Some folks in positions of educational import are shading the truth, big time. How do I know this?

Because I'm hearing two very different things that can't be reconciled. From state chiefs, I'm hearing complaints about overweening federal bureaucrats who push waivers and Common Core implementation with no regard for workability. And now they are boiling about the whiplash caused by the Gates Foundation's decision to endorse a two-year moratorium on using Common Core tests for teacher evaluation, pushing back the timelines that federal officials have so aggressively put forward. Full stop.

But, when I talk to friends at the U.S. Department of Education, Gates, or other major foundations, they tell me I'm crazy. They tell me that no serious state chief is complaining. They tell me that state chiefs are enthusiastic about waivers and appreciate the suggestions, sense of urgency, and political cover that's been provided.

There are really only three possibilities. One is that the state chiefs are BS'ing me. A second is that federal and foundation officials are. And a third is that the state chiefs are BS'ing folks at ED and the foundations.

I have an Occam's razor-style trick for cases like this. It dates to my days as a classroom teacher: I always assume that people lie to the most important person in a given situation, in order to curry favor. In this case, I'm just an egghead who writes stuff—I'm clearly the least important person. Nobody has much incentive to make up complaints for my sake.

Second, I don't think that the federal or foundation officials are lying to me. The folks I'm talking to are off the record and they've already mostly concluded that I'm unhelpful on the whole Race to the Top/ESEA waivers/Common Core deal. (Now, I do suspect that part of the problem is that these officials are hearing what they want to hear, but that's a problem for another day.)

This brings us to the third possibility, and to a suspicion I've harbored since 2009, which is that state chiefs are lying when talking to the feds and to foundations. They're biting their tongues when it comes to sharing their frustrations, concerns, and headaches. This is the only reason I can think of why Gates could triumphantly issue its call for a two-year hiatus, seemingly unaware that it risked big headaches for ardent Common Core champions in states like New York, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Delaware. The Gates folks apparently thought the grand call for a national moratorium would be helpful and widely welcomed—and I know they reached out to a bunch of people on this—which seems to suggest there's a problem with the information they're getting.

Why would state chiefs not offer the straight scoop? Based on lots and lots of conversations, I think it's because they want to be seen as good actors. They want to keep being invited to the inner sanctum. They want to be on the good side of ED's now uber-powerful junior staff when it comes to waivers (otherwise, they risk the Washington State treatment—losing their waiver for violating a requirement that vanishes a few weeks later). State chiefs want foundation love and foundation dollars. They want to be seen as team players and good guys by the Secretary of Education. They want to be "no excuses" leaders.

This is all understandable. But I'm more than a little afraid it's brought us to a place where federal officials and major foundations are making major decisions based on bad information, and where too many leaders find that it makes more sense to go along than to try to shout against the wind. So perhaps "lying" is too strong a word. Maybe the state chiefs are just telling important people what they want to hear, even if it's not entirely true. Whatever label you stick on it, though, I think that it's a major problem with serious ramifications. And one that doesn't appear likely to get better any time soon.