

## Fence Post

### District 200 made the right call

I sometimes criticize Wheaton-Warrenville District 200, so I want to speak out when the district does something right — in this case, using classroom time for student learning, rather than what may be (at best) a feel good speech.

Let politicians pontificate, but let teachers teach. Schools work best when curriculum and funding are local and accountable, not remote-controlled from inside the Beltway. Thank you to District 200 for making the right call, and for promptly communicating it.

By the way, what's President

Obama's lesson plan? As remarkable as his accomplishments may be, they are not the result of public education — he graduated from an exclusive private school in Hawaii. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan ran the Chicago Public Schools, but failed to produce even one public school Obama deemed good enough for his own children.

Instead, Obama has sent them to elite private schools in Chicago and D.C., but opposes school choice for poor parents in D.C. by failing to extend D.C. Opportunity Scholarships. The true lesson public school students can learn from the administration in D.C. is one of hypocrisy.

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# When Bush spoke to students, Democrats investigated, held hearings

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The controversy over President Obama's speech to the nation's schoolchildren will likely be over shortly after Obama speaks today at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia. But when President George H.W. Bush delivered a similar speech on October 1, 1991, from Alice Deal Junior High School in Washington DC, the controversy was just beginning. Democrats, then the majority party in Congress, not only denounced Bush's speech -- they also ordered the General Accounting Office to investigate its production and later summoned top Bush administration officials to Capitol Hill for an extensive hearing on the issue.

Unlike the Obama speech, in 1991 most of the controversy came after, not before, the president's school appearance. The day after Bush spoke, the Washington Post published a front-page story suggesting the speech was carefully staged for the president's political benefit. "The White House turned a Northwest Washington junior high classroom into a television studio and its students into props," the Post reported.

With the Post article in hand, Democrats pounced. "The Department of Education should not be producing paid political advertising for the president, it should be helping us to produce smarter students," said Richard Gephardt, then the House Majority Leader. "And the president should be doing more about education than saying, 'Lights, camera, action.'"

Democrats did not stop with words. Rep. William Ford, then chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, ordered the General Accounting Office to investigate the cost and legality of Bush's appearance. On October 17, 1991, Ford summoned then-Education Secretary Lamar Alexander and other top Bush administration officials to testify at a hearing devoted to the speech. "The hearing this morning is to really examine the expenditure of \$26,750 of the Department of Education funds to produce and televise an appearance by President Bush at Alice Deal Junior High School in Washington, DC," Ford began. "As the chairman of the committee charged with the authorization and implementation of education programs, I am very much interested in the justification, rationale for giving the White House scarce education funds to produce a media event."

Unfortunately for Ford, the General Accounting Office concluded that the Bush administration had not acted improperly. "The speech itself and the use of the department's funds to support it, including the cost of the production contract, appear to be legal," the GAO wrote in a letter to Chairman Ford. "The speech also does not appear to have violated the restrictions on the use of appropriations for publicity and propaganda."

That didn't stop Democratic allies from taking their own shots at Bush. The National Education Association denounced the speech, saying it "cannot endorse a president who spends \$26,000 of taxpayers' money on a staged media event at Alice Deal Junior High School in Washington, D.C. -- while cutting school lunch funds for our neediest youngsters."

Lost in all the denouncing and investigating was the fact that Bush's speech itself, like Obama's today, was entirely unremarkable. "Block out the kids who think it's not cool to be smart," the president told students. "If someone goofs off today, are they cool? Are they still cool years from now, when they're stuck in a dead end job. Don't let peer pressure stand between you and your dreams."