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TRANSCRIPT

BOB SCHIEFFER: Today on FACE THE NATION, Education Secretary Arne Duncan on President Obama's speech to school kids, swine flu, and fixing America's educational system.

President Obama's upcoming speech to the school children Tuesday has created such an uproar that some schools are not going to show it. And some parents say they'll keep their children at home--what is going on. And are the schools prepared for the onslaught of swine flu this fall.

Then to the deeper problems. We spend more per capita on students than any country in the world, yet our students lag behind those in most nations--can our schools be fixed. Those are the questions for Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

Then, I'll have a final word on a real mess of a summit. But first, Education Secretary Arne Duncan on FACE THE NATION.

ANNOUNCER: FACE THE NATION, with CBS News chief Washington correspondent Bob Schieffer. And now from CBS News in Washington, Bob Schieffer.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And good morning again. When President Obama was looking for someone to run the Education Department, he did not have to look far. He picked Arne Duncan, who had compiled a-- an impressive record of achievement as head of the schools in Obama's hometown of Chicago.

Mister Secretary, welcome to you this morning.

ARNE DUNCAN (Secretary of Education): Good morning. Thanks for the opportunity.

BOB SCHIEFFER: The President is planning to speak to the nation's school children Tuesday by C-Span and the internet. And I think it's fair to say the White House was blindsided by the reaction that has blown up, a real fire storm. Conservatives are in a rage. Glenn Beck spoke for many of the talk show people when he said, these are his words, "...they are capturing your kids...Stand guard, America. Your republic is under attack."

Jim Greer, the chair of the Florida Republican Party, complained that, "...taxpayer dollars are being used to spread President Obama's socialist ideology."

Even one of the usually moderate voices of the Republican Party, Tim Pawlenty, the governor of Minnesota, said, "...it's disruptive. I don't think he needs to force it upon the nation's school children."

I guess my question to you, Mister Secretary, what is going on?

ARNE DUNCAN: It-- it's been pretty interesting. But the-- the President's whole message is about personal responsibility and challenging students to take their education very, very seriously. And we have some important goals for the country. We want to see more high-performing schools. We want to see more students improving their academic achievements. We want to see more students going to college and-- and succeeding in graduating. None of those things happen, it's impossible, if students aren't working hard every single day.

And it's amazing to me the last time a President spoke to the nation's children was in 1991. The real question I have is why has it been eighteen years since a President has addressed our nation's youth? And schools can do this. They can not do it. They can watch it during the school day. They-- children can watch it at home with their families. They can watch it a month from now. They can never watch it. It's purely voluntary. But I think all the drama, all the hoopla, at the end of the day if the President motivates

one C-student to become a B-student, one B-student to become an A-student or one student who is thinking about dropping out to stay in school and take their education seriously, it's all worth it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: What about the -- we hear that some parents are going to keep their kids at home.

ARNE DUNCAN: Yeah. It-- it's just-- it-- again, that's just silly. They can go to school, they can not watch. It's just, you know-- it going to be, you know, eighteen-minutes speech. And so that just doesn't make any sense.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And-- and I understand you have decided now to make the text of the speech public tomorrow.

ARNE DUNCAN: The text will be available tomorrow on the White House website, and people can look. And again, this is all about the-- the President challenging our young people to take responsibility for their education. We can have the hardest-working teachers. We can have the best textbooks. We can have the most modern buildings. If students aren't committing to work hard every day to have a good work ethic, to set goals, to really aspire for something, it's all for naught.

BOB SCHIEFFER: A-- and you're not going to cancel-- the President's not going to cancel the speech.

ARNE DUNCAN: Oh, no, sir.

BOB SCHIEFFER: There was one-- there was one question that I did have. In some of the-- the study materials that you sent out to some of the schools to accompany this. At one point, they suggested they write letters to the President about how they could help him. I understand you have changed the wording in that.

ARNE DUNCAN: This was guides that were put out by teachers, for teachers. And there is one that wasn't worded quite correctly. It was talking about helping the President hit his goal of having the highest percent of college graduates by 2020. He's drawn a line in the sand in that. We just clarified that to say write a letter about your own goals and what you're going to do to achieve those goals. So, again, it's really about personal responsibility and accountable-- being accountable, setting real goals and having the work ethic to see them through.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Were-- were you surprised at this reaction?

