

Senate Confirmation Hearing: Arne Duncan
January 13, 2009

The following is an excerpted transcript of the Senate confirmation hearing nominating Chief Executive Officer of the Chicago Public Schools, Arne Duncan, as Secretary of Education. In this excerpt, Mr. Duncan talks about his experience running a program for the "I Have A Dream" Foundation.

Twenty years ago, you may recall, the former Secretary of Education Bill Bennett called the Chicago Public Schools the worst district in the nation and we're proud to have made significant progress since that time, and to really be a model of national reform. But again, the hard work is going to continue there and is far from done.

The six years prior to that, I was fortunate to work with my best friend, John Rogers, and along with my sister, set up the nonprofit side of his business, the Ariel Foundation.

We did two things; we ran an "I Have A Dream" program from 1992 to 1998, and my job and my sister's job, and a great team of volunteers for those six years, was to take 40 sixth-graders and work with them all the way through high school – to tutor them, to mentor them every day, to work with their families, to give them the opportunity to be successful.

And at the end of that, we are proud that 87 percent of our students graduated on time, and 65 percent went on to college. The class one year ahead of us from that school, Shakespeare Elementary, had a 33 percent graduation rate, meaning 67 percent did not graduate – 67 percent the year before didn't graduate, 87 percent of our class did.

What we're trying to demonstrate is, again, given students from high-poverty areas, given the challenges – with long-term support, with long-term opportunities and guidance, our students can be very, very successful.

About halfway through that, in 1995, we started our own small public school, the Ariel Community Academy, which today remains one of the highest performing neighborhood inner-city schools in Chicago, has a very innovative financial literacy curriculum, and I think, is a model that we can learn a great deal from going forward.

So those experiences – managing Chicago Public Schools, setting up a nonprofit – obviously were extraordinary learning opportunities for me.