yes, we desperately need the money to stave off hundreds of thousands of teacher layoffs. The most important thing we can do is to keep teachers teaching, keep our students learning, to educate our way to a better economy, but at the same time we have to push a very, very strong reform agenda. And I actually think with

unprecedented resources must come unprecedented reform. And I want to talk to you about what we're looking at for assurances in the recovery package.

We're going to take those assurances and put them into our race to the top competition for an additional \$5 billion. We also have almost \$5 billion to support Title I school improvement grants. So think about \$100 billion of more formal legitimate programs and \$10 billion in discretionary resources. I talked to Secretary Paige a while back. I think he had \$17 million. We have more than \$10 billion.

So if we don't do something to make it better now, when is it ever going to happen? This is a once in a couple generations opportunity and we're going to push very, very hard to make sure, that we're using the resources and dollars to drive the kind of change our country needs.

I'll also walk through a couple of areas that are so important to us. And to be clear, I think all of these areas are important. We're asking states and districts not to pick and choose - not to cherry pick and look at this comprehensive package of reforms that we think collectively will get us where we need to go.

First of all, I'm just a big believer in understanding the data. And numbers don't tell you everything by any stretch, but when you don't have numbers, you're just shooting in the dark. And we all have our guesses, we all have our hunches, we all have our intuitions. Looking at schools on the national, state, district, and individual level, we don't have real data, and we really don't have a way to drive student achievement and close the achievement gap.

So we're looking to make sure that every state, every district has a comprehensive data system that does a couple of things. First it should track every single child from the time they enter school through the time they graduate, and we need more and more to understand how our students do once they go off to higher education. Are they graduating? Are they all taking remedial classes? What's happening with them? That's why we want states to start to tell us those things. There are far too many places where we don't even know what our students are doing, so how can we begin to figure out what strategies are working and what strategies aren't?

Second, we want to track every child to their teachers so that we can understand which teachers are making the biggest difference in our students' lives. That's scary to some. That's controversial. I'm going to keep coming back to this theme that great teaching matters. Adults matter tremendously to our children. The more we can find out which teachers are doing a phenomenal job of driving student achievement and which ones aren't the more we can build upon success and replicate those.

Third, we want to track teachers back to their schools of education so we can understand which schools of education are producing the teachers that are producing the best student results. And while I travel the country and start to spend lots of time talking to teachers and students, I have to tell you, we have some hard work to do with our

schools of education. It might not come as a surprise to many of you here, but as I talked to some of the great teachers around the country, many of them unfortunately felt woefully underprepared to come in and be very effective.

Second, this is an idea that John happens to push really hard - we have to dramatically raise our standards. The idea of 50 states doing their own thing makes no sense. We have to talk about race to the bottom and dumbing down the standards.

And I come from one of those states where that happened. I'm from Illinois. I can speak to this from personal experience. What most infuriates me is that in many, many states, we are basically lying to children. We tell children they are quote, "meeting the state standard." A logical conclusion for that child and that parent is if I'm meeting the standard, I'm on track to be successful. I'm doing something right. But the fact of the matter is that in many, many states, where we are quote, "meeting that state standard," you are barely prepared to graduate from high school and you are absolutely unprepared to go to a competitive university, let alone graduate.

And it's really interesting to look at the NAEP national and state data. There are wide, wide gaps, and we see states where 85 or 90 percent of students are meeting state standards and 12 percent or 15 percent are meeting NAEP standards. We're lying to kids. So we're looking at common, college-ready, career-ready, and international benchmark standards.

These aren't federal standards. They won't be something that I come up with. These are international standards. Our students today are competing with children in India and China. And we need to make sure that our children are competing on a level playing field and have a chance to be successful. Right now, our children are at a competitive disadvantage and that has to change.

And we're very, very pleased that a number of folks have come to the table. The business community has been crying out for this for a long time with great non-profits and with folks from the private sector. The Gates Foundation, College Board, and Achieve have been working very, very hard. You've probably seen in the last two months or so, the head of the NEA and the head of the AFT have come to the table. CAP has been talking about this. So you have all the governors on board now. We have the state school chiefs that you hear are doing a great job. There's an interesting confluence of facts. This is a historic third-rail. But business, government, non-profit, unions, political leaders - everyone is saying that we have to do better by our children. We have to raise the bar dramatically.

I can do this in the Q&A, but one of the fundamental problems I have with No Child Left Behind is it was very, very loose on the goals. You had 50 different goalposts, 50 different states doing their own thing, but it was very tight and very descriptive on how you get there. I want to fundamentally flip that on its head and have a real high bar, a rigorous bar that will be much more creative and innovative, and hold people accountable for results.

