

CAROLINA JOURNAL ONLINE



- [News and Opinion](#)
- [Research](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [Related Sites](#)
- [Carolina Journal Info](#)

John Hood's Daily Journal

Put NC To The Test

By [John Hood](#)



April 15, 2010

RALEIGH – North Carolina education officials are currently considering sweeping proposals to revamp the state's testing and accountability system, including a meaningful assessment of high-school attainment. The Raleigh *News & Observer* [reports](#) that the state board of education is aiming for the 2013-14 school year as a target for getting all or most of the new standards in place.

As state officials work their way through the process, they ought to keep several things in mind.

First, whatever system they adopt will be valuable only to the extent that it is credible. Whatever else one might say about North Carolina's accountability system for public schools, it is undeniably true that North Carolinians have good reason not to take it seriously. The list of past mistakes, mischaracterizations, and misjudgments is a long one.

Second, the purpose of a testing and accountability system is to arm parents, educators, reformers, and public officials with the information they need to make good choices. It should not be an exercise in public relations, budgetary gamesmanship, or interest-group politics.

Finally, while it is certainly true that many North Carolina students will end up studying, working, or living in other parts of the country, so that our academic standards ought not to be so idiosyncratic as to limit their horizons, there's no need for us to embrace a federal role in setting standards. As Neal McCluskey wrote in [a recent study for the Cato Institute](#), the case for national curriculum standards is far shakier than its proponents routinely assert.

Some countries that routinely outperform America in student achievement have clear, mandatory national standards. But other high-performing countries have a more decentralized system, more in keeping with our own. That makes it harder to justify the tremendous costs, financial and otherwise, likely to be associated with attempts to adopt a national curriculum:

Potential powerful interest groups must be overcome. Crippling conflicts between different religious, ethnic, and ideological factions must be avoided. And a culture that is generally averse to an intense focus on academics must be transformed.

For all these reasons and more, North Carolina ought to adopt new testing and curriculum standards that set a higher academic bar, preserve the independence and credibility of the test, make as much information available as rapidly as possible to the general public, and give both reformers and policymakers the outcome data they need to make good decisions. I've long thought that the best choice would be for North Carolina to use an off-the-shelf test from an [independent national](#)












[testing company](#).

At the same time, it's important to keep one's expectations realistic. Setting high, credible academic standards is only one element of a real school-reform agenda. North Carolina also needs to abolish teacher tenure, implement real [merit pay](#), expand [parental choice](#), and abandon the "progressive education" fads that have [decimated the reading and math skills of generations of young people](#).

Easier said than done, I know.

Hood is president of the John Locke Foundation.

 **SHARE THIS**

-  [Delicious](#)
-  [Digg](#)
-  [Facebook](#)
-  [Furl](#)
-  [Google](#)
-  [Newsvine](#)
-  [Propeller](#)
-  [Reddit](#)
-  [StumbleUpon](#)
-  [Technorati](#)
-  [Yahoo](#)



PRINT THIS PAGE



EMAIL THIS PAGE

©2010 [John Locke Foundation](#), 200 West Morgan St., Raleigh, NC 27601, Voice: (919) 828-3876



[DesignHammer](#), a Raleigh, Durham web design company ~ Building Smarter websites