I subscribe to the belief that there are few issues within any society that are more significant than the issue of educating those people who live within it. As a future educator, a citizen within the society that you, President Obama, are now the leader of, and a product of the education system which you, Secretary Duncan, are now chiefly responsible for, I feel it is not only my right, but also my duty to voice my concerns regarding the state of our most significant societal issue. And so, I’d like to take this opportunity to do just that. The current political administration has made several pushes for educational reform; the encouragement of merit pay programs, the support of charter schools and the implementation of the race to the top initiative are all admirable approaches to attending to the current issues that are inherent within the U.S. education system. However, some of these attempts may be of more detriment than benefit.  
 Teaching starts with teachers. It seems then that the logical thing to do would be to reward those who play a large part in education, and in a capitalistic nation such as ours, the best reward, it seems, is monetary compensation. Attempts at this monetary compensation have been unsuccessful, however; the Merit Pay program, meant to encourage quality teaching in the classroom through financial incentive, is deeply flawed. The philosophy behind salary reforms is that if educator’s salary is adjusted based on performance the result will be a specific academic outcome for their students (Hornick-Lockard). However, studies have not proven that this is the case. Rick Perry’s Texas Educator Excellence Grant legislation gave school districts the funding to distribute bonuses to high performing teachers based on student TAKS scores, but schools districts were uncooperative, giving out bonus checks of significantly less value than the grant suggested. The $300 million grant produced no evidence that the merit pay program had an effect on student achievement (Stutz). Education scholars do not know if financial incentives and rewards actually improve teaching methods or student achievement (Guthrie and Schuermann). This, incidentally, brings up another blemished element in the theory of pay-for-performance salary reforms. How exactly does one measure the quality of teaching in the classroom when there are so many inconsistent factors? Proposals for Merit Pay programs in schools tend to “lack objective criteria,” according the President of the American Federation of Teachers (Feldman). Even the exceptions to this tendency fail to truly present criteria that would account for the several discrepancies in the correlation between quality teaching and student achievement. Students are not cookie-cutter replicas of one type of learner. In a single classroom a teacher may be dealing with 25 students and 25 different learning styles. To suggest that he or she should be paid more for being a better teacher for those 25 students is to suggest that he or she be paid more for having several different personalities. The truth is, some teaching styles are not compatible with some learning styles, and while teachers do need to work around that to ensure that each student is receiving information in a way that he or she can learn it, the stress of impending monetary gains will not aid teachers in working patiently with a student, or 24 students. In fact, tying student performance to teacher pay is a seemingly excellent option if the goal is to create a higher-stress environment in the classroom. Teachers are a valuable part of our society, and are, as many citizens have expressed, grossly underpaid. While educators do deserve a better paycheck, basing their pay on student performance is not only unfair, but also, according to studies, ineffective. Instead of spending millions of tax dollars on the funding of merit pay programs that do not work, it seems that state and federal legislation should be pushing toward a reform in the professionalism of the education field and perhaps spending in favor of an overall raise in teacher pay. Tax money is being poorly spent, students are not benefiting, and teachers are not receiving the rewards that they deserve.   
 In many cases, merit pay programs were tested on inner-city teachers, simply because the potential benefits politicians and scholars were hoping to see from the program are desperately needed by inner-city schools. The conditions of schools in urban areas, especially those of low-income, have been consistently declining, and as result many families are fleeing from typical public education in hopes of finding an alternative to work as their saving grace. While there are several benefits to the charter system, more specialized education, programs, and freedom in school structure, the main attracting for families in our poverty-ridden and underperforming areas is, “[doubt] that the public schools can do (or at any rate, will do) what is necessary to educate poor minority children” (Raspberry). The government’s focus on the lifting of current caps on charter schools is in turn causing them to be negligent when it comes to typical public schooling. I must urge you then, Mr. President, and Mr. Secretary, to consider the fact that at this moment students who attend typical public schools are being severely underserved. In reality, had these schools been given the proper federal and state attention, a lift of charter schools would not need to be a political focus because students would be receiving exceptional education already. The issue lies in the fact that parents and children alike in urban areas see charter schools as a saving grace in the face of floundering, dangerous typical public schools, but with limited space and lottery-based admissions, not everyone is given the opportunity to be saved by a decent education. Additionally, these so-called saviors are not necessarily always better performance wise than the schools from which these students are fleeing. That means that even if a student’s name, to their parents’ relief, is drawn from the mass of other names hoping for a chance at quality education, there is still a chance that the student may be deprived of decent schooling. In fact, that student may also be forced to experience the pangs of disappointment and upheaval if they attend a charter school that ultimately fails and is shut down, and the student is sent back to their original unsafe or underperforming school, thus entering a cycle of poor government provided education options and a widened achievement gap. Which, it seems to me, is a bit counteractive.   
 I do not mean to undermine the attempts that have been made to improve our public schools. The Race to the Top initiative did, at the very least, force states who were interested in receiving the grants made available to think about how they could implement reformation in their respective public education system. However, in states like Massachusetts, where education has been a top priority for a great number of years, the criterion and rubric attached to the grant program worked against the state goals and, more importantly, strengths. In this way, while the RTTT initiative did help fund the improvement of some states and encourage others to work toward a similar outcome, it had some of the same negative effects of the long standing No Child Left Behind legislation; it sought out accountability in student education, but stifled the high achieving.   
 The No Child Left Behind program’s been of great benefit in that it demands s