

## Politicians: Hopelessly naïve about government

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There are numerous causes of federal government expansion, including special-interest pressures and the ability to borrow-and-spend endlessly.

Another cause was highlighted in a recent story about a Bush-Obama education program: politicians are excessively optimistic and hopelessly naïve about their ability to solve society's problems top-down from Washington.

I want to highlight the Washington Post summary because this is such a classic failure:

“One of the Obama administration's signature efforts in education, which pumped billions of federal dollars into overhauling the nation's worst schools, failed to produce meaningful results, according to a federal analysis.

“Test scores, graduation rates and college enrollment were no different in schools that received money through the School Improvement Grants program — the largest federal investment ever targeted to failing schools — than in schools that did not.

“The Education Department published the findings on the website of its research division on Wednesday hours before President Obama's political appointees walked out the door.

“The School Improvement Grants program has been around since the administration of President George W. Bush, but it received an enormous boost under Obama. The administration funneled \$7 billion into the program between 2010 and 2015 — far exceeding the \$4 billion it spent on Race to the Top grants.

“The school turnaround effort, he told the Washington Post days before he left office in 2016, was arguably the administration's ‘biggest bet.’

“He and other administration officials sought to highlight individual schools that made dramatic improvements after receiving the money. But the new study released this week shows that, as a large-scale effort, School Improvement Grants failed.”

It is excessively optimistic and hopelessly naïve to think that a new federal spending effort would turn around the nation's schools after that approach has not worked for five decades. But the Post reveals how deep the blind optimism was in this case:

“Some education experts say that the administration closed its eyes to mounting evidence about the program’s problems in its own interim evaluations, which were released in the years after the first big infusion of cash.

“The latest interim evaluation, released in 2015, found mixed results, with students at one-third of the schools showing no improvement or even sliding backward.

“Even then, Duncan remained optimistic about the School Improvement Grants, which he said had — along with the Race to the Top grants — unleashed innovation across the country.”

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