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At GMM Policy Forum, Secretary of Education Duncan Offers Steps to Address Education Crisis

By Miriam Bridges

America faces a skills crisis and other deep challenges in education, said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan at the annual GMM policy forum, part of ICI's 54th General Membership Meeting. In a conversation with ICI President and CEO Paul Schott Stevens, Secretary Duncan offered a range of ways to address these challenges, including specific recommendations for the fund industry.

"This is a national issue of complacency," Duncan said. "As a country we have rested on our laurels for far too long." He cited a 25 percent dropout rate and a system of teaching math and science that is "fundamentally broken."

Financial literacy is also an area of concern, according to the Secretary. "We are graduating far too many people who are financially illiterate."

Secretary Duncan elaborated on ways the U.S. can surmount these hurdles. American teachers should be paid more, he suggested, adding that the U.S. should emulate countries such as Finland, Singapore, and South Korea, where the teaching profession enjoys more prestige and teachers are drawn from top ranks of university graduates.

While the federal government cannot "micromanage 100,000 schools," Secretary Duncan said it can serve as a vital source of funding, a catalyst for change, and a means to bring more accountability into education.

The private sector also has a role, Secretary Duncan emphasized. He offered praise for local partnerships and efforts such as [Ariel Community Academy](#), a Chicago public school sponsored by Ariel Investments. He also offered the fund industry three ways to further educational progress. First, he urged ICI attendees to engage politically on education with leaders at the state and local level, with a focus on financial literacy as a piece of the approach. Next, he stressed the importance of having fund companies further their efforts to create diverse workforces. Finally, he said the fund industry could be a part of a national call to action to raise awareness on educational matters.

"You can have a tremendous, tremendous impact," he said.

Miriam Bridges is vice president of ICI Education Foundation and editorial director at ICI.