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Students Differ, and So Should Schools

By Neal McCluskey – 12/10/12

As proponents pushed national curriculum standards – the Common Core – a few years ago, one of the arguments they employed was that it just doesn't make sense to have 50 state standards instead of one national set. What they never adequately explained is why that is, probably because there is no compelling reason that national should be superior. Indeed, reality demands a move in the opposite direction.

The assumption behind national standardization is that all students, regardless of state residence, should be able to do the same things at the same time. That ignores basic reality: states have different populations and challenges. Some are industrial, others rural. Some have large immigrant populations, others don't. Some start with high average incomes, others low. Having different state standards allows better tailoring to people's actual needs than nationalization.

The key to reform, however, goes much deeper than national-versus-state. If you've ever met more than one child you know that all children are different. That means we need a system built to meet diverse, individual needs – the opposite of standardization. It means a system of educational freedom, in which money is attached to children and educators have the autonomy to establish schools with different curricular specialties, rules and objectives. Such a system would maximize the ability of unique kids – real kids – to be matched with schools focused on their specific needs, abilities and desires.

There are numerous other reasons to oppose federal control of education – and the funding that enables it: it has proven horribly expensive and ineffective; it mainly serves special interests employed by the funds; and it is well outside the specific, enumerated powers which are the only ones the Constitution grants the federal government. From an educational and human standpoint, however, one

argument is supreme: All kids are unique. It only makes sense to treat them that way.