

Obama to seek US\$5b to transform teaching profession

Reuters

February 15 , 2012

WASHINGTON, Feb 15 — US Education Secretary Arne Duncan will deliver a scathing critique of teacher training colleges today as he unveils a US\$5 billion (RM15.1 billion) initiative to transform the teaching profession from top to bottom.

In remarks scheduled for delivery at 3.30pm EST (2030 GMT), Duncan will argue that the profession needs to become more selective, offer more consistent training, evaluate teacher effectiveness more critically and reward the best teachers with salaries on par with doctors and lawyers.

"Many of our schools of education are mediocre at best," Duncan will say in remarks prepared for an online town hall meeting with educators. "Many teachers are poorly trained and isolated in their classrooms.

"No other profession carries a greater burden for securing America's future. And no other profession deserves more respect," added Duncan, who once headed Chicago's public schools.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan with President Barack Obama at the White House, February 9, 2012, as the president speaks about providing states flexibility under the No Child Left Behind law in exchange for reform. — Reuters file pic
But his ambitious goals may run into major roadblocks.

President Barack Obama's administration wants states to compete for a share in US\$5 billion in federal grants to overhaul their teacher training colleges and create new standards for teacher evaluations. But that fund is subject to congressional approval, and Republicans have already served notice they intend to fight new spending initiatives.

All four Republican candidates seeking to challenge Obama in November's election have called for greatly reducing the federal role in education.

On the state level, it is unclear where legislators will find the resources to raise teacher salaries or offer sizeable bonuses to the most effective teachers, as Duncan has repeatedly urged. Many states have cut tens of millions in funding for primary and secondary education in recent years as they grapple with enormous budget deficits.

Duncan's rebuke of teacher colleges is also likely to arouse opposition from the institutions themselves. His description of many schools as ineffective rankles teacher educators such as Michael Morehead, dean of New Mexico State University's College of Education.

'Misperception'

In recent years, Morehead said teacher colleges had dramatically boosted their standards. Decades ago, he said, anyone with even a mediocre grade-point average in high school could get into a teacher college, flounder through the courses and yet still graduate as a teacher.

Now, he said, many schools were more selective in their admissions and required hundreds of hours of apprenticeship, or student teaching, before granting a diploma. Many states also require teachers to pass one or more licensing exams before taking charge of a classroom.

"It's certainly a misperception" that teacher colleges were failing, Morehead said. "Yet that's what is consistently expressed."

But Tim Knowles, who directs the University of Chicago's Urban Education Institute, said reforms in teacher education were sorely needed. About half of new teachers who go to work in urban schools leave the profession within five years. Many of them complain they were not prepared for their responsibilities. Knowles said some new teachers had spent as little as six weeks in apprenticeships before being put in front of their own classrooms.

Knowles said he hoped the Obama initiative would prod states to rank teacher colleges by how well they prepared their graduates, how long those graduates remained in the teaching profession, and how much impact they had on their students, as measured by standardised test scores.

Otherwise, he said, it was hard to tell how effective they were. "Right now, it's a total free-for-all," he said.

The Obama initiative is called RESPECT, an acronym for Recognising Educational Success, Professional Excellence and Collaborative Teaching.

The American Federation of Teachers, a national teachers' union, has issued a general statement of support for Obama's education reform policies but has not commented on the specific details of the Duncan proposal. — Reuters

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2012 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/obama-to-see-us5b-to-transform-teaching-profession/>