ARNE DUNCAN: It-- it's the kind of things I, frankly, don't pay any attention to. We have major problems, we have major challenges in this country, Bob. We have more homeless students than we've ever had. We have teachers and social workers and counselors working so hard to bring them into school and keep them there and I want to thank them for that effort.

We have a drop-out rate that is staggering, thirty percent of our students don't graduate from high school. That's 1.2 million students every single year and ninth-graders that don't complete twelfth grade. We have to educate our way to a better economy. This is about global competitiveness. So I don't spend any time on the silly stuff. I try and stay laser-light focused on really dramatically improving what's going on for our nation's children.

BOB SCHIEFFER: The secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, said last week that the nation should get ready for a big influx of swine flu. We know the first vaccines are not going to be ready to Octo-- until October. Are the schools going to be ready for this?

ARNE DUNCAN: Yes, schools have done a phenomenal job so far. I just really want to thank them, both K to twelve and higher education. We're asking for a couple things.

We're asking for prevention first. We're asking for close monitoring by parents and really employing common sense.

So if students are sick, if they're coughing, please don't send them to school. We really want to keep schools open as much as we can. I was taught as a child to cover my mouth with my hands when I coughed. That's wrong. Cover it with your sleeve, wash hands thoroughly and frequently. And so far things are going very, very well. Once the vaccine becomes available in mid-October, we absolutely want the vaccine to be available at schools. We think it's a great distribution spot. We have students-- and, again, for families who want their child to receive the vaccine, we want them to be able to do it at schools.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, do you think that it should be mandatory?

ARNE DUNCAN: No, I don't think we should mandate anything like that. Again, I think we should make the option available. And I'm sure-- My wife and I would like our children to-- to-- to receive the vaccine. But we should never mandate something like that. It's up to parents.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And-- and what about keeping the schools open? When do you have to decide or when should administrators decide to close the schools?

ARNE DUNCAN: It's really-- closing's a last resort because you-- you-- the continuity of learning is so important. As you know, we have so many working families. When schools close it creates tremendous social disruption. So if you reach a horrible, critical mass where you have, we'll do that. We're really trying to say if you're sick, stay home. Stay home until twenty-four hours after the fever breaks. That's when you-- you become less contagious. But schools are really trying to stay open. So far they're doing a great job. I checked on Friday. We had about twenty-four schools close around the country. We have ninety-five thousand schools open.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But you have how many, twenty-four that were closed?

ARNE DUNCAN: Yeah, there are twenty-four around the country that were closed. They closed for a short period of time, then they reopened.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I-- I noticed one story on the wires this morning. At least two thousand students at Washington State University are, apparently, already showing signs of swine flu.

ARNE DUNCAN: Yeah. And college is doing a great job. They've actually creating some dorms for students that have H1N1. And they're giving to this idea of socialized relations is important. People are helping out.

Emory University is doing a great job of it as are many others. And people are being thoughtful. And what I've really seen, frankly, is the outbreak of common sense. People being thoughtful and doing the right thing.

BOB SCHIEFFER: So, I trust you're worried but not that worried about it.

ARNE DUNCAN: Well, we're prepared-- we're prepared for the worst. But you-- you're hoping for the best. But, yes, you absolutely have to be prepared. And again, the more the school is a part of the solution, the more the schools become vaccination centers, the more we help, you know, solve this thing. That's-- that's the right thing for us to be doing. And we've talked to principals and counselors and social workers around the country and everybody wants to help. Everybody wants to contribute.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let's talk about some of the more long-term problems with the schools. It is generally acknowledged here and abroad that most of the top universities, maybe ninety percent of the top universities in the world are in the United States.

ARNE DUNCAN: We have a world-class higher-education system.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And then when we look at our school system from kindergarten through-- through high school, we find that even though we spend more per child than any other country in the world, our students continually lag. They're near the bottom in science and-- and math compared to other-- other countries in the world. I know you're trying to change that, but let me just ask you first, how did we get there?

ARNE DUNCAN: It's a great question, Bob. I honestly think as a country, we've lost our way educationally. And, you know, we're all focused on the economic crisis. I really believe we have an education crisis in our country. And we have to educate our way to a better economy. That's the only way that we get there.

And other countries-- you know, we used to lead the world in the percent of college graduates. A lot of people still think we're do. We've flat-lined and many other countries have passed us by. There is a recent international comparison of fifteen-year-olds' math results. The United States was thirty-first, thirty-first in the world. That's not who we are. But that's what-- that's the reality today.

