



Photo by Leslie B. Williams

June 8, 2009

*Address by the Secretary of Education to
The Fourth Annual Institute of Education
Sciences Research Conference*

Robust Data Gives Us The Roadmap to Reform

Good morning, and thank you, Stuart (Kerachsky of the Institute of Education Sciences [IES]), so much for that nice introduction.

I also want to say thank you to Sue Betka for her leadership at IES as well as to the entire career staff. Sue has been so helpful during this transition. I know that she'll continue to be a great, great resource for our new director, and let's give John Easton a big round of applause. Let's hear it for John.

As everyone knows, John Easton is a colleague for whom I have tremendous respect. I feel so fortunate that we're going to be able to continue to work together. The Chicago Consortium on School Research enjoys an independent relationship with the Chicago Public Schools similar to that of IES with the Department of Education.

John always told us the cold, hard truth without regard to ideology or politics. And so many of our most important reforms in Chicago were a direct result of work and data produced by the Consortium—the idea of ending social promotions, keeping our freshmen on track and trying to dramatically raise graduation rates, tracking college enrollment, developing growth models

and thinking very differently about how we turn around underperforming schools.

The common denominator for all of these policy decisions was that they were informed by data. I am a deep believer in the power of data to drive our decisions. Data gives us the roadmap to reform. It tells us where we are, where we need to go, and who is most at risk.

There's a lot I don't like about *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, but I will always give it credit for exposing our nation's dreadful achievement gaps. It changed American education forever and forced us to take responsibility for every single child, regardless of race, background, or ability. And this is just one example of how data affects policy and there are many, many more.

I'm actually thrilled to have a leader like John working with us here in Washington and I'm absolutely committed to relying on high-quality, independent research funded by IES to inform our thinking.

So thank you, John, for coming to Washington and agreeing to serve, and thank you, Sue, as well as the entire career staff, for your extraordinary service.

I want to begin this morning by talking about the historic opportunity we have today. We will never have

a chance like this again. We have a president who is passionate about public education. He and his wife were not born with silver spoons in their mouths. They are who they are because they worked so hard and because they got a great education.

We have absolute bipartisan leadership on the Hill that sees the need and the opportunity for us to get dramatically better. We have more proven strategies out in school districts around the country—rich, poor, rural, urban, suburban. We have had this flourishing of innovation and entrepreneurial ideas over the past 10, 15 years. We've never had so many examples of success before.

And thanks to the *Recovery Act*, we also have some money, and money does matter. Over \$100 billion in new resources is coming to education. It would have been unimaginable just a few months ago to think about that.

And the *Recovery Act* focuses on four broad areas of reform. We're convinced that with unprecedented resources must come unprecedented reform. Just simply investing in the status quo isn't going to get us where we need to go.

We're focused on college- and career-ready internationally benchmarked standards. We have many states, as you know, voluntarily moving in that direction. We're thinking a lot about teacher quality—great talent matters tremendously, as does how we attract and attain the best and brightest teachers and principals in our business and how we get them to work in some of our toughest schools.

We're thinking about turning around schools. If we were to take—we have about 100,000 schools in our country—if we were to take the bottom 1 percent each year, the bottom thousand, and year after year turn them around, over the next four or five or six years, we could basically eliminate those drop-out factories from our nation.

And finally, we need robust data systems to track student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

Today's speech is the first in a series of policy speeches around those four assurances, leading up to the Race to the Top and the Invest in What Works and Innovation grants that will be coming soon.

Race to the Top and Invest in What Works and Innovation funding provides \$5 billion in discretionary money. I was talking to Secretary Paige recently. I think he had \$17 million. We have \$5 billion. Think about the opportunity we have to make a difference.

The time frame now, the rough time frame is to have draft applications out in July, final applications out by October, and then to get grants out to states and districts by February.

Today, of course, I want to focus on data and I'm blessed to have an audience that knows what I mean when I use words like regression models and effect size indicators. While these words may have meaning for all of you, as you know, they have very little meaning to the general public. And one of our collective challenges is to talk about data and research in ways that people understand. That's one of John's tremendous gifts—to take complicated ideas and make them understandable. That is the only way that good ideas can lead to action and not just remain on a shelf somewhere.

