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Republicans Increase Education Spending

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Not that that's a good thing.

At the [Cato Institute](#), several conservatives squared off to discuss education reform. David Cleary, Majority Staff Director for the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee attached to the office of Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN), defended the recently-passed "Every Student Succeeds Act," or ESSA. The Heritage Foundation's education policy analyst Lindsey Burke disagreed with ESSA's promised reforms, while former education commissioner Michael Hansen straddled both sides of the political aisle.

Cleary claimed that ESSA scaled back some of the Department of Education's overreach with Common Core and Race to the Top but was not perfect. "It[ESSA] is not the panacea to all ills the federal government has created the last 40 years [but it] is better than the waivers." He continued, "[Common Core] was certainly not a good thing" and it was forcing America into the wrong direction. "It was a very Republican idea," Cleary asserted, "but a federal requirement was absolutely the wrong thing to do." ESSA "turned off the teacher evaluation mandate" of Common Core and also turned off the Secretary of Education's ability to impose these mandates, which Cleary felt was virtually unprecedented in the history of education legislation.

Cleary hedged on ESSA's benefits, "It was a significant reversal of course...but did it go far enough? That's debatable." He noted that Sen. Alexander tried to add a voucher amendment to ESSA, but found that "the political appetite for a voucher, a block grant, wasn't there." He felt that the Right had "turn[ed] the tide" with ESSA and that "it is a good step, a good beginning."

Now, "it's up to the states of how to implement the law...it's up to states to push back" because "the whole apparatus of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of waivers...has ended" with ESSA. "There's no micromanaging from Washington" under ESSA, Cleary said, "we've hit a pretty good balance there." "Now, states can develop their own measurements" in education.

However, Lindsey Burke disagreed with Cleary's points. She said, "NCLB was a labyrinth of federal programs" and she saw that "elimination is pretty limited" under ESSA. Under NCLB, there were so-called "shadow programs" which were unfunded education programs that continued to exist. Burke said, "More than half of these unfunded programs saw funding increases under ESSA" and "only four or five programs were actually eliminated." Burke did not end there, continuing, "We still have a terrible labyrinth of a bill with the 1,051 pages being a part of it" and conservatives "did not see spending reduced whatsoever." Burke said that under

NCLB, the government “spent about \$23 billion annually” while ESSA “is authorized at about \$24 billion” in spending.

Michael Hansen, a former education secretary in Virginia and education commissioner in Florida, currently is a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Center on Education Policy Governance Studies. He said that people should ask two questions, “Is there a role for the federal government in education? Should the role be expansive or small?”

While in Virginia, “We did not apply for Common Core and did not apply for Race to the Top” because “I believed Virginia state standards were worth keeping.” When he was in Florida, “it made sense for Florida to have Common Core.” Someone once told him that the Department of Education is “giving away waivers like candy...I said that if that’s the case, it’s a jawbreaker.” Hansen pointed out that these NCLB waivers were lengthy and had to be edited by Washington bureaucrats, which also required the strenuous task of gathering stakeholders (i.e. teachers, unions, universities and parents) as a part of the waiver process.” He said, “I don’t expect the federal government to totally step away” from education, but he prefers this shift to the state and local governments becoming more like senior partners instead of junior partners under Common Core. Hansen noted that local and state education control has “been in every single law [dating] from [the] 1965 [passage of the ESEA]” and Common Core ignored it. “That role should stay in place,” Hansen affirmed. He also told the audience that, contrary to common wisdom, “states and local schools have the authority to create annual tests” and not the federal government.