

U.S. Education Secretary announces \$891M in federal education funds for N.J.

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Ed Murray/The Star-LedgerU.S.

Secretary of Education Arne Duncan listens during an assembly at North Star Academy. In a bid to reform the nation's urban schools, Duncan has been visiting charter schools nationwide to see what is working. He visited North Star Charter in Newark on Friday .

NEWARK -- U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced today that New Jersey's application for nearly \$900 million in education funding from the federal stimulus package had been approved.

Duncan made the announcement during a [visit to the North Star Academy](#), a multi-campus charter school in Newark whose methods, including extended class hours and an emphasis on character development, have won praise and yielded high test scores.

Duncan's visit to the school's Clinton Hill campus amounted to a fact-finding mission. He hopes to replicate the successes there and other experimental schools across urban America, a policy priority under President Obama. Duncan toured classes and participated in a discussion with a select group of students and their parents.

Also onhand were Gov. Jon Corzine, U.S. Sens. Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez and Reps. Rush Holt and Donald Payne.

New Jersey joins 26 other states that have already secured stimulus funds. Duncan said \$891 million was being released to the state now; New Jersey can apply for an additional \$440 million in the fall.

The federal money will give Corzine the financial leeway he needs to avoid major budget cuts in education this fiscal year, and was already included in his proposed budget.

[Full Star-Ledger coverage of the N.J. budget](#)

Flanked by a blue banner that read "Conversations About Education" and standing with a group of students and their parents, the youngsters in uniforms of green-collared shirts and khaki pants and skirts, Duncan seemed pleased to be freeing up federal money for yet another state.

"It's an unprecedented investment in education," he said, adding the recession is a "huge opportunity" to work

on the nation's "education crisis."

"Rahm Emanuel, the President's chief of staff, has a great line, 'Never waste a good crisis,'" Duncan said.

Roughly \$20 billion in stimulus funding for education is already on the way to state coffers, but much of it seems more focused on stemming the bleeding than on educational transformation. Duncan said federal stimulus aid would save 14,000 education jobs in New York.

"We're going to continue to save hundreds of thousands of jobs," Duncan said.

Newark officials are hopeful future federal spending may be a catalyst to further success.

Newark Mayor Cory Booker, who was traveling outside the state, said in a telephone interview that the visit will contribute to a deep understanding that Duncan and others in the administration have long been developing about change in the city.

Booker visited Duncan in Chicago before either one held their current positions, and they spent an hour talking education reform and the possibilities for change. The education secretary formerly headed up the Chicago public schools.

"I'm really excited about the secretary's visit," Booker said. "He's really in tune with what is happening in Newark. His team has already been involved in the city even before President Obama was elected."

The mayor said he is hopeful experiments like the one at North Star can be replicated elsewhere in the city and the nation. And he said Clifford Janey, Newark's superintendent, has been supportive of both charter schools and other experiments.

"For too long we've looked at charter schools and traditional public schools as separate," Booker said. "The great thing about Dr. Janey is he sees them as part of the same system...that there is not one path but a need for an interwoven set of strategies."

Steve Chambers contributed to this story.

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