People need to get it and they need to be part of the cause of public education. And that means they need to understand data.

When we did our first turnaround schools in Chicago, in which we closed and reopened the schools with the same children but with new adults, the saddest part of it was that so many parents had no idea how far behind their schools were. They didn't know that they were the worst schools in the city and, in fact, had been like that for years. They thought they were just like everyone else.

And part of the problem is that people don't know how to read data, how to sift through it or understand it and that's really a challenge for all of us. This is just an insider conversation, but it affects everyone outside of this club: parents, children, taxpayers, and employers. And the stakes have never been higher. We must tell the truth and we must tell it clearly. We cannot communicate an undecipherable code.

In the months and years ahead, we will ask thousands of communities across America to close and reopen schools based on data showing that they are

underperforming. That has never happened before and it will be as difficult as it is important. It will change and improve the life chances of children from underserved communities forever.

We will ask millions of teachers to use student achievement and annual growth to drive instruction and evaluation. Parents need to understand that. We ask elected officials in states across America to embrace higher standards even though the initial data for their states may reflect badly on them and their schools. This will take real political courage with short-term pain leading to long-term gain.

Clearly, this is a lot to ask of people. It is our responsibility to make this experience as safe and comfortable for people as possible. People need to get it and they need to be part of the cause of public education. And that means they need to understand data.

Data may not tell us the whole truth, but it certainly doesn't lie. So what is the data telling us today? It tells us that something like 30 percent of our children, our students are not finishing high school. It tells us that many adults who do graduate go on to college but need remedial education. They're receiving high school diplomas, but they are not ready for college.

I saw a figure in the paper the other day that talked about a million students a year spending their Pell Grants on courses that don't give them college credit. This is why we need higher standards. When states lower standards, they are lying to children and they are lying to parents. Those standards don't prepare our students for the world of college or the world of work.

When we match NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the Nation's Report Card) scores and state tests, we see the difference. Some states, like Massachusetts, compare very well. Unfortunately, the disparities between most state tests and NAEP results are staggeringly large.

This is one of the significant problems of *NCLB*. It let every state set its own bar and we now have 50 states, 50 different states all measuring success differently, and that's starting to change. We want to flip that. We want to set a high bar for the entire country against states' and districts' ability to create and hit that higher bar, give them the chance to innovate and hold them accountable for results.

Through the Council of Chief State School Officers, 46 states and three territories have agreed to work on a common core of internationally benchmarked standards. This is just a first step, but it is a huge step in the right direction.

We absolutely support that work because we know from the data that the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study that America has stagnated educationally as the rest of the world has progressed and in too many places passed us by.

We're competing with children from around the globe for jobs of the future. It's no longer the next state or the next region. It's India, China, South Korea, and Finland.

I was on Capitol Hill the other day and faced questions over how much recovery money was going to save jobs and how much was going to advance reform. I told them that in the long run reform is all about jobs. We have to educate our way to a better economy.

Yes, we have to keep teachers in the classroom and we have distributed enough money through recovery to save literally hundreds of thousands of teaching jobs around the country. But if that's all we do, then we'll miss an opportunity. The status quo today is simply not good enough. No one should be satisfied.

Now, we know the news isn't all bad, of course. We also know that children of all age groups across the country have improved their performance in reading and that younger students are posting strong gains in math. We know that achievement gaps are narrowing at the elementary school level.

We also know that college enrollment has increased for students at all income levels. And that the enrollment gap between students from low- and high-income families has shrunk by almost half. That means that more disadvantaged students have access to college, which is extremely encouraging as more and more of today's jobs in a competitive, global economy require postsecondary education.

With enrollment in our K-to-12 public schools rising to all-time highs, we know challenges remain in educating a population that is growing, as we all know, but becoming increasingly diverse. The results from the long-term NAEP show that we have a lot of work left to do, particularly in raising the achievement of our

students at the secondary school level, whose test scores have barely moved over the past three decades.

This is what we mean by transparency and absolute commitment to exposing the good, the bad, and the ugly about our current state of education.

