

Arne Duncan
U.S. Secretary of Education

Biography

Arne Duncan was nominated to be Secretary of Education by President Barack Obama and was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on Jan. 20, 2009.

In his confirmation hearings, Duncan called education "the most pressing issue facing America," adding that "preparing young people for success in life is not just a moral obligation of society" but also an "economic imperative." "Education is also the civil rights issue of our generation," he said, "the only sure path out of poverty and the only way to achieve a more equal and just society." Duncan expressed his commitment to work under the leadership of President Obama and with all those involved in education "to enhance education in America, to lift our children and families out of poverty, to help our students learn to contribute to the civility of our great American democracy, and to strengthen our economy by producing a workforce that can make us as competitive as possible."

Prior to his appointment as Secretary of Education, Duncan served as the chief executive officer of the Chicago Public Schools, a position to which he was appointed by Mayor Richard M. Daley, from June 2001 through December 2008, becoming the longest-serving big-city education superintendent in the country.

As CEO, Duncan's mandate was to raise education standards and performance, improve teacher and principal quality, and increase learning options. In seven and a half years, he united education reformers, teachers, principals and business stakeholders behind an aggressive education reform agenda that included opening over 100 new schools, expanding after-school and summer learning programs, closing down underperforming schools, increasing early childhood and college access, dramatically boosting the caliber of teachers, and building public-private partnerships around a variety of education initiatives.

Among his most significant accomplishments during his tenure as CEO, an all-time high of 66.7 percent of the district's elementary school students met or exceeded state reading standards, and their math scores also reached a record high, with 70.6 percent meeting or exceeding the state's standards. At high schools, Chicago Public School students posted gains on the ACT at three times the rate of national gains and nearly twice that of the state's. Also, the number of CPS high school students taking Advanced Placement courses tripled and the number of students passing AP classes more than doubled. Duncan has increased graduation rates and boosted the total number of college scholarships secured by CPS students to \$157 million.

A study released in June 2008 by the Illinois Education Research Council lauded the Chicago Public Schools for its efforts to bring top teaching talent into the city's classrooms, where the number of teachers applying for positions almost tripled since 2003, from about 8,600 to more than 21,000, or about 10 applicants per teaching position. The number of teachers achieving National Board Certification—the highest education credential available to teachers—increased

from 11 in 1999 to 1,191 in 2008, making Chicago the fastest-growing urban district in this area of achievement.

Prior to joining the Chicago Public Schools, Duncan ran the non-profit education foundation Ariel Education Initiative (1992-1998), which helped fund a college education for a class of inner-city children under the I Have A Dream program. He was part of a team that later started a new public elementary school built around a financial literacy curriculum, the Ariel Community Academy, which today ranks among the top elementary schools in Chicago.

Duncan formerly served on the boards of the Ariel Education Initiative, Chicago Cares, the Children's Center, the Golden Apple Foundation, the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, Jobs for America's Graduates, Junior Achievement, the Dean's Advisory Board of the Kellogg School of Management, the National Association of Basketball Coaches' Foundation, Renaissance Schools Fund, Scholarship Chicago, and the South Side YMCA. He also served on the Board of Overseers for Harvard College and the Visiting Committees for Harvard University's Graduate School of Education and the University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration.

In 2008, he was honored by the Civic Federation of Chicago and the Anti-Defamation League. In 2007, he received the Niagara Foundation's Education Award, the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship Enterprising Educator Award, and the University High School Distinguished Alumni Award. He also received honorary degrees from the Illinois Institute of Technology, Lake Forest College, and National-Louis University. In 2006, the City Club of Chicago named him Citizen of the Year. He was a member of the Aspen Institute's Henry Crown Fellowship Program, class of 2002, and a fellow in the Leadership Greater Chicago's class of 1995.

From 1987 to 1991, Duncan played professional basketball in Australia, where he also worked with children who were wards of the state.

Duncan graduated magna cum laude from Harvard University in 1987, majoring in sociology. He was co-captain of Harvard's basketball team and was named a first team Academic All-American. He credits basketball with his team-oriented and highly disciplined work ethic.

His late father was a professor at the University of Chicago and his mother has run a South Side tutoring program for inner-city children since 1961. As a student in Chicago, Duncan spent afternoons in his mother's tutoring program and also worked there during a year off from college. He credits this experience with shaping his understanding of the challenges of urban education.

Duncan is married to Karen Duncan and they have two children, daughter Claire and son Ryan, who attend a public elementary school in Arlington, Virginia.