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## The Education Department's 82% Failure Rate

Posted 03/10/2011 06:47 PM ET

**Government:** Education Secretary Arne Duncan blames — you guessed it — George W. Bush for the steep decline of public schools. How much failure does it take for politicians to recognize government as the problem?

It was shock time at the House Education and Workforce Committee on Wednesday. The U.S. Department of Education unveiled an almost unbelievable number regarding the breakdown of the public school system: By next year, some 82% of all U.S. public schools could be failing.

Secretary Duncan, in warning the panel, actually echoed longtime criticisms of federal education policy.

"By mandating and prescribing one-size-fits-all solutions," Duncan charged, the Bush administration's bipartisan No Child Left Behind law "took away the ability of local and state educators to tailor solutions to the unique needs of their students."

President Obama's purported answer is a political no-brainer: cut the locals some slack from federal rules.

But what Duncan actually proposes has been described as "a single national assessment system" by critics like University of Arkansas professor of education reform Sandra Stotsky, who was a longtime commissioner in the Massachusetts public school system.

A year and a half ago, Duncan was telling the National Press Club that the various state educational benchmarks amounted to "a race to the bottom" because "we have 50 different standards, 50 different goal posts."

Duncan said then that "when a child is 'meeting the state standard' they are in fact barely able to graduate from high school. And they are absolutely inadequately prepared to go to a competitive university, let alone graduate. And so we have to stop lying to children."

So we wonder: What's really needed — more Washington "one-size-fits-all solutions," or "the ability of local and state educators to tailor solutions to the unique needs of their students"?

"Feds in the Classroom" author Neal McCluskey calls the great concordat between George W. Bush and the late Ted Kennedy that is No Child Left Behind "the largest federal encroachment in education in American history," through which "the federal government can dictate what will be taught, when, and by whom, to most of the 15,000 public school districts and 47 million public school children."

When President Bush and other Republicans decided to embrace an initiative that was going

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03/11/2011 10:00:20 AM ET

## Investing Tip

to strengthen the public school teachers unions' stranglehold on public education, they should have known that they would never get credit for tough standards.

They would never conquer what Bush memorably called "the soft bigotry of low expectations" at the heart of liberal Democratic education policy.

Ultimately, they would only end up being accused of not spending enough money.

Far from forcing state and local educational bureaucracies to shape up, No Child Left Behind has encouraged political games.

"With only about 37% of schools identified as failing last year, the leap to 82% certainly does seem improbable," McCluskey said of Duncan's warnings in a blog post for the Cato Institute on Wednesday.

"But quietly evading the spirit of NCLB — actually improving educational outcomes — some states backloaded their improvement goals to very late in the full-proficiency game, betting NCLB would be gutted by 2014 and they'd never be held accountable."

This isn't giving American children what they need: a vibrant system of schools competing with one another toward excellence, and meeting the demands of its clients — parents.

That will only come with the demise of the U.S. Education Department, which is basically just a glorified grant provider to state and local governments.

Federal meddling in public schools has snowballed since the 1960s, with mass failure and test-score stagnancy the undeniable result.

Washington has been wearing its dunce cap for decades. It should long ago have been sent to the corner.

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Posted By: [Trader Mike\(50\)](#) on 3/11/2011 | 7:32 AM ET

Dept of Education is another failed jimmy carter program that belongs on the trash heap of incompetent history.

Posted By: [derekcrane\(195\)](#) on 3/11/2011 | 5:17 AM ET

There are certain things that we can all agree are necessary for a person to be described as "educated."How they become educated is a different problem.It is here that the"one size fits all" doctrine fails.It is irrelevant how a student becomes educated-home, public school, charter, private-so long as they meet certain standards, as determined by national assessment tests.The Dept. of Educ. has failed in improving student achievement and should concentrate only on evaluating

Posted By: [dwdrury\(3495\)](#) on 3/11/2011 | 3:28 AM ET

Once upon a time there was no federal money sloshing around schools. They were judged by how well kids did on their SAT or ACT scores. Fed money yields Fed rules and bureaucracy, and the standards got lost in the gold rush. Best solution: Abolish the Dept. of Education, and its huge money pit, lower Fed taxes and let state and locals figure out how to meet the desired college admissions testing requirements.

Posted By: [nincompoo\(100\)](#) on 3/10/2011 | 10:54 PM ET

Do we really need the Department of Education? Why not abolish it together with TENURE. Both are debilitating to public education. Why do private schools excel most of the time over public schools? Because of government interference?

Posted By: [DHBarr\(245\)](#) on 3/10/2011 | 10:31 PM ET

In the deep recesses of the Dept of Education, "No Child Left Behind" is called by another name - "No Child Gets Ahead". Now we see the ultimate result of the federalization of the education system - failure. Yes, we do need to put education back under local government control, and the simplest way to do that is to abolish the Dept of Education altogether for a saving of some \$75 Billion a year.

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