But all the great ideas are not going to come from Washington. They're going to come from the local level and the more we empower local districts and local schools to really drive change, the more we allow them to innovate, the better we're going to do. We're going to become much tighter on goals to really allow people some creativity and a chance to innovate to get there.

Third, and CAP has pushed very, very hard on this, and this is a constant theme I'm going to keep coming back to: We have to reward excellence in our profession. Somehow we've been scared to talk about excellence. And I don't care what profession: business, non-profits, sports, education – great work matters tremendously. And I've seen throughout my life what the highest expectations can do for children who are desperately poor, who come from horrendously violent neighborhoods, who have dysfunctional families. With great adults in their lives those children can be extraordinarily successful.

So we need to reward excellence. We need to figure out who our best teachers and principals are. We need to create incentives for the best teachers and the best principals to take on the toughest of assignments. We talk so much about the achievement gap, but I think we have an opportunity gap. We have our best teachers, and principals working with our most privileged students, and we've had many historical disincentives and very few incentives to get our best and brightest working with children and communities that are underserved.

I think that we're serious about filling this gap. If we're serious about changing the status quo, we don't need another 15 studies. We know which these schools are. We know what the neighborhoods are. We need to get great people in to help those kids and we need to do it now. And so we're putting lots and lots on the table to encourage states, and districts to reward excellence, and place that excellence where we need it most.

Finally, we have areas of critical need: natural science and special education. I think we have had a math and science shortage for 25 or 30 years. I'll have to try and fix it. I don't want to be talking about it 25 or 30 years from now. I'll have to pay math and science teachers more. That's a little bit controversial too, a little bit hard, but if we have areas of critical need, why don't we pay – pick a number: \$5,000, \$10,000, \$15,000 or more. Where we need more math and science teachers, we need to find a way to keep them in the classroom, help them be successful, but also reward them for staying there.

And I worry so much about our students in sixth, seventh and eighth grade who start to lose interest in math and science. I think the big reason for why that happens is that they're often being taught by teachers who don't know math and science. It's hard to teach what you don't understand, and then it becomes boring for the students. They see the teacher is not engaged. They see the teacher doesn't get it and then we lose this next generation of great mathematicians and scientists. So we are really thinking very, very differently about talent.

The final item I'll talk about now before I answer questions is to really think about our struggling schools. Again, John gave you many of the numbers, but we have to fundamentally change what's going on. There's 2,000 high schools throughout the country that are producing 50 percent of our dropouts. We know what the problem is. We don't need another study. And unfortunately, these are not problems that started two years ago. In many of these high schools, this has been going on for 15, 20, 30 years - literally for decades. So what do we do? How do we fundamentally go in there and make a difference?

There are three things we have to think about very, very differently in these communities that have been historically underserved. One is we have to think very differently about time. Our school day is too short. Our school week is too short. Our school year is too short. We have lots of very innovative charter schools doing lots of different things, but one thing they all have in common is they have a longer school day. They're spending more time with kids. If you take out all the curriculum innovations, the common denominator in the schools that are making a difference is they're finding ways to extend the day.

I think our schools need to be open 12 to 14 hours a day, six or seven days a week, and 11 or 12 months a year. And schools shouldn't just extend the day, but need to think differently about after school to include a variety of enrichment programs, academic support, drama, arts, sports, chess, music, and debate. Schools also need to include a wide variety of activities for parents including GED, ESL, and family literacy night. We have to invite the not-for-profits, community-based agencies, and local service partners into our schools.

Buildings don't belong to the local union. They don't belong to the local principal or the superintendent. These buildings belong to the community. And in every poor neighborhood, a neighborhood that's starved for resources, we have schools. And in every school there are classrooms, computer labs, gyms, libraries, and some have pools. And the more our schools truly become the centers of the community; the more our students are based there. And the more they're safe and not on the streets, the better they're going to do. And so we have to fundamentally think differently about that.

I've been trying to push hard for districts to think about summer differently. We all know. We all get it. No more studies about summer reading loss. We all know about children - they reach a certain point in June and because they aren't read to during the summer they come back to us in September further behind than when they left. It doesn't make any sense. So we need to bring these students back early, working with them and keep accelerating the rate of change.

Secondly, great teaching matters, and great principals matter. And we need to have the courage, where it's not working, to move adults out, keep children there and bring a new team of adults in to serve those children. A turnaround strategy.

