

# Newsweek

## Jeb's Schools Plan Means More Federal Control

By Neal McCluskey

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In a [Washington Post op-ed](#) laying out his thoughts on the federal role in education, Governor Jeb Bush wrote, “We are long overdue in setting the lines of authority so clearly.” Alas, the lines he offered would furnish just the sort of “clarity” that has led to nearly limitless federal control over schooling without [any meaningful evidence](#) of lasting improvement.

The true heart of what Bush wrote was not his declaration about setting lines, but the three justifications he offered for federal intervention. Washington, he wrote:

should work to create transparency so that parents can see how their local schools measure up; it should support policies that have a proven record; and it should make sure states can't ignore students who need extra help.

All of this is what has gotten us to the *de facto* state of federal control we are currently in:

- “Transparency” has come to mean federally driven tests and curriculum standards—the Common Core—because under No Child Left Behind states had been defining “proficiency” for themselves, and it wasn't sufficiently “transparent” for some people whether “proficient” kids in Mississippi were as educated as those in Massachusetts. Of course, you can't have much more complete federal control than Washington deciding what students are taught.
- Supporting policies with “a proven record” opens the door for any policies politicians declare “proven.” See, for instance, [the rhetoric](#) vs. [the reality](#) of pre-K education programs.
- Making sure states “can't ignore students who need extra help” has also been used to justify national standards and tests. Indeed, it underlies everything Washington does. Sayeth federal politicians, “Some groups aren't doing so well, and since we spend money to end that we'd better dictate terms. So let's connect to all that money to school [nutrition guidelines](#), [teacher evaluations](#), [English and math content](#), [school opening times](#)...”

Quite simply, in setting his lines, Governor Bush set no lines. Thankfully for him, lines of federal authority have already been drawn. Indeed, they were set centuries ago: The Constitution gives the federal government impose transparency, offer help, or anything other than prohibit discrimination by state and local governments and govern federal lands.

As I've [noted before](#), obeying the Constitution would save folks like Governor Bush a lot of reinventing work. More importantly, it would save everyone else expensive, ineffectual trouble.

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