I need your collective help to drive a national conversation that is above partisan policy disputes, beyond wars on math and reading, and instead focuses on the facts. We need to reach some agreements. We can't keep studying things without arriving at some commonly accepted conclusions.

President Truman once lamented the fact that every economist he spoke to would always say, "On the one hand things might get better, and on the other hand, things might not." Truman finally concluded that if he wanted to find definitive advice on the economy, he was going to have to start finding some one-handed economists.

To some extent, the education community suffers from that same dynamic. For every study showing the benefits of the policy, there's another one with a different conclusion. Quite often people draw different conclusions from the same study and that's where we need to separate ideology from analysis.

I recently spoke to education writers about the search for truth in education. I challenged them to go beyond the ideological statements and the surface conclusions and find out what is really happening for our children in our classrooms.

It's kind of like the debate around charter schools. Advocates say they outperform traditional schools. Opponents say they don't. The plain facts show that some charter schools do, and some of them don't. But rather than acknowledge the obvious, we devolve into an ideology debate and somehow forget that this is about children and learning. If something helps children, let's do it.

That's where all of you come in with the research and the facts. Education reform is not about sweeping mandates or grand gestures. It's about systematically examining and learning and building on what we're doing right and scrapping what hasn't worked for our children.

IES and its grantees are uniquely able to contribute to this effort. You are staffed with world-class researchers

and skilled statisticians. You have high standards both for evaluating program effectiveness and for the publications you produce. I want to tell you what we're doing to support data-driven instruction and research.

In addition to \$250 million in the *Recovery Act* for statewide data systems, we have requested nearly \$690 million for IES' activities, an increase of more than \$70 million from last year's budget.

Among other things, that money will pay for a longitudinal study of teachers and an international assessment of adult competencies. We will also launch a national survey to examine the participation of our youngest learners in preschool as well as the levels of parent and family involvement in education.

We will also focus on data in our *Race to the Top* and *Invest in What Works* and *Innovation* applications. While the applications are still under construction, we are developing questions around how teachers are using data to drive instruction. Many teachers are hungering for data to inform what they do.

Our best teachers today are using real-time data in ways that would have been unimaginable just five years ago.

They need to know how well their students are performing. They want to know exactly what they need to do to teach and how to teach. It makes their job easier and ultimately much more rewarding. They aren't guessing or talking in generalities anymore. They feel as if they're starting to crack the code.

We will also ask whether the data around student achievement is linked to teacher effectiveness. Believe it or not, several states, including New York, Wisconsin, and California, have laws that create a firewall between students and teacher data. Think about that: Laws that prohibit us from connecting children to the adults who teach them.

Usually, firewalls are set up for our protection. They prevent hackers from getting into our computers and they block our children from visiting inappropriate Web sites. But these state firewalls don't help us. They hurt all of us. They impede our ability to serve students and better understand how we can improve American education.

I brought this up in a meeting in California two weeks ago and a local union leader said the following: "Gather data so you can decide who the good teachers are?"

Wrong. We need more data, but not to use it as a basis for teachers' pay."

Now I absolutely respect the concerns of teachers that test scores alone should never be used solely to determine salaries. I absolutely agree with that sentiment. I also appreciate that growth models as they exist today are far less than perfect. We have a lot of work still ahead of us.

But to somehow suggest that we should not link student achievement and teacher effectiveness is like suggesting we judge a sports team without looking at the box score.

It's like saying, since standardized tests are not perfect, eliminate testing until they are. I think that's simply ridiculous. We need to monitor progress. We need to know what is and is not working and why.

Hopefully, some day, we can track children from preschool to high school and from high school to college and college to career. We must track high-growth children in classrooms to their great teachers and great teachers to their schools of education.

In California, they have 300,000 teachers. If you took the top 10 percent, they have 30,000 of the best teachers in the world. If you took the bottom 10 percent, they have 30,000 teachers that should probably find another profession, yet no one in California can tell you which teacher is in which category. Something is wrong with that picture.

