

Will Conservatives Endorse Big Government Education?



At a time when conservatives regularly promote limited government and condemn further encroachment by the federal government into the nation's health insurance system, the last thing they should be doing is lending support to a program that will *increase* the government's role in citizens' lives. Unfortunately, that is exactly what one noted conservative is doing when it comes to education in America.

[Thomas B. Fordham Institute](#) President Chester Finn encourages conservatives to follow his lead [endorsing](#) the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), a set of national education standards developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. CCSSI will be the bridle by which the federal government controls schools that willingly accept Race to the Top Fund sugar. [According](#) to the National Association of State Boards of Education

the Obama administration is supporting this initiative to develop common standards by allocating part of the [\$4.35] billion "Race to the Top" funds towards the common core initiative, including \$350 million for the development of common assessments.

In pitching CCSSI to conservatives, Finn noted that CCSSI

emerged not from the federal government but a voluntary coming together of (most) states, and the states' decision whether or not to adopt them will remain voluntary.

Neal McCluskey, Associate Director of [Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom](#), not surprisingly, [dissented](#) from Finn's CCSSI endorsement. McCluskey wonders

Why would Finn make voluntarism and freedom from the feds major selling points? Because conservatives know that federally imposed standards would be subject to federal politics, and that means control by the teachers' unions, administrators' associations, and other interest groups that have outsized political power in education.

Most States, it seems, are more than willing to accept federal standards if doing so brings some of that government cheese. Forty States, as of January 19, have applied for RttT grants, which the Department of Education [states](#) will "dramatically re-shape America's educational system."

The federal government's role in education, since establishing the Department of Education under Carter to Bush's "No Child Left Behind" and now to Obama's "Race to the Top" gets bigger and bigger year in and year out. How, exactly, has that limited government's growth?

Chester Finn's intention is surely not to increase the federal government's scope and reach into our lives. Unfortunately, CCSSI, coupled with Race to the Top funds, will do exactly that. So when Finn asks conservatives to endorse CCSSI, what, exactly is he asking them to support? A good education in America's founding principles of limited government, liberty, and personal responsibility? Or is he, unintentionally, asking conservatives to conserve Big Government's status quo and a one-size fits all federally mandated mode of education?

Education is a key inoculation factor that boosts a citizen's immune system against the encroaching disease of Big Government. Organizations like [the Culture Alliance](#), [Intercollegiate Studies Institute](#) and [Cato Institute](#) exist to increase the number of those inoculated. Chester Finn, inadvertently, makes it more difficult for these organizations to spread America's foundational values by lending his support to a disease that, as it ravishes the body politic, creates an ever-smaller citizen.