We did this in a relatively small number of schools in Chicago – and it was tough, tough work and controversial. But in these schools, the same children, the same families, the same needs, the same socioeconomic challenges, the same communities, with a new team of adults, higher expectations, and a different sense of what’s possible, working harder, had better results. Some of those children, within a couple of years, are performing two to three times better – not 2 or 3 percent; two or three times better.

One school that we closed and reopened with new teams went from being one of the lowest performing schools in the state to having the highest gain in the state of Illinois – the greatest gain. It is unbelievably hopeful, but once you see that we have a chance, it’s absolutely heartbreaking to think about what they weren’t getting before.

And this isn’t charter versus non-charter. In fact, when we did this in Chicago, all new teachers came in. I’m hoping non-charters do this. I think we have a wide variety of players in this business. We need non-profits. We need school districts. I would love to have the unions really step up and help solve this problem. And if we think about the relatively small number of schools that we know around the country are producing the overwhelming majority of our dropouts, we have to think very, very differently about that.

What I’m pushing for, and it will take us a little time to get there, is to eliminate the bottom one percent of schools every year. In this country we have about 95,000 schools. Let’s round it up to 100,000. What if every year, as a country, we were taking the bottom 1,000 schools and fundamentally changing them? Time, talent, turnaround, and figure out what the right local strategy is. Four, five, six years from now, that bottom five, six, seven percent would be gone, and would come back as an entirely different set of options.

I ultimately think that the only way we end poverty and restart communities is through quality education. You can have all the job programs you want. You can have all the anti-poverty programs you want. You can have all the community development money you want. If you don’t protect the schools, those communities will remain poor. We cannot have a great urban city, or strengthen our rural economies unless we have great schools.

The final thing I’ll say is these are real challenges, but I’m very, very hopeful because in every urban community today, and in many, many rural areas we have extraordinary examples of success. We don’t have to recreate this thing. A big part of our job now – the Department of Education – is to simply listen, to learn, and to scale up those best practices. And we’re going to use all of our discretionary resources to really invest in what works.

What we lack as a country, quite honestly, is not an intellectual knowledge of how to educate kids, but political will. We lack the courage. But now we have a president, a Congress, a Department of Education, and leadership from governors, mayors and state school chiefs, that say that we can’t wait and that this is a once in a lifetime historic

opportunity. If we have the courage, and the political will, we can fundamentally change what's happening to our children around country. If not, we will never have another opportunity like this in our lifetime.

And so I urge all of you to work with us to have an open, honest and transparent conversation about the good, the bad and the ugly. Don't think about a 10-year plan, or a 50-year-plan, but what we can do in the next two, three, four years that will fundamentally change what's happening to the children in this country. If we can do that, we'll change things for generations to come.

Thank you so much. And I'll take any questions you might have.

(Applause.)

Q: Good morning, Mr. Secretary. My name is Robert Graham, and I want to encourage and support what you said. And I think an old problem that you need to change that paradigm on is listening and learning. I want to thank you for starting your education tour going out into the communities to talk to parents and teachers. I think what has been missing from this vigorous reform you talk about is the inclusion of parents and community organizations, that have been fighting for education reform for a long time, but were resisted by politicians because they claimed they didn't have the money to do anything.

I want to encourage you to take the lead in telling our governors, mayors and our chancellors that they cannot do massive reform and exclude the community from that reform. And as a sign of my encouragement and support – I'm going to be a part of the host team that welcomes you when your tour arrives in the District of Columbia.
(Laughter, applause.)

SEC. DUNCAN: Thank you. I do think these remarks are hopeful. All the answers are out there. I don't have to come up with the answers. We just need to pay attention, listen, and learn from the people doing phenomenal work around the country, and scale up what works.

The other thing I'll say is that we all have to work together differently. I would argue that as much as money, and a lack of resources – historically, there's been a real lack of resource – adult dysfunction has been at the heart of this problem. (Laughter.) And I don't mean that lightly. Adult dysfunction is at every level: teacher to principal, teacher to student, superintendent to district, and state to mayor. The Department of Education has been a big part of the problem, and we're trying to look in the mirror every single day and change our culture from being a bureaucracy to really being an engine of innovation.

And we as adults have to behave in very, very different ways to interact together. Everyone has to be at the table, to answer a question. No one group can do this alone. All

of us have to stretch outside of our comfort zone, and if we don't, we're going to continue to shortchange children.

Q: This is very exciting for me. My name is Chris Straight and I am from sunny Naples, Florida. The state of Florida keeps trying to compete to be one of the lowest performing states in the union when it comes to education. The question I have comes from a member of my school board. Reading First has been a program that's been very effective for Title I schools. In Naples over 50 percent of our children receive free and reduced lunch, but Reading First has not been successfully funded. What are you looking at in terms of a comparable program for our Title I students?