I know that many forward-thinking educators share this view and I am confident that, with your help and your thoughtful work, we can overcome the legitimate concerns of teachers that they are being judged merely on test scores.

We began a pay-for-performance program in Chicago that was designed by 25 of our city's best teachers. It rewards not just individual teachers but entire schools and includes several factors well beyond test scores.

It's too early to see real results about pay-for-performance initiatives. There aren't a lot of studies

showing it boosts student achievement, but there is plenty of evidence that it boosts worker productivity in other industries, so why shouldn't we try it? Over time, you collectively will tell us whether it's working.

We will also push states to make data available to researchers. Of course, we realize student privacy is a real concern. But there are solutions. We can assign student identifiers to connect databases in school systems. Universities, researchers and other nongovernmental third parties can strip out personally identifiable information from those databases.

And, hopefully, some day, we can track children from preschool to high school and from high school to college and college to career. We must track high-growth children in classrooms to their great teachers and great teachers to their schools of education.

Which schools of education are producing the teachers that produce the students that improve the most year after year? We need to know that answer.

We can one day do a better job of understanding what makes great teachers tick, why they succeed, why they stay in the classroom and how others can be like them. Hopefully, we can track good programs to higher test scores to higher graduation rates. Hopefully, one day we can look a child in the eye at the age of eight or nine or 10 and say, "You are on track to be accepted and to succeed in a competitive university and, if you keep working hard, you will absolutely get there."

Today, many states are well along the path to having good data systems. Today, nearly every district has an information system that stores data about students, and more teachers have access to these systems than ever before.

In Garden Grove, California, teachers administer quarterly assessments aligned with California state standards. Results are available the next day.

In Long Beach, teachers see benchmarked assessments, attendance and behavior. They meet regularly together to review data, monitor student progress, and plan strategies for at-risk students. In addition, the high school students monitor their own progress. How is that for motivation? We need more and more districts using this kind of technology to help them improve.

The Data Quality Campaign, DQC, lists 10 elements of a good data system. Six states, Alabama, Arizona,

Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, and Utah, have all 10 elements. Other states are also making progress. For example, Arkansas has a data warehouse that integrates school fiscal information, teacher credentials, and student coursework, assessments, and even extracurricular activities.

The system has allowed for better student tracking to enable the state to identify double-count enrollments and is saving it more than \$2 million in its first year.

We want to see more states build comprehensive systems that track students from pre-K through college and then link school data to workforce data. We want to know whether Johnny participated in an early learning program and completed college on time and whether those things have any bearing on his earnings as an adult.

Hopefully, one day we can look a child in the eye at the age of eight or nine or 10 and say, “You are on track to be accepted and to succeed in a competitive university and, if you keep working hard, you will absolutely get there.”

There’s so much opportunity for growth and progress in this area. We have the money and we have the technology. The biggest barrier, the only remaining barrier in my mind is whether we have the courage. It takes courage to expose our weaknesses with a truly transparent data system. It takes courage to admit our flaws and take steps to address them.

It takes courage to always do the right thing by our children, but ultimately we all answer to the truth. You can dance around it for only so long. America’s children need your help. America’s educators need your help, and the president and I need your help. We don’t have a minute to waste.

Reforming public education is not just a moral obligation. It is absolutely an economic imperative. It is the foundation for a strong future and a strong society. Education is the civil rights issue of our generation. The fight for quality education is about so much more than education. It’s a fight for social justice. It is the only way



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to achieve the quality that inspired our democracy, that inspired women to stand up for their rights, and then inspired minorities to demand their fair share of the American promise, and it inspires every child to dream.

Those dreams are shaped in America’s classrooms. They are nurtured by the dedicated teachers and principals all across America who do the hard work every single day of educating our children. And they are counting on all of you to help them get better, help them see how they can improve, and help them turn their students’ dreams into reality.

So I thank you for all that you have done. I thank you in advance for all that you will do. And thank you, above all, for telling us the truth, for keeping us honest and for showing us the path forward. We may never have an opportunity like this again to transform the quality of education in our country. Together, let’s make the most of it.

Thank you so much. Thanks so much.

U.S. Department of Education

Arne Duncan
Secretary

August 2009