



Ideas Changing the World

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Education Issues

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Feds Should Flunk Out of Education

The latest federal test results for 12th graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show stagnation in reading, and for all practical purposes nothing in math, says Neal McCluskey, the associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

To be fair, there are lots of NAEP tests, but the long-term test that has tracked mathematic achievement consistently since the early 1970s confirms the big point: There's been essentially no change in high school math achievement for nearly the last four decades.

It hasn't been for a lack of spending or legislating, says McCluskey.

- According to the federal Digest of Education Statistics, in 1970 Washington spent an inflation-adjusted \$32 billion on elementary and secondary education.
- In 2009, the feds blew an estimated \$83 billion -- about a 160 percent increase.
- On a per-pupil basis, the Digest reports an inflation-adjusted rise from \$435 in 1970 to \$1,015 in 2006 (the latest year with per-pupil data).
- Washington has also increasingly demanded more standards, testing and "accountability" under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), but high school reading results were slightly higher before NCLB and the long-term trend shows math achievement a bit higher before the law.

Why does Washington fail?

- In part because actual educational success hasn't mattered that much.
- On the assumption that it would translate into better results, well-intentioned voters have generally supported politicians who have promised to spend more money and make schools "accountable."
- The problem is that politicians say lots of things, and when politicians spend money it's often not to get better education, but to curry favor with teacher unions, administrator associations or other special interests.

Source: Neal McCluskey, "Feds Should Flunk Out of Education," Orange County Register, November 23, 2010.

For text:

http://articles.ocregister.com/2010-11-23/news/24944523_1_high-school-reading-results-naep-scores-nation-s-report-card

For more on Education Issues:

http://www.ncpa.org/sub/dpd/index.php?Article_Category=27