

**Questions for Secretary Arne Duncan, Submitted by Committee Republicans  
for the March 3, 2010 hearing record of the Full Committee hearing on  
“Building a Stronger Economy: Spurring Reform and Innovation in  
American Education.”**

Congressman Tom Petri

1. Under your leadership, the Department has been talking a great deal about innovation, particularly regarding assessment. In many cases, however, the policies of the Department seem to lag behind innovation. One of the types of assessment that several states are looking at is a computer adaptive test that uses items at, below and above grade level to determine with a great deal of accuracy the exact level at which a student is performing. Using items outside of grade level is a very useful tool to determine the exact level at which students are operating. I know that over 50 percent of the school districts in my Congressional district and more than 50 percent of the school districts in Wisconsin are paying extra to contract with a provider to conduct this sort of testing at the school district level because they find that it provides more immediate and more useful data for their teachers. Is this the kind of innovation in assessment that you support?

Congressman Buck McKeon

- 1) SES providers create a number of jobs, especially in low-income areas. Can you tell me how many jobs are created by the SES industry and further can you tell me how many of those jobs are held by teachers that are able to supplement their salaries by working for an SES provider outside of the school day?
- 2) Under the final requirements issued by the Department on December 3, 2009 for the School Improvement Grants program, an SEA is authorized to seek a waiver to permit a school that implements a “turnaround” or “restart” model to “start over” in the school improvement timeline. Because of this new waiver, students currently receiving free tutoring will lose valuable academic opportunities while the LEA figures out how to implement a new “turnaround” or “restart” system that will hopefully lead to improved academic achievement in its struggling schools. What is the Department’s plan to ensure that students (many of whom are performing at several grade levels behind their peers) who have been receiving extra help – through free, individualized tutoring – continue to receive intensive academic interventions as the LEA works to turn around its struggling schools?

Congressman Mark Souder

1. I am concerned about the July 1, 2010 effective date that was included in the House-passed version of SAFRA and included in your budget proposal. While we have seen an increase in the number of schools that have transitioned into the Direct Loan (DL) program, there are still thousands of schools in FFEL, despite the Department’s best arm-

twisting efforts to push schools into the Direct Loan program. I have also heard from schools that the transition to DL is NOT as easy as flipping a switch. Can you provide me with documentation that outlines the past, present and future actions the Department has put into place to ensure that no students will go without timely access to federal loans should the July 1, 2010 date remain unchanged?

2. Despite the obvious skills that Family Therapists can bring to children in the schools, the growing problem of mental health issues in schools and shortage of personnel the ESEA omits Family Therapists from the list of professionals identified as qualified to provide mental health services. Would you be in favor of amending ESEA to list Licensed Family Therapists alongside professional counterparts under the definitions of: 1) "school based mental health services providers," 2) "pupil services personnel," as well as 3) adding Family Therapists to the list of recognized professionals in school counseling programs?

#### Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers

1. Well before the enactment of No Child Left Behind, there was the Eisenhower Professional Development Program which focused on improving the skills and content knowledge of K-12 teachers in mathematics and science. No Child Left Behind transitioned this program into the broader based Teacher and Principal Training and Recruiting Fund. I am concerned that our students are falling behind in the critical areas of math, science, technology, and engineering. Can you discuss how your budget puts forward proposals that ensure teachers are prepared to effectively teach these subjects?
2. One aspect of the Budget that I'm extremely concerned with is the restructuring of the Perkins Loan program. As you know, this program was established in the late 1950s in fear that we were falling behind technologically to the former Soviet Union and its space program. Despite its success for the last half century in providing financial aid to a critical student population, it was restructured as part of SAFRA. Concerns have been expressed by many in the higher education community that as currently proposed the program will not serve the needs-based population that it was intended to serve. Would you comment?

#### Congresswoman Judy Biggert

1. In January, I held a roundtable with local educators and superintendents from my district to discuss their views on Race to the Top. Probably the biggest complaint that I heard was that they were being asked to sign memorandums of understanding when there were still so many unknowns about the program. Many of my constituents also expressed concern that all of the money awarded would go to the City of Chicago. I have read the detailed grading rubric put out by the Department, but can you give us more detail about how the money will be allocated to local districts? How are you ensuring that suburban and rural school districts have a chance to get their fair share of the funds?

As a former school board President, I firmly believe in local control of education. One of my biggest concerns with Race to the Top is that states are graded based on their willingness to join a voluntary multi-state consortium dedicated to creating national education standards. While I understand that most states joined voluntarily, I am very concerned that this could be a first step toward what is effectively a national education board. Can you assure me that education standards will ultimately remain a state and local decision?

2. I was recently contacted by Rasmussen College, a proprietary school in my district, with concerns about the Department of Education's efforts to redefine "gainful employment" in the Title IV student loan program by regulation. As you know, the current draft proposal would prohibit students at proprietary schools and in certain other non-degree programs from borrowing if the interest on that student's loans would exceed 8% of his/her expected income. If this proposal were to be put into effect, it would have severe negative consequences for many of my constituents, including those who intend to work in high-need occupations. According to Robert King, Chairman of the school:

Under the proposed "gainful employment" calculation, Rasmussen College's School of Nursing students would not be eligible for Title IV funding as the debt-income calculation is above 8%. The State of Illinois is expected to experience a 21,000 nursing shortage by 2020 and Rasmussen College wants to help fill that gap. Our College has an average 94% retention rate among nursing students each quarter and more than 90% of our nursing graduates pass their nursing certification exams, with several of our campuses achieving 100%. With a nursing placement rate of 98%, ED's proposals run counteractive to President Obama's goals of increasing the educational attainment levels of all Americans and simultaneously creating jobs.

I agree with the college's assessment of this proposal, and would like you to address the following questions:

- a. If the purpose of this proposed regulation is to protect student welfare, why does it almost exclusively affect proprietary schools?
  - b. Where did the 8% debt threshold originate?
  - c. Would you consider increasing the debt-to-income ratio? How about making exceptions for high-demand professions?
3. As you know, I'm very concerned about the education of children and youth who are homeless. The last ESEA reauthorization included the McKinney-Vento Act, legislation that I authored to address the barriers faced by homeless students, so that school could be a place of stability and opportunity. I will soon introduce legislation to refine and strengthen this program in the next reauthorization. The President's FY2011 budget does not include any increase in funding for this program, despite the fact that the numbers of homeless students reported by public schools have increased by 40% over the past two years.

- a. What is the Administration's vision for addressing the educational needs of homeless students?
- b. What efforts are being made to ensure that students who are homeless have access to all existing federal educational programs, including Title I Part A, early learning, and higher education?
- c. Do I have your commitment to work together on this issue, so that being without a home does not mean being without an education?