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THE 3-MINUTE INTERVIEW - Neal McCluskey

By: [Keith St. Clair](#)
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Newly created national standards for math and reading are about to become the norm in American classrooms, and many people are saying they're superior to current state standards. McCluskey, associate director of Cato's Center for Educational Freedom, doesn't believe the hype.

So what's your hang-up?

The standards that have been put forth might end up being better than what some states have, but people forget that they'll be subject to the same political forces that caused the current state standards to be dumbed down. We've seen over and over again that when standards are hard to meet, rather than pushing kids over the high bar, they lower the bar. There's no reason to believe that the forces that have done that at the local level won't do it at the national level.

What forces?

Ordinarily, they're the people employed by the public school system -- the teachers unions, administrative associations, people whose livelihoods are invested in the system.

Could anything stop the dumbing down?

No. As long as the government is creating the standards, and attaching money to the adoption of the standards, they will be dumbed down. People will be told that these standards are good, and you should adopt them, but no one pays attention to the political system and what it will do to them in time.

Anything you do like that's going on in public education?

Because I define public education as more than traditional public schools, but as public access to quality education, there is good news. School choice is continuing to grow -- there are more voucher programs, more tax credit programs, and more kids in more charter schools than we had 10 years ago, much less 20 years ago when we didn't have any of those things. Parents and taxpayers are demanding, more and more, that parents have choice in their children's education. That's a positive development.

-- Leah Fabel

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