SEC. DUNCAN: Reading First had some strengths, but also had some weaknesses. You know, there are some things at the Department of Education that I think lessened the culture. We've put \$300 million into early literacy and into teenage high school literacy. Obviously, that's an important part of the overall strategy, and basically we want to build on what did work and leave what didn't work. We're making very significant investment in the FY-10 budget in this area.

MR. PODESTA: Okay. I think we have time for about two or three more questions.

Q: Jackie Patton with the Ohio School Board. You've been stating that you're very strong on mayoral control. I would like to suggest that a lot of the school systems that have dysfunctional school boards and dysfunctional schools, probably don't have the strongest mayors either. I wonder how you see weak mayors with control as an improvement.

SEC. DUNCAN: I don't think mayoral control is the only answer. No one thing is the silver bullet, or the only way to solve a problem. But I argue for mayoral control by pointing to one successful example: Detroit. I was in Detroit this past week. Detroit has a 67 percent dropout rate. I can't get my head around that. Two-thirds of the average high school students will never graduate from high school, and this happens year after year after year.

So I'll talk about Detroit being my ground zero in education. To me, it's New Orleans without the hurricane, and it took a hurricane and a lot of people to die in New Orleans before folks woke up. I hope that doesn't have to happen in a place like Detroit.

But in places like that where the problems are so intractable, I think you need everyone on deck. And our view is that if just the public schools try to improve themselves, even with the best of intentions, we're not going to get there. We need the business community. We need the philanthropic community. We need the religious community. We need the non-profits. We need social service agencies. You need to rally the entire city behind these efforts; and even then we still may not get there.

The best I can think to improve schools citywide is to have leadership from the top. We need the mayors to step up and be part of the answer. If the mayor doesn't do a good job, we should hold him accountable, throw him out and bring in a mayor that will care about education.

But I will tell you, I could never have done the work that I did in Chicago without the support of Mayor Daley – couldn't have done it. We wouldn't have had the political will, the courage, or other folk helping and investing in what we're doing. And so it's not the magic bullet. There're a lot of successful cities who don't have mayoral control. But when things are tough and two-thirds of every single class aren't graduating, just a little bit of change around the edges is not going to be the solution.

Q: I'm Cathy Cavanaugh from the University of Florida. And I'm thrilled to hear you talking about prioritizing data systems. Right now, between five and ten percent of American students are in virtual schools. In those schools, the student and teacher data are not connected to the state data systems. I look forward to hearing how that connection might be made so that the data of the exponentially growing numbers of students in virtual schools will be targeted by decision-making.

SEC. DUNCAN: I'm not the technical whiz here. I'll just say that every child that enters a preschool program at age three should just have a student identifier. That student identifier should follow that kid whether they are in preschool, a virtual school, a charter school or regular school. That identifier follows the kid all the way through college. We would then know which districts, partners, charters, and virtual schools are doing a great job helping students graduate and move on.

Q: Hi. I'm actually from Illinois. I went to the (name of school inaudible). It has about 48 percent dropout rate and (name of academy inaudible) has a 99 percent college matriculation rate. How do you think specialized schools like that can help around the country?

SEC. DUNCAN: That's a great question and it's a little harder in places that don't have the density of population of Chicago, but I'm a big believer in choice and competition, particularly at the high school level. And I think the more we have five, six, seven great choices, and let parents and students figure out which learning environment is best for them, the better we're going to do. This works better in areas where we have more students.

Historically we've had a one-size-fits-all mentality and often that one size didn't fit much of anyone. And the more choices we provide can really empower students and parents to figure out what the best learning environment is for them. For example, in Chicago we have math and science academies. We have schools that focused on fine and performing arts. We have schools that focused on world languages. We try to do a lot around vocational technical training. We have single-sex schools. We have military academies. Some of these schools are controversial and hard to establish, but they're all schools of choice. No one is assigned there, and so students and parents vote with their

feet. When schools have long waiting lists, we've replicated them. And the schools where kids didn't show up, we shut them down.

Even parents who may not have been educated well themselves, may not have graduated from high school, let alone gone to college, know intuitively what the best learning environment is for their child. They know what's good for them. We have to put them in a position to be able to make some choices and figure out what's the right option for them.

