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## **The Pursuit of Life, Liberty, and Public Education**

*American Book Award Winner Sonia Sanchez,  
Duke Ellington HS Students To Look at Education Equality on December 8th*

Education is being called “the civil rights issue of our generation” by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, as he calls for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act – more commonly known since 2002 as No Child Left Behind. On December 8th, internationally-renowned poet and activist Sonia Sanchez will highlight a panel discussion at Duke Ellington School for the Arts in Washington, DC to examine this topic with 11th and 12th grade students. “This will not be any ordinary bureaucratic conversation,” says Mark Williams, chair of the Literary Media and Communications department at Ellington. “We are interested in having our students engage in a discussion with artists and thinkers about how art can serve as the site of civil resistance.”

Ellington students will question panelists on the premise that every person, regardless of race, religion, and class is born with the right to receive an education – making it an inalienable right. Panelists will be asked to consider how standards of education should be determined, how they can be maintained, and how education parity can be achieved for all American citizens. As a civil rights issue, then how can citizens effectively fight for their inalienable right to an education for their children? Housed in a historical context of young people/students fighting for Civil Rights, how can students now fight for this inalienable right?

Other panelists will include Professor Douglas Reed of Georgetown University, whose research centers on the politics of education; and Kyle Dargen, Distinguished Adjunct-in-Residence in the Creative Writing department at American University, whose work examines contemporary American issues through the lens of the African-American literary tradition.

Says Mr. Williams, “Our students have been involved in a rigorous examination of this issue, and they are deeply aware of the massive discrepancies amongst public schools in the District alone, as far as resources, funding, test scores, etc., and the fact that these discrepancies fall squarely along socioeconomic/demographic lines. Their question is – if they are born with a right to receive an education, then what exactly does that mean, and how do they begin that pursuit?”

“The Pursuit of Life, Liberty, and Public Education” will begin at 10 a.m. at the Ellington Theater, Duke Ellington School of the Arts, 3500 R Street, N.W., Washington, DC. Duke Ellington is a DC public high school that provides professional arts training and college preparation to talented DC public school students; for more information, please go to [www.ellingtonschool.org](http://www.ellingtonschool.org). For media inquiries, please contact Kristen Hartke at 202.744.0280 or [khartke@olg.com](mailto:khartke@olg.com).