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**Date:** Tue, 2/28/2012 8:40:04 AM

**Subject:** Re: Open Letter From Rick Hess to Chiefs for Change

Paul do mind taking a stab at a response for the chiefs to react to?

Sent from my iPad

On Feb 27, 2012, at 10:38 PM, "Paul Pastorek" <[beaureese24@gmail.com](mailto:beaureese24@gmail.com)> wrote:

Well folks - like one of my favorite old time songwriters wrote..."It's a big ol' goofy world..." This is the part reform I hate. Everyone wants to tell you what to do and how to do it.

the price of leadership is responding to the critics where appropriate. Whether it's Ed Trust or Rick Hess, or "friends" are turning on us to show leadership. What leadership compels us to say or do is another things. our message is NOT getting out.

I think this is one where a response is required. I have a personal reaction to this and personal messaging, think sitting Supts need to make up their minds what they want to say. I know you have a ton of stuff going but I suggest that you not let the grass grow...

Paul

On Mon, Feb 27, 2012 at 12:44 PM, Jaryn Emhof ([Jaryn@excelined.org](mailto:Jaryn@excelined.org)) <[jaryn@excelined.org](mailto:jaryn@excelined.org)> wrote:

## **An Open Letter to the Chiefs for Change**

By **Rick Hess** on February 27, 2012 9:14 AM

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick\\_hess\\_straight\\_up/2012/02/an\\_open\\_letter\\_to\\_the\\_chiefs\\_for\\_change](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/rick_hess_straight_up/2012/02/an_open_letter_to_the_chiefs_for_change)

Hi All,

You know I dig you, and that I've long regarded many of you as friends, mentors, kindred spirits, and inspirations. But, right now, I'm feeling compelled to add a new tag: enablers.

We just recently watched the end of round one of the ludicrous "waiver" spectacle. The Obama administration took the modest authority to waive provisions of NCLB into a license to require that states adopt a raft of preferred measures, or else label most of their schools as failing.

Of course, the administration had presented it very differently. Last fall, the Secretary of Education made grand promises that he'd be offering broad flexibility. Many of you leapt at that offer. ED's staff lived up to little or none of what was promised. Instead, you encountered Duncan subordinates who either ignored or reneged upon the expansive promises. Whether Duncan was insincere, unaware of what his subordinates were doing, or folded under pressure from Washington's NCLB hardliners is unclear. What is clear is that you guys slogged through months of bureaucracy, had your proposals evaluated by judges who reached bizarre verdicts, and contorted yourselves in

in return for little real flexibility. And I know that several of you found the moving-the-goalposts nature of this infuriating.

Yet, while some (and your deputies, staff, and allies) have privately shared concerns, you've said not a word in public. Instead, you've issued cheerful press releases, praised the President and Secretary, and just been happy to see some of the more destructive elements of NCLB. In so doing, you undercut efforts to point out the problems with what's happening.

Indeed, when critics raise questions about the erratic process, federal micromanagement, or problematic demands around subgroups or turnarounds, the administration just shrugs and tells reporters, "I don't know what these carpers are talking about; just go re-read the nice things that [Republican chief or governor X] said about us."

Unless and until you publicly share your concerns about the Department's overreaching and micromanagement, efforts of us arguing for a Department more respectful of state-level leadership are going to be ineffective. Absent your voices, those of us raising concerns are a Greek chorus flanking an empty stage, and readily dismissed by ED as confused and misinformed.

Look, I like Secretary Duncan. I know his intentions are good and he's only doing what he's doing because "it's the kids." But his [Common Core-induced attack](#) last week on South Carolina suggests that he badly needs to be reminded of the nature and limits of his proper role. (See my new book [Carrots, Sticks, and the Bully Pulpit](#) for more careful examination of what the feds do and don't do well.) Indeed, Duncan's outburst evidenced either intellectual dishonesty or a worrisome lack of awareness regarding how ED's efforts are unfolding. Duncan insists "The idea that the Common Core standards are nationally-imposed is a conspiracy theory in search of a conspirator. The Common Core academic standards were both developed and adopted by the states." Uh, hold on here.

The Common Core has been aggressively supported by this administration. Whether one thinks that makes the exercise "nationally-imposed" is mostly a matter of semantics. Prominent Common Core proponents have been on Duncan's team, literally for years, that its ham-handed tactics were doing more harm than good. It's ludicrous for Duncan to pretend otherwise. Race to the Top, the administration's "ESEA blueprint," and the waivers all rewarded adoption of Common Core, while RTT included \$330 million to develop Common Core assessments--funds that, with a little concern for the niceties of statutory prohibitions, are helping to develop curricular and instructional "materials."

Three takeaways: First, given the likelihood that this administration will have five more years to run, but may never reclaim unified control of Congress, there will be increasing temptations for the administration to bypass Congress and rule by fiat. The prospect of an endless series of state's petitioning to amend their waiver and RTT plans means we're already closer to this state of affairs than I'd have thought possible a year ago. This is bad for democratic government; for education policy; and for students, teachers, and schools.

Second, take care not to challenge administration priorities (especially if you're a GOP governor) or Mr. Duncan or make his displeasure known. Duncan responded to the possibility that South Carolina might back away from the Common Core by declaring, "South Carolina lowered the bar for proficiency in English and mathematics faster than any state in the country from 2005 to 2009...That's not good for children, parents, or teachers." Quick question: if it is all a state-led enterprise, why is the Secretary inserting himself into a state's internal deliberations, hurling in and making vague, threatening allusions?

Reminds me of Duncan's comments when Texas Governor Rick Perry, a critic of RTT and the Common Core, was about to enter the GOP Presidential contest last summer. Duncan felt compelled [to tell Bloomberg TV](#) that "far too few of [Texas's] high school graduates are actually prepared to go on to college" and "I feel very, very badly for the children there." It fell to Texas Commissioner Robert Scott [to point out](#) that Duncan had misrepresented the data in offering his comments.

Third, let's be fair: this Department is not the first to be guilty of such attempted browbeating. I recall the press and vicious remarks that the Bush Department of Ed directed against public officials in Utah and Connecticut--mostly less terming them racists--when those states were looking to opt out of NCLB. If I were a state official, this bipartisan trend would only boost my concern about Duncan and his team going unchecked and unchallenged.

It's time to stop enabling dubious behavior and to step up. How about it?