So we have to get dramatically better. And, again, I just feel this huge sense of urgency. We have to dramatically increase the graduation rate. Think about thirty percent of students dropping out, 1.2 million students a year. There are no good jobs out there. What are they going to do? They're basically condemned to a life of poverty and social failure.

We have to graduate many more students. We have to make sure many more of those who graduate are prepared for some form of higher education. Four-year universities, two-year community colleges, trade, vocational, technical training, whatever it might be, a high school diploma does not begin to be enough in today's, you know, competitive economy. But if you're dropping out from high school, there's nothing out there for you. And we have to work with a real huge sense of urgency to drive that dropout number down as quickly as we can and increase the graduation rate.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You-- more money has been allocated by this administration to education than to the education secretary than, I can remember, any education secretary having. You have launched one program, your Race to the Top Program. What-- basically what you're doing, you are telling schools and states to reform, to close the bad schools, to get rid of the bad teachers, to encourage the good teachers, a lot of reforms. And if they do that, then the federal government is willing to give them millions, millions of dollars. How exactly does this work?

ARNE DUNCAN: With unprecedented resources-- I want to thank the President and the bipartisan Congress so much for their support. With unprecedented resources has to come unprecedented reform. More of the same investing in the status quo is not going to get us where we need to go. So we're challenging states. We're challenging districts. We're challenging nonprofits in a couple of areas. We're saying you have to raise standards. We need a high-- high bar, college-ready, career-ready standards for everybody, for every single student. We're saying you have to track students throughout their educational career. You can't lose them. We have to figure out where we're doing a great job with them and where we're not.

In education, great teaching, great principals matter tremendously. I think the teachers around the country are literally the unsung heroes of our society. How do we get more great teachers, more great principals. How do we support them. How do we help them be successful.

And finally, when schools simply aren't working, do we have the political will, do we have the courage to fundamentally turn them around. We talk so much about the dropouts. We have about two thousand high schools in the country, Bob, that produce fifty percent of our nation's dropouts, two thousand high schools, fifty percent of our nation's dropouts, and seventy-five percent of the dropouts from the minority community--African-American, Latino, young boys and girls. That's unacceptable. Again, we have to be willing to have the courage to do the right thing.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Well, one of the things that you're pure-- putting emphasis on is accountability. And you're saying you have to reward the good teachers, get rid of the bad ones. And the teachers unions are very nervous about this, because they don't like tying teacher performance to test results, standards, as you're talking about.

How are you going to get them to do that?

ARNE DUNCAN: Well, let me broaden out first, we're challenging everyone. This goes back to the President's speech on Tuesday. We are challenging everyone to take responsibility for doing better.

What bothers me, Bob, in education so much is that we all point fingers. We-- we blame each other. The higher education blames high school, saying the students aren't ready. The high schools blame the elementary schools. The elementary schools blame early childhood. And guess who early childhood blames? The parents.

And guess what, these are all our children. We all have to come together. We have to stop pointing fingers. We all have to look in the mirror and say, what can we do dramatically better to, again, make sure many more students are going to great schools, many more students are prepared to fulfill their dreams?

And so we all have to move outside our comfort zones. I've actually never been more impressed with the national leadership of both unions, the AFT and the NEA, Randi Weingarten and Dennis van Roekel. I've been spending a tremendous amount of time with them. They are passionate. They are committed. They are enlightened union leaders.

And we all have to work hard. We all have to move outside our comfort zones, not just the unions, students, parents, principals, us as a Department of Education. We all have to behave in very different ways to get dramatically better results.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You-- you're talking about national standards. What does that mean?

ARNE DUNCAN: I'm talking about having common college-ready, career-ready standards. And what we've had under No Child Left Behind, one of the many problems on No Child Left Behind is we've had fifty different standards, fifty different goalposts.

And in many states, including the one I'm from, in Illinois, due to the political pressure, those standards have been dummed down. And let me take a moment on this.

In too many places I think, Bob, we are, honestly, we're lying to children. And let me explain what I mean. If a child hears they're quote-unquote "meeting the state standard," that child, that parent, the logical assumption is, they're going to be on track to be successful.

But in way too many places around the country, children that are meeting that standard, because the bar is so low because it has been dummed down, they're barely able to go to high-- to graduate from high school and they are totally inadequately prepared to be successful in higher education.

That has to change. We have to stop lying to children. We have to raise the bar for everyone. We have to have our high expectations. We are going to make sure that every student who graduates from high school is both college-ready and career-ready and has a chance to-- to fulfill their dreams.