Q: Hi. I'm a psychologist in D.C. public schools and I understand the concept of having extended time and the importance of it. Sadly enough, at times, that's not the most optimal school culture for a child to be in. I was just wondering what you're going to do in order to understand cost? Like you said, social innovation often happens from the ground up, but how do you make sure that funds get to the innovative ideas that promote a more conducive environment for children's learning?

SEC. DUNCAN: Well, there are a couple of considerations, for example, if the school is horrendous, more time in a horrendous school probably doesn't help. (Laughter.) I'm not being funny - I'm being serious. You could make a case that less time in a horrendous school would be helpful. And so I go to figure out what the situation is within individual school. I try to understand where schools are improving, and where things are getting better. I would argue that more time is a very powerful and strategic tool. In schools where things are dysfunctional, you have to turn them around. You have to come in, move adults out, bring a new team of adults in and then think about extending learning time.

So you can't really understand this at the federal level, and have to look at districts and the local folks to understand if this is improving schools. We need to do more of this medicine at this school. One thing that improves one school may not help another.

And so I hope to really empower folks to have the resources and the opportunity to think about what the right intervention is at the right time.

MR. PODESTA: Okay, last question.

Q: Good morning. I'm Monica Graham with the D.C. College Success Foundation. Thank you for joining us this morning, Secretary Duncan. One of the issues to address is the disparity between the requirements for high school graduation and requirements for college entrance. This is one of the primary challenges that those of us who work with college access deal with.

Here in the District of Columbia, students can graduate with just two years of math and two years of English. And there's also a huge push to get students out of high school early once they complete those requirements to keep the high school graduation rates up. I spent this past December trying to fight against principals who were trying to

get high school juniors to graduate because they completed everything that's required for high school graduation.

So I am wondering, are there any initiatives planned to set national standards so that a school district can't decide to lower their standards to increase high school graduation rates, which ultimately leaves students unprepared and unable to access college?

SEC. DUNCAN: That's a good question and I'll try to answer it in two parts. First, I talked about international, not national college-ready, career-ready, international benchmark standards. I'm a huge proponent of that.

What you're asking is a little bit different. What are the course requirements towards graduation? It's interesting how the state of Michigan is actually looking to raise their graduation requirements. Some folks in Detroit were told if you raise the requirements you're going to drive up the dropout rate. I told them they are crazy - our whole problem is that our expectations are far too low.

And I promise you - I'll put my reputation on the line - if you raise requirements, students will hit that high bar and keep moving. How could any student be prepared to go to a competitive university if they finish math as a sophomore in high school? You can't do it. And so I think we all have to raise the bar.

We not only have to raise the bar, we have to provide the supports. Getting to college is not an easy path for every child. We have to make sure we're providing support through after-school tutoring, summer programs, help at home, and make sure that students who are struggling also have those kinds of opportunities.

Our expectations for our teenagers in this country are far, far too low. I know it. I see it. We surveyed students in Chicago, and they told us our expectations as adults were far too low, and I think we have to continue to challenge them. And I promise you, as we challenge them, graduation rates will go up and dropout rates will go down. And the fact that adults don't believe this is a huge part of the problem.

I'll close with one anecdote that I often use that I think shapes the debate about expectations. One of the things I am most proud of in Chicago is that in the last five years we doubled the number of students taking and passing AP classes. But to be honest at the end of those five years, our students are not twice as smart as they were five years prior. I'd like to think they were a little bit smarter. The initial problem was our expectations were too low and we weren't giving students the opportunity to take AP classes.

And guess who primarily were denied that opportunity: Black and Latino students. The rate of these young men taking AP classes almost tripled. I visited a high school in Detroit this week which has phenomenally smart, great kids, working really, really hard, and I was told these kids have made it through some horrendous stuff. I

came to find out they don't have an AP class in that school. These kids really work hard and overcome all kind of odds, and adults aren't providing for them. It's not acceptable.

And so the more we raise the bar, whether it's higher graduation requirements or international benchmarks standards, or trying to add AP classes, we have to challenge ourselves very, very hard to get there. I promise you, if we do that, our kids will rise to our expectations.

Thank you so much for having me.

(Applause.)

MR. PODESTA: As a graduate of the Chicago public school system, I want to thank you for your leadership there. (Laughter.) But really, thank you tremendously for your leadership nationally. Thank you for really getting the ball rolling, not only on using the American Recovery and Reinvestment funds, but also for creating the platform for both innovation and success for our young people in this country.

With that, I'm going to take the secretary out and Cindy Brown is going to come up and explain what's going to happen for the rest of the morning. But once again, please, thank Secretary Duncan for being here with us this morning.

(Applause.)

(END)