

Cato Institute Study Finds Weak Case for Common Standards

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on February 17, 2010 9:56 AM | [1 Comment](#) | [No TrackBacks](#)

Forty-eight states have signed on to support the development of common academic standards. But they may be supporting something that doesn't have much evidence of effectiveness in improving learning, according to a new paper from a think tank here in Washington.

In a policy analysis released today, Neal McCluskey, the associate director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the [Cato Institute](#), argues that the case for a set of standards shared by all states is empirically weak. In "[Behind the Curtain: Assessing the Case for National Curriculum Standards](#)," he argues that expanding educational choice is a more effective way to improve schools, and he touches on some of the arguments and research that support that view.

(McCluskey uses the term "national standards" to refer to the current initiative to develop standards shared by all states. Well aware that previous movements to develop national standards have met with resistance from those who oppose a strong federal role in education, organizers of the [current initiative](#) call them "common standards," and point out that they are being shaped by the states, not the federal government.)

In his paper, McCluskey analyzes the research base for national standards and finds it weak. He points out—as did my colleague Sean Cavanagh in his [overview of the standards debate](#) for our special issue of *Quality Counts* this year—that while some countries with national standards perform better than the United States does, and some don't.

McCluskey argues the case against national standards in [this article](#) from last year, as well, as does Cato colleague Andrew J. Coulson in [this one](#).

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, which are organizing the common standards movement, explore the case for such standards in their [Joint International Benchmarking Report](#). You might also want to take a look at a cluster of interesting commentaries on various sides of the common-standards issue in our [Quality Counts](#) report.

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