BOB SCHIEFFER: How long do you think it will take to get national standards?

ARNE DUNCAN: Well, this is being led not by us. It should never be led by us. It is being led exactly the right place, at the local level. All the good ideas for education, they are never going to come from Washington, they're always going to come from great local educators.

So the-- the state school chiefs, the National Governors Association, we have forty-seven states today voluntarily working together on these standards. The business community has been crying out for this. Both unions are absolutely on board with this. You have great nonprofits, College Board, Achieve, Gates working together.

And it's so interesting, Bob, two or three years ago this was the third rail. You couldn't talk about raising the bar. Couldn't do it. Now you see this national movement led at the local level to move in the right direction. I couldn't be more encouraged.

A long way to go. Not there yet, but this is the-- absolutely the right thing to do for our nation's children and for our nation's long-term economic competitiveness. We have to educate our way to a better economy. It's the only way we're going to get there.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right. We'll take a break here. We'll come back in a minute. We'll talk about charter schools and we'll talk about this whole business of No Child Left Behind and what you think about it and how it needs to be changed, in a minute.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And we're back now with the secretary of education, Arne Duncan.

Mister Duncan, let's talk, a little bit, about No Child Left Behind. This was a cornerstone of the Bush education policy. Senator Kennedy joined with the President to craft that legislation.

It's left a lot of people disappointed. And you don't seem to be much of a fan of it. What needs to be done with it, in your view?

ARNE DUNCAN: A number of things need to change. First of all, it's desperately underfunded. And again, thanks to this President's tremendous leadership and Congress's support, as you said, hundred billion dollars in new money for education, never enough in this tough economy. You know, you'd love to-- to do more.

But what we did is we staved off an education catastrophe, thanks to the money in the Recovery Act. We would have had hundreds of thousands of teachers who were going to be teaching, starting last week and this week, who would have been out of jobs, teachers, social workers, counselors. We would have seen class size go from twenty-five to forty. And I'm just so thankful we staved off that education catastrophe.

So significant new funding, north of ten billion dollars for Title I, poor children, north of ten billion dollars for IDEA, children with special needs. We have to put our money with our-- where our mouth is.

But, having said that, there are many other things we have to do. Money alone is never going to solve this problem. A big problem with No Child Left Behind is you-- they are very, very tight on-- on how you get to your goals, very loose on what the goals were, nationally.

Again, fifty states did their own thing. I want to fundamentally flip that on its head, have a high bar, high goal, common, college-ready, career-ready standards, but being much looser, let the great ideas come from the local, great teachers, great principals, great school districts, great states, be loose on how you get there.

No Child Left Behind was very prescriptive on the method, very loose on the goal. That is fundamentally backwards and we want to turn that on its head.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Now, you're also talking about merit pay for the good teachers. A lot of the unions are-- are very suspicious of that. Do you think you have any chance of-- of getting that?

ARNE DUNCAN: What we want to do is we want to reward excellence. And what I've said, Bob, is that education is interesting to me.

We've been scared to talk about excellence. And we have teachers and principals that, every single day around this country, are performing miracles. They're helping children who are overcoming horrendous difficulties at home, in the community. It might not be safe. Stay focused on education and be successful and break those cycles of poverty and social failure.

We can't do enough to recognize excellence, to reward it, to learn from it, to replicate it, to shine a spotlight on it. And I think great teachers and great principals need to be rewarded.

Having said that, no teacher goes into education to make a million dollars. They go in for the most altruistic reasons. They want to make a difference. They're absolutely committed to their children.

But recognizing great teachers, great principals, putting them in historically underserved communities, inner-city, urban, rural and making sure, in areas where we don't have enough great teachers, math and science, we pay teachers a little bit better there.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And, obviously, these are decisions that had to be made by local school boards and by the states. But the way you encourage that, I take it, is by telling them, if they are willing to do these things, then the federal government is willing to compensate.

ARNE DUNCAN: Right. We have unprecedented discretionary resources. Again, states can compete for them. And you talked about the 4.35 billion race to the top. We actually have, collectively, more than ten billion dollars in discretionary resources.

We've had-- we've never had so much money to invest. And I talk so much about the challenges. But I'll tell you why I'm so help-- hopeful and so optimistic. We've never had more great teachers, more great classrooms, more great schools, more great school districts in the history of our nation. There's been this flourishing of innovation and entrepreneurial educators.

