



**Newsire - December 16, 2008**

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## **TRANSITION**

MR. DUNCAN GOES TO WASHINGTON. Barack Obama's announcement this morning of Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan as his nominee for Secretary of Education has finally put an end to the obsessive guessing game amongst the education "insiders". Obama spoke of the "same tired debate" surrounding education, saying that there has been a lot of talk and too little action. Promoting a new vision for a 21st century education, he presented his Ed Sec nominee, a (sort-of) supporter of reform practices - including charter schools and NCLB accountability - and an urban school leader who maintains a good relationship with the teachers' unions. Duncan is a safe pick that keeps both sides of the Democratic party schism on education placated, but it's going to be a difficult balancing act when he gets to D.C. The nation's capital is resistant to change by its very nature, so if he is hoping to fulfill the reform promise so many want to hear, he will have to drive through the entrenched special interests so much a part of this city.

Here's a little taste of what's happening in his new hometown -

WHAT'S WORKING. D.C. charter schools are succeeding, according to *The Washington Post*, and "have opened a solid academic lead over those in [the city's] traditional public schools." An [analysis of test results](#) for economically disadvantaged students shows that "D.C. middle-school charters scored 19 points higher than the regular public students in reading and 20 points higher in math." D.C. charter school students outscored their conventional public school counterparts in other areas as well. In an [online chat](#), writers discussed some of the reasons charters are thriving in the District: "A culture where the grown-ups trust each makes it a lot easier to teach kids. The experts doing research say high expectations and standards of behavior have to be applied consistently across classrooms. That's a lot more evident at charters than most DCPS schools I've visited. Charter directors were very consistent in saying that they will not hesitate to get rid of teachers who they feel are not performing. On the other hand, they are also very eager to keep the teachers they like, and provide support and encouragement and training to keep them happy."

## **SOME HOLIDAY CHEER...**

CER published this poem in 1996, and its lessons still ring true today for newly nominated Education Secretaries and reformers alike:

### **The Blob Who Thought It Stole Christmas**

All the parents and teachers they wanted reform.  
They looked for solutions to break from the norm.  
They wanted things better, that's why they were fighting,  
To make sure their kids would learn reading and writing  
And science and math and history too  
For everyone's children, not just a few.

But the Blob and its grins, they hated reform.  
"Imagine," they sniffed "trying to break from the norm."  
Standards, and charters, and school choice and such



This ed-reform business is much, much too much.

Who are they, these people this reform-minded crew  
Who think they know better than us what to do?  
We'll fix them,  
We'll teach them,  
We'll show them who's boss.

We'll make doubly sure that they suffer a loss.  
We'll stop all their harping and carping and cries  
We'll tell all the people their numbers are lies.  
We'll say that they're wrong And without hesitation,  
We'll say that they're out  
To destroy education.

Oh, we'll offer solutions - the people will buy it,  
All we will need say is, " It won't hurt to try it."  
Whole language, new math,  
And lots of things pending  
(Which, of course, will require more billions in spending.)

And for those who ask questions or say it's a waste,  
With great condescension, they'll be put in their place.  
We'll stop the reformers, we'll stop them, we will,  
Because after all,  
We're the kings of the Hill.

So the Blob and it's grinch  
Embarked on their task  
To make sure that all things reform finished last.

But the parents and teachers and grandparents too,  
Went on with their work, they knew what to do.

The Blob might have money and power and might.  
But that didn't mean that they knew what was right.  
And no matter the odds, or how long it might take,  
The reformers were steadfast... a difference they'd make.

They wouldn't be quiet  
And they wouldn't give in  
And whenever they lost, they would just start again.  
They offered suggestions and wrote legislation  
And some ran for office, (to the Blob's consternation).

We'll stop these reformers the Blob-grinches blustered  
And what we can't stop we will just filibuster.  
We'll do all we can, oh we've got a few tricks,  
After all it's our business to play politics.  
Against our opponents we'll spend, spend galore.  
And for those who are with us, we'll spend even more.

And when it was over the Blob danced with glee  
Their efforts had let to a great victory.  
They'd shown the reformers, and now they could say  
"Just take your reforms, now take them away."  
But the parents and teachers and grandparents too,  
Just smiled at the Blob, because everyone knew:  
That for all of its millions and for all of its might,



The Blob had not managed to carry the fight.

No matter the money and time overspent  
No matter how much their support they had lent  
In state after state they had failed to defeat  
The education reformers they said they would beat.

And when it was over the fact remained still,  
That they couldn't be really the King of the hill.  
And for all of their ranting and raving and storm  
They've really done nothing to stop ed- reform.



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