

Did Betsy DeVos Really Just Say That?

In the video clip above, Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos made a statement to Fox News Channel's Bill Hemmer that left most conservative education advocates scratching their heads.

She said:

The Every Student Succeeds Act, which is in the process of being implemented now, essentially does away with the whole argument about Common Core. Each state can set the standards for their state. They may elect to adopt very high standards for their students to aspire to and work toward. That will be up to each state to be able to ascertain what is right for that state. We hope that all of them will have very high expectations.

In other words, she was suggesting that because of ESSA, Common Core had been effectively eliminated from public school curricula in the U.S. This had to leave the education advocates who pushed so hard to get DeVos' highly contentious nomination through the Senate wondering whether she had been lying to them the whole time, or if she was just plain delusional.

Perhaps there's a more reasonable explanation.

Let's assume for a moment that a sister in Christ hasn't lied to us, and that she's entirely sane. The wording of ESSA could lead one to believe that it eliminates Common Core's influence on the American educational system:

The federal government is prohibited from ... mandating, directing, controlling, coercing, or exercising any direction or supervision over academic standards that states develop or adopt, including Common Core State Standards.

The Republicans who crafted the legislation touted it as a major victory for educational reform, government deregulation, and a dagger to the heart of Common Core. But was it really? From what conservative education activists say about ESSA, it's more of a rebranding of Common Core than an elimination.

The key phrase to listen for is "high standards"—or words to that effect—which have become the new code words that Washington, D.C., educrats are using in lieu of Common Core. And, when you troll through the 1,060 pages of ESSA, it jumps right out at you:

Each State shall demonstrate that the challenging academic standards are aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the system of public higher education in the State and relevant State career and technical education standards.

"Challenging academic standards" sounds an awful lot like "high standards." But let's also look at the second half of that sentence, which sounds synonymous with "college- and career-ready standards"—a key phrase the Obama administration's Department of Education used to describe Common Core.

Regardless of DeVos' comments, however, President Donald Trump reaffirmed earlier this month his commitment to ending Common Core's influence on public education:

When I go out to Iowa, when I go out to the different states and I talk, they want to run their school programs locally and they'll do a much better job...

And I like the fact of getting rid of Common Core. You know, Common Core, to me, we have to end it. We have to bring education local, to me. I've always said it, I've been saying it during the campaign, and we're doing it. {eo}