



Paul Bedard: Breakthrough ‘No Child’ deal would loosen federal meddling in schools

By Paul Bedard, April 7

An unusual bipartisan Senate deal to reform the controversial "No Child Left Behind" program would pull back federal involvement in local schools, and leave it up to states to participate in Common Core, according to the architects of the long-awaited compromise.

"Basically, our agreement continues important measurements of the academic progress of students but restores to states, local school districts, teachers and parents the responsibility for deciding what to do about improving student achievement," said Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander, chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

"This agreement is a strong step in the right direction that helps students, educators and schools; gives states and districts more flexibility while maintaining strong federal guardrails; and helps make sure all students get the opportunity to learn, no matter where they live, how they learn, or how much money their parents make," added the committee's top Democrat, Sen. Patty Murray.

Many states that felt the federal government played too strong a role under the Bush-era law will likely cheer the agreement because it lessens many federal requirements while keeping the testing and accountability regime fairly healthy.

The bill would end the federal test-based accountability system, letting states decide how to use the federally-required test for their own accountability purposes. It would keep the required two tests in reading and math in grades 3-8 and science for 3-12.

It would also strengthen state and local control over creating accountability systems, though they will have to meet federal standards. In a review of the agreement, the HELP committee said, "the federal government is prohibited from determining or approving state standards."

The bipartisan agreement also makes sure that it is up to states to determine academic standards. Said the statement:

"The bill affirms that states decide what academic standards they will adopt, without interference from Washington, D.C. The federal government may not mandate or incentivize states to adopt or maintain any particular set of standards, including Common Core. States will be free to decide what academic standards they will maintain in their states."

While neither side got everything they want, the deal is one of the first signs that bipartisanship is alive again on Capitol Hill. The committee is set to take action on the agreement next week

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