

Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Duncan,

The President recently made a claim that education is crucially important for the future of this nation, and you have said the same. However, right now all over the country public education is being gutted. I am a resident of a rural town in Pennsylvania. Our district is faced with a huge cut to our state educational funding, proposed by our new Governor, and we are facing the prospect of losing our sports programs, music and art, closing half of our elementary schools, including a Blue Ribbon elementary school, laying off a significant portion of our staff, as well as – get this – eliminating kindergarten. Next year, because of a pension funding crisis, we will face more cuts, and more the year after, and our local tax base is stretched to the limit.

Because of the heavy reliance on local property tax to fund education, across this state there is also a ridiculous variation in the resources available to school districts, with some schools able to spend only 40 cents per dollar spent by wealthier districts. Because of this, poor and rural districts are disproportionately impacted by the looming funding cuts. In districts like ours, we are faced with year after year of closures and cuts. How is this an acceptable way to educate children?

In this looming funding crisis, our school district's hands are tied. The state has cut our district's educational subsidy by more than a million dollars, and the district is bound by state law to a maximum increase to our local tax rate. So all that is left to do is cut. While in many ways, this is a state issue (although that could be changed with more federal funding for regular education), it is also a federal issue. Our district is mandated by federal law to provide roughly \$3 million worth of special education services yearly, yet it receives only about \$1 million in federal reimbursement for those services. That translates to a \$2 million hole in our district's educational budget. For a district with an overall budget of about \$26 million, that is a large gap. Filling that \$2 million gap would save BOTH schools that will probably have to close and would keep most of the programs that our district has to consider cutting this year just to stay afloat.

In the United States of America, it is just wrong that education is being given such short shrift and that there is such radical inequality in funding. As the Secretary of Education, who has claimed that education is the key to our future, you have the responsibility to help enact a solution – to put your words to concrete action.

Thank you for your attention,