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Your education road map to state and federal politics

Michele McNeil covered education and state government in Indiana for a decade before joining *Education Week* as a state policy reporter in June 2006. Alyson Klein, who reports on federal education policy, joined the staff in February 2006 after nearly two years at *Congress Daily*.

[« An Inaugural Ball for the Elementary Set | Main](#)

A Celebration for Linda Darling-Hammond

From guest blogger Stephen Sawchuk

The drinks flowed, the sushi rolled, and the head of President-elect Obama's education-policy review team, Linda Darling-Hammond, sparkled in an elegant bronze silk gown for a reception held in her honor tonight at a swank downtown Washington hotel.

Speaking in her honor were representatives of McGraw-Hill and the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education, which helped sponsor the event; Dan Domenech, the executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, and ... New York City schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein.

Klein's appearance WAS a bit of a surprise, given the supposed "split" among Democrats in the education-policy community. During the vetting of potential education secretary candidates, Klein, a signer of the Education Equality Project manifesto, was viewed as belonging to a group that supported stronger accountability for teachers and administrators. Alternatively, a second coalition, "Broader Bolder," argued that districts needed more support for wraparound services in public schools and that schools alone shouldn't be held responsible for closing achievement gaps. Darling-Hammond was viewed as belonging to the latter group.

But Klein debunked this supposed split as a media fabrication. "They say there's one camp here and another camp here," he said. "Well let me tell you, in education sometimes people don't even agree with what they [themselves] are saying."

Darling-Hammond has long said that skin color, zip code, and family income should not determine the quality of a child's education, Klein noted. Working together under Barack Obama, leaders can finally deliver the promises of *Brown v. Board of Education* for the nation's urban schoolchildren, he concluded.

Klein apparently left soon after speaking, so I didn't have a chance to follow up on these remarks with him. But is the "war" really over? Hard to say: There weren't a whole lot of EEP signers in attendance—no Michelle Rhee, for instance. And a woman just to my right groaned, "Oh, God!" and buried her head in her companion's arms when Klein was announced as a speaker.

But if there are two things that can bring everyone in education policy together, at least for a while, they are arguably Obama and money. The event was as much a pre-party for Obama's inauguration as it was a celebration of Darling-Hammond's work, and there was a palpable feeling of excitement from the crowd.

"It's almost like a breath of fresh air has blown through the capital," said Jan Harp Domene, the president of the National PTA.

And everyone I spoke with credited Darling-Hammond and her education team's advocacy for winning K-12 education the largest share of cash of any policy area in the House's proposed stimulus package (\$122 billion, according to my colleague Alyson Klein).



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"This is an administration that gets education," Darling-Hammond told me in a brief interview. "It understands how to leverage improvement and reform while dealing with fiscal needs." Examples of that, she said, include the additional funds for teacher performance pay and for improving teacher preparation, both of which were key ideas in the Obama campaign platform (read more about this [here](#) at *Teacher Beat*).

As to the "camps" in the Democratic party, Darling-Hammond agreed with Mr. Klein's assessment. "All of us talk to each other" after stories on the "split" run in the newspapers, she added with a smile.

She wouldn't comment, though, on whether she'll have a place in the administration.

But whether Darling-Hammond gets a formal position or not may not matter, said Bob Wise, the president of the Alliance for Excellent Education, a high-school reform nonprofit organization. "Whether official or not," he said, "she is clearly one of the foremost advisers to the new president."

Other notables in attendance: Michael Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools; Tom Carroll, the president of the National Council on Teaching and America's Future; Anne Bryant, the executive director of the National School Boards Association; and Cindy Brown, the head of the education-policy shop at the Center for American Progress.

Posted by Stephen Sawchuk on January 18, 2009 8:53 PM | [Permalink](#)

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