



## Dueling moral imperatives on education

By Howard Rich  
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Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal has been working hard to raise achievement levels for students in his state by expanding choices in the academic marketplace.

"The moral imperative to improve education is more than an economic one," Jindal said in promoting his choice initiatives last spring. "The moral imperative to improve education goes to the heart of the American Dream. We have a chance to shape the kind of future we leave behind for our children and grandchildren. I believe like every generation before us, we have an obligation to leave this state better than we found it."

Standing in Jindal's way? The U.S. Department of Justice - which filed a lawsuit last month seeking to block Louisiana's recently expanded choice program on the grounds it might increase "racial identifiability" at failing, government-run schools.

Jindal was livid.

"It's incredible to me that the Justice Department is trying to use the same rules that were designed to protect kids ... to help them go and get a better education (are now being used) to trap these kids in failing schools," he said.

Jindal is right - and rightfully indignant - but he shouldn't be surprised. In addition to choking off parental choices, a major push is underway in Washington, D.C. to dramatically expand the cost and scope of federal intervention in an education marketplace already dominated by sub-par government-run schools.

The modern federal education experiment - which has its roots in Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" of the 1960s - continues its costly expansion today with Common Core, an effort by the Obama administration to force a dumbed-down, agenda-driven curriculum on local schools.

"Federal expenditures for K-12 education have soared from \$12.5 billion in 1965 to \$72.8 billion in 2008, measured in constant 2008 dollars," The Cato Institute's landmark 2009 study Downsizing Government revealed.

That's an astonishing 482% increase - after accounting for inflation.

What has this massive escalation of federal intervention accomplished? According to annual data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), math scores rose by just two points (or 0.66 percent) from 1973-2008, while reading scores rose by only one point (or 0.35 percent) from 1971-2008.

Meanwhile high school graduation rates have remained stagnant dating back to the mid-1970s.

The government's own reports affirm this chronic failure.

"America's education system fails our nation and too many of our children," a recent Congressionally mandated report concluded, adding that "too many U.S. students - the future labor force - are not competitive with students across the developed world."

The report also acknowledges that despite decades of increasingly costly government intervention, "no other developed nation has inequities nearly as deep or systemic" as the United States.

Sadly, the "solutions" recommended by this report come straight from the educrat union playbook - including higher salaries for government-run school employees, more "training" for teachers and unprecedented federal intervention in the classroom. The report also recommends another dramatic escalation of the government's demonstrably failed early childhood initiatives.

But more government investment and federal control aren't the only things being pushed by Washington radicals – apparently the left has its own "moral imperative." This view was lent blunt expression recently by Slate editor Allison Benedikt, who concluded "you are a bad person if you send your children to private school."

"If every single parent sent every single child to public school, public schools would improve," Benedikt wrote.

"This would not happen immediately. It could take generations. Your children and grandchildren might get mediocre educations in the meantime, but it will be worth it, for the eventual common good."

The "eventual, common good?" Sounds like a prelude to nationalized education. And while the government's report stopped short of such nonsensical statements, it did call for Americans to "muster the collective will to ensure that every child in America is prepared to participate fully in our civic and economic life."

America does need to muster the collective will - to end the federal government's failed education experiment and unleash the power of the American marketplace on our underperforming system.