

## **Illinois education funding: Duncan says Illinois on better track to get education stimulus**

### **Education chief says funds may flow here**

**By John McCormick**

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Almost everywhere U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan goes these days, people ask him how they can get some of the \$100 billion in federal stimulus money he oversees.

That was true Friday when he spoke at an education conference during a hometown visit, one of at least three he has made since becoming the nation's top education official in January.

When Duncan last spoke publicly in Chicago, he scolded Illinois for its lack of action on education reform. He used that April visit to warn the state that it risks losing its shot at the new pot of federal money unless it shows the political will to fundamentally shake up the way schools are funded and operated.

"I was probably a little tough in my comments to Illinois," Duncan said in retrospect. "Since that time, there's been some absolutely remarkable progress I would not have predicted."

Duncan pointed to the recent move by state lawmakers to double the number of charter schools allowed, efforts to create new data systems to track performance, and ongoing discussions to boost state standards.

The former Chicago Public Schools chief was the keynote speaker at a gathering sponsored by Advance Illinois, a bipartisan reform group led by former Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar and Bill Daley, the former U.S. commerce secretary and the mayor's brother.

Outside the Hyatt Regency Chicago, several dozen people protested school closings and other decisions Duncan made in his previous job. "Duncan is Flunkin' " read one of the signs carried by the group Caucus of Rank and File Educators.

Duncan has reserved \$5 billion in stimulus money for an incentive program for education innovation. He sounded more optimistic than in April about the state's chances of receiving some of that money. "If Illinois can continue to have the courage and the will to challenge the status quo, there is a huge opportunity there," he said. "But the proof is really going to be in what's happening here – not the talk, not the rhetoric, but in actions."

To address the problem of good teachers fleeing inner-city schools and the lack of math and science teachers, Duncan proposed more money for certain teachers.

“We have to think very, very differently about rewarding talent,” he said.

Duncan also pointed to a five-city road show he plans to undertake with former GOP House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Rev. Al Sharpton that will be aimed at raising awareness on the achievement gap between white students and minority students.