

Senator Hillary Clinton Addresses SIPA Forum

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Tobey Maguire and Kirsten Dunst were not the only notable figures on campus this week. New York Senator Hillary Clinton was at the International Affairs Building to attend the seventh annual David N. Dinkins Leadership and Public Policy Forum.

Introduced by Professor and former New York City Mayor David Dinkins, the former First Lady spoke to about one hundred students, administrators, superintendents from school districts across the country, and various scholars in the field of urban education policy.

In her speech, Clinton urged those at the forum to take action to improve the quality of public education provided to American's youth, addressing such problems as overcrowded classrooms, uncertified teachers, and students not reading at appropriate levels.

Clinton addressed the major role families play in the quality of education, as well as the importance of childcare and the influence of the media. "It is so much harder for responsible adults to influence children of today than it was when I was growing up," she said. "If we just take a moment and think about the difference in culture and society, and family structure, we know that we are dealing with a different set of problems."

Still, Clinton recognized that many of the racial and cultural issues that exist in contemporary society are nothing new. "We still have persistent and pervasive racism and poverty in many of our urban districts that disproportionately effects children who come from backgrounds that makes it easier for them to be vulnerable to the impact of poverty and the messages of racism," she said.

Although Clinton highlighted many of education's pitfalls, the Senator acknowledged that there were many successful urban public schools adding that the key to solving urban educational problems is to replicate those schools and programs that have proven successful.

She also spoke about the essential role of the federal government in improving urban education and said she feels the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, promoted by President George W. Bush, would not have a major effect on the urban education system. The act promotes a stringent monitoring of public schools by the federal government and proposes standardized testing in every grade. Clinton attacked the Act for this and for not promoting more teacher recruitment, adding that its 5.9 percent increase in federal funding to schools was not enough.

Supporters of the Act point to its more than 40 programs providing federal funds to nearly every school district in the nation. They say that the Act provides supplemental assistance to improve education for low-achieving students and includes a Bilingual Education Act, a Reading Excellence Act, and a Class-Size Reduction Act.

Clinton proposed a national teacher recruitment act to relieve the shortage of certified teachers felt across the country. She urged the federal government to assist with improving urban education, and said the Bush administration's tax cut should be reallocated the education system.

College Democrats member Jonathan Klein, CC '01, agreed with Clinton's thoughts on the challenges facing urban educational systems. "With the New York City Public School System being severely burdened and under funded, the federal government should make an effort to better the public schools," he said. Architecture student Benjamin Bolger felt that this financial burden on the schools can be seen across the city, and that government funding is not being allocated correctly. "The imbalance of funding can be seen in less than a mile between public schools in the city. The government needs to make more of an effort towards equity," he said.