

Source: [Legal](#) > / . . . / > [News, Most Recent 60 Days \(English, Full Text\)](#) Terms: [cato institute](#) ([Edit Search](#) | [Suggest Terms for My Search](#)) Select for FOCUS™ or Delivery*Schools push for national standards Wyoming Tribune-Eagle (Cheyenne) July 12, 2009 Sunday*Copyright 2009 Cheyenne Newspapers, Inc.  
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Wyoming Tribune-Eagle (Cheyenne)

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**SECTION:** LOCAL NEWS; Main; Pg. a1**LENGTH:** 677 words**HEADLINE:** Schools push for national standards**BYLINE:** Becky Orr**BODY:**

By Becky Orr

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CHEYENNE - Should students from Wyoming learn the same facts about geometry as Alabama students?

The question is at the heart of a debate about whether to move to national academic standards.

States now set their own standards. The standards spell out what students should learn. American students learn at different rates, depending on where they live.

A student could fail a subject in a state with higher standards but pass the subject in a state with fewer requirements.

The federal government cannot force states to adopt national standards. But U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan wants to get rid of the patchwork of different standards.

He pledged to spend up to \$350 million to help states set national standards in reading and math.

Wyoming and 45 states have agreed to develop common K-12 standards in language arts and math.

The National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are heading the voluntary effort.

"I don't have any problem with it as long as Wyoming doesn't have to water down (its) standards," said Jim McBride, Wyoming's superintendent of public instruction.

McBride said he does not object to national standards for basic skills in reading and math. But the process gets more complicated at higher grade levels, he said.

The use of a national exam to test students on national standards is years away, he said. In Wyoming, students will continue to take the standardized test called Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students.

State Department of Education officials are reviewing Wyoming's academic standards over the next five years. The work will continue even as efforts move forward for national standards, McBride said.

Kathryn Valido, president of the Wyoming Education Association, said the state's teachers union and the National Education Association support voluntary national standards developed by professionals in education.

Such standards could make it easier to accurately compare achievement among different states, she said.

Teachers should be involved in coming up with standards, she said. "I don't think it will change how teachers will do their jobs."

Leaders in states and local school districts still would choose the curriculum.

Four states - Alaska, South Carolina, Missouri and Texas - have refused to participate in setting national standards.

Texas education officials have complained about costs of developing such new standards. They also don't want to surrender local authority.

The nonprofit **Cato Institute's** Neil McCluskey fears the national effort will keep academic standards low. The private institute researches different issues.

Teachers, administrators and bureaucrats want to keep the lowest standards possible, he said. "National standards would eliminate what little competition exists now."

The federal government also would gain more control, he said.

"In the end, there is zero reason to believe that national standards will be any better than local or state (standards)," McCluskey said.

The federal No Child Left Behind Act requires that students in grades 3-8 and 11 be proficient (at grade level) in math, reading and writing by 2014. The same law allows each state to decide what it means to be proficient.

Laramie County School District 1 Superintendent Ted Adams supports voluntary national standards. The federal government does not have expertise or authority to develop them, however, he said.

Some states set standards very low so they can meet requirements of No Child Left Behind, while others set standards higher, he said.

Results of the National Assessment for Educational Progress test in 2005 showed that 47 percent of Wyoming's fourth-graders scored at grade level in reading on the state test, and 34 percent scored at grade level on the NAEP.

In Alabama, by contrast, 83 percent of fourth-graders scored proficient on the state test. But only 22 percent did so on NAEP.

"We've got to get ourselves with the same set of national standards. It is very important work. It is going to be very difficult to do," Adams said.

**GRAPHIC:** Goins Elementary fifth-grader Jessi Olson takes the online reading portion of the PAWS statewide standardized test in 2007. Larry Brinlee/staff

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