And I don't have to come up with any good ideas. What I need to do is invest in what works, take to scale those best practices, make sure that, where it's working in two schools, let's have it work in ten. Where it's working in two school districts, let's go to twenty.

We have an unprecedented chance to invest in innovation, to invest in best practices, and really make sure that every child has an opportunity to fulfill their dreams, not just a few.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let's talk a little bit about charter schools. These are schools, of course, that are organized. They get public funding. But they also are able to raise their own money. And they don't have some of the restrictions that you find in other public schools. Some people say they're not as good an idea as we once thought they were. There's been one study, I think, out at Stanford, that said they haven't performed as well as-- as many people thought they were. What's your-- what's your take on charter schools?

ARNE DUNCAN: I've said repeatedly I'm not a fan of charter schools. I'm a fan of good charter schools. And what does it take to have a good charter school?

A couple things have to happen. In too many places, this hasn't been the norm around the country. But a couple conditions have to be in place.

First of all, this is not let a thousand flowers blo-- bloom. There should be a very high bar to ent-- to entry. The chance to educate children, I think, is a sacred obligation, and we should be picking-- picking the best of the best to open charter schools. Once you decide who those are through a very competitive, rigorous process, charter school operators need two things. They need real autonomy. These are

innovators; they need to be freed from bureaucracy. By definition, they have a different educational vision. You have to give them the space to let them move and run.

But you have to couple that autonomy with real accountability. And you have to hold them accountable for results. And we have five-year performance contracts. I ran the Chicago public schools. I was lucky to start many successful charter schools, but I closed three for academic failure. And so you have to couple that autonomy with real accountability.

Finally more and more, we need to seek charter schools and traditional public schools and these are all public schools, these are all our children, these are all our tax dollars, they need to share best practices. Greater charters can learn from district schools. District schools can learn from charters. There's some distrust.

And again, when adults fight, when there's adult dysfunction, children lose. So making sure folks talk. What's interesting is some of the best charter schools are run by union members. And the charter school movement actually was in part began or was founded by Albert Shanker, the legendary head of the AFT. And I think charters can also be laboratories for innovative labor management agreements. So I think there's so much we can learn. Where they're working, let's do more of them, let's replicate them. There are some extraordinary charter schools around the country. Where they're not working, they're second-tier or third-tier, let's be honest about that and let's close them down.

BOB SCHIEFFER: And that's one of the things you are talking about. We have less than a minute. Closing schools, that sometimes is more difficult than people think it is.

ARNE DUNCAN: What I'm talking is about where schools aren't working, if you took the bottom one percent of schools nationally by any definition where dropout rates are sixty, sixty-five, seventy percent, where students are falling further and further behind every single year, let's not tinker around the edges. Let's not look for incremental change.

Let's-- children have one chance, Bob, to get an education, one chance. Let's come in and let's fix it and let's give them a chance to be successful long term. Let's not-- let's not tinker around the edges anymore, can't afford to do it.

BOB SCHIEFFER: All right, Mister Secretary, so nice to have you with us this morning. When I'll be back in a moment, I'll have a final word on the happenings of this summer.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: Finally today, well, here we go again. School is coming. Summer is over. And now that's about the best you can say for any of it. Congress comes back to town this week and is probably glad to be back.

For one thing, it should be more pleasant around here than back home where constituents were in a foul mood and town meetings turned so nasty, Jerry Springer could have run them unedited and no one would have noticed old Jerry wasn't even there.

Last week, the White House was putting final touches on the President's make-or-break speech to Congress on health care this Wednesday when it was blindsided by that fire storm of conservative opposition to his plan to speak to the nation's schoolchildren about the rewards of staying in school and off dope.

The President's poll numbers went down as unemployment figures went up again and the news from abroad was no better as the war in Afghanistan took a bad turn and commanders were saying more American troops may be needed. The State Department said it had fired many of the guards at the U.S. embassy in Kabul for holding naked pool parties.

In this year's grid iron show where journalists spoof politicians, I played the role of George Bush and sang a parody song that went this way. "Things are such a mess, Obama is probably sitting at my desk, wishing he was John McCain."

Well, looking back on the news of the summer, that's sounding more like a documentary than a parody.

Back in a second.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)

BOB SCHIEFFER: And that's our broadcast. We will be back right here next Sunday. Thank you for watching.

ANNOUNCER: This broadcast was produced by CBS News, which is solely responsible for the selection of today's guests and topics. It originated in Washington, DC.