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Brad Smith
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April 15, 2009

Dear Washington Legislator:

We are aware that the Washington Education Association (WEA) sent you a letter claiming that our characterization of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was incorrect. Their statement not only misses the point of our original letter, but runs explicitly counter to the spirit and intent of the ARRA.

The ARRA challenges states to demonstrate progress on the following four assurances, and ultimately to accelerate student performance:

1. Making improvements in teacher effectiveness and ensuring that all schools have highly qualified teachers;
2. Making progress toward college and career ready standards and rigorous assessments that will improve both teaching and learning;
3. Improving achievement in low-performing schools, by providing intensive support and effective interventions in schools that need them the most; and
4. Gathering information to improve student learning, teacher performance, and college and career readiness through enhanced data systems that track progress.

There is no clearer indication of the ARRA's intent to drive reform than a recent statement by Education Secretary Arne Duncan:

"Now, for those states that move fastest and furthest toward these reforms – not only with the state stabilization funds, but also with the Title I funds – they may win a share of a \$5 billion Race to the Top fund, which will be awarded later in the year. I want to repeat what I just said. If you want Race to the Top funds, you must do a good job of investing stabilization and Title I funds. Every dollar states spend must help improve learning. With this Race to the Top fund, we are putting real money on the line to challenge every state in America to push harder and do more for its children. You should be looking at pay for performance. You should be looking at charters and other new learning models." (Remarks of Secretary Duncan, State Stabilization Announcement, April 1, 2009)

Our goal this session should be to do everything we can to improve our education system and position Washington to be competitive for hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds—not to do as little as possible or to defend the status-quo.

Here are a few examples.

The ARRA explicitly calls for states to demonstrate the ability to tie student performance and educator evaluation– something Washington currently lacks. Here again Secretary Duncan is clear: "We need to know whether teachers and principals are being evaluated on the basis of student outcomes – because if you're not linking student performance to teachers you don't really know who is and who is not succeeding." (*ibid.*) Washington's ability to receive the second phase of state fiscal stabilization funds depends upon our state's capacity to collect and report this and other data, as noted in the attached letter from Secretary Duncan's to our Nation's Governors on April 1, 2009.

On accountability, the ARRA "requires states to get serious about fixing schools that are chronically underperforming." (Remarks of Secretary Duncan, State Stabilization



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Announcement, April 1, 2009) Washington has a voluntary school improvement system, and furthermore, Washington law prohibits the state from intervening in chronically low-performing schools. It is absurd to suggest that Washington has accountability matters well in-hand and that more cannot be done to advance meaningful accountability. **Robust accountability, including an appropriate role for the state to work with local school boards to turn around low-performing schools, must be a key provision of any effort to redefine basic education this session.**

Finally, while the stimulus money may be one-time, ARRA is the nation's new education agenda, according to Secretary Duncan. "With these assurances and the Race to the Top Fund, we are laying the foundation for where we want to go with N.C.L.B. [No Child Left Behind] reauthorization," Secretary Duncan told the New York Times on April 14, 2009. "This will help us to get states lining up behind this agenda." Washington can either help lead this agenda, or play catch up for years to come.

The bottom line is clear: Given our state's \$9 billion deficit, we cannot afford to leave federal money on the table. And, given that slightly less than 50 percent of our 10th graders meet state standards in math, we cannot afford to walk away from an opportunity to boldly enact new reforms.

We ask that you act now to position our students and state for success.

We thank you for hard work on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Caroline King". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'C' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'g'.

Caroline King
Interim Director, Partnership for Learning

Enclosures:

Remarks of Secretary Duncan, State Stabilization Announcement, April 1, 2009
April 1, 2009 Letter from Education Secretary Arne Duncan to Nation's Governors
April 10, 2009 Letter from State Business, Education and Nonprofit Leaders

CC: Governor Gregoire, Washington Legislators