



EVENT BRIEF

**CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS AND  
AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE HOLD SUMMIT ON STATES' EDUCATIONAL  
INNOVATION**

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On Monday, November 9, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW), the Center for American Progress (CAP) and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) sponsored a national education and workforce summit titled, "Race to the Top: Education and Skills for a Stronger America." The focus of the event was on educational innovation and the role the business community can play in reform at the state level. In addition, the three hosting organizations released a new report, *Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Innovation*, which is a follow-up to the previous *Leaders and Laggards* study that rated states based on school performance.

This memo is a summary of highlights discussed by the key note speakers. Attendees also had an opportunity to hear panel discussions on state innovation and ways for the business community to increase their involvement in education reform efforts.

**KEY NOTE SPEAKERS**

- Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education
- Thomas J. Donohue, President and CEO, U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- John Podesta, President and CEO, Center for American Progress

**SUMMARY**

The remarks of the event's opening speakers all included a variety of statistics that spotlighted the need for education reform. Innovation was the word of the day, with an emphasis on flexibility in achieving results. The new *Leaders and Laggards* study focused on innovation in eight areas:

- **School Management** (including the strength of charter school laws and the percentage of students who like the way their schools are run)
- **Finance** (including the accessibility of state financial data)
- **Staffing: Hiring & Evaluation** (including alternate certification for teachers)
- **Staffing: Removing Ineffective Teachers** (including the percentage of principals who report barriers to the removal of poor performing teachers)
- **Data** (including such measures as state-collected college student remediation data)
- **Technology** (including students per Internet connected computer)
- **Pipeline to Postsecondary** (including the percentage of schools reporting dual-enrollment programs)
- **State Reform Environment** (including data on the presence of reform groups and participation in international assessments)

### **Secretary Arne Duncan**

Secretary Arne Duncan opened with his thoughts on the roles the federal government and state and local governments should play in education reform. He saluted the sponsors of the event for focusing on states since they have much of the authority to implement reform efforts. Secretary Duncan then cautioned against heavy-handed federal policies and reiterated his belief, “that [the federal government’s] role is to support—not dictate—education reform at the state and local level.” He also commended the three diverse organizations who came together to write the report for looking past political differences to work together on the topic of education, “the one issue that rises above politics and ideology.”

Secretary Duncan also announced that the final application for Race to the Top funds will be released later in the week by the Department of Education (ED), and he gave examples of how the forthcoming \$4 billion reform program has already improved states’ abilities to implement innovative strategies. For example, he cited California and Wisconsin for passing legislation that links student achievement data to teacher evaluations and said that eight states had increased their charter caps. Texas, Florida, Colorado, and Chicago were also lauded for having unions and school districts that are working together on performance pay. Secretary Duncan also clearly outlined ED’s priorities for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). They include setting clear goals while allowing flexibility to meet them; creating more competition for federal dollars; and focusing federal dollars more effectively. The Secretary closed his remarks by urging the business community to become more directly involved in education. Specifically he suggested sending employees and retired executives into the classroom to share their life experiences, offering summer jobs to teachers in related fields, and helping Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs innovate.

### **Thomas J. Donohue**

Thomas J. Donohue began by commending the Obama administration for being on the right track on education reform. He sees the support for charter schools, increased innovation, STEM, and researched-based turnaround strategies as positive elements of

reform. Donohue had a number of recommendations to improve the overall quality of education in the nation, including strengthening the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) Act by increasing principal autonomy and authority. Some criticism of the role teachers unions play in policy discussions was also discussed. Donohue said that teachers should certainly have a say in policy, but they should not be able to determine it. He encouraged the private sector to improve their involvement in education, urging business leaders to get involved in the management of schools instead of just sitting on school boards.

#### **John Podesta**

John Podesta began his remarks by listing a few troubling statistics from the new *Leaders and Laggards* report. He mentioned that more than 33% of college freshmen have to take remedial courses in college, an indication that even high school graduates are graduating without necessary academic skills. Podesta said the solution to the problem of poor student performance lies in rewarding innovation and progress. States had varying performances across the different measurements for innovation, but Podesta highlighted a few that were doing especially well in specific categories. Georgia was cited for improved data collection; Florida for holding its charter schools accountable; and Minnesota for its performance-based system of teacher compensation. He closed by emphasizing the difference between innovation and fad. “Reformers have long confused the novel with the effective,” Podesta said, crediting the report for including meaningful information on the latter.

#### **QUESTIONS**

There was only time for two questions from the audience after these remarks. A reporter from the *National Journal* began the question period by saying business is often criticized for saying they want education reform but then do not actively advocate on behalf of education legislation. He asked what could be done about this perception? Donohue defended the business community and said “you have to have something worth lobbying about first.” He stated that the business community already contributes \$2.5 billion to education issues in addition to vigorously supporting the use of stimulus funds to protect teacher layoffs and to fund the Race to the Top. The last question was asked by a member of the Albuquerque Chamber of Commerce who wanted to know how to actually get innovations put into place. Podesta’s reply focused on “getting in the face” of local political leaders to call out the need for flexibility and capacity building.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Donohue closed this portion of the summit by stating that everyone needs to be more aware of what is going on with our education system. According to Donohue, we have known about these problems without solving them for too long. “It’s about time somebody started a small revolution,” he said.

The *Leaders and Laggards* report offers a detailed survey of each state’s strengths and weaknesses on education innovation. A comprehensive map of the results, along with the full study, can be found at: <http://www.uschamber.com/reportcard/default>.