

Federalism in education



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Education has always been highly valued by Americans; for it is believed to be a primary means for creating a healthier society, a tool to end poverty and disease, or a battleground in a culture war. Historically, the educational system has been a decentralized one, with influence and financing focused in the local school district. The system of governance, however, is a federal one, with the involvement of all three levels of government in education.

Queries about the connections among the levels of government have become progressively significant as both the State and Federal roles in education have increased and the ascendancy of education has become more and more centralized. The degree to which control has transferred from the local level is evident in numerous courts cases such as the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* and 1962 *Engel v. Vitale*. During the same time some activists were demanding decentralization of large-city school districts in hopes of dominance; other observers were beginning to question the vitality and significance of local school boards.

William Bennett and Rod Paige recommended a national school test to respond to fears of the country's weak education system. The belief is that national standards, testing, and increased school accountability will address these concerns. Under The No Child Left Behind Act, passed in 2002, states create their own statewide tests and methods of accountability. No Child Left Behind allows states to set their own standards for measuring student achievement. With a national test, there would be more consistent standards throughout the country and states will have to improve evaluations and teaching to meet the national standard.

The American education system remains in a state of crisis. Each year, the United States spends more than \$550 billion on K-12 public schools. A student attending public school in 2008 can expect taxpayers to spend an average of \$9,266 on his or her behalf. Millions of American students continue to pass through the nation's public schools without receiving a quality education. In many of the nation's largest cities, high school graduation rates are below 50 percent. The widespread failure in America's public schools imposes great personal and societal costs.

This widespread failure may imperil our nation's prosperity and security. Federal and state policymakers must recognize this persistent crisis and implement policies that will lead to an education reform. Federal government involvement in education policy is inexorable as education continues to be at the vanguard of national issues due to the United States' decreasing global standing. From the last 50 years government's role in education has constantly expanded; threatening the stability of power in terms of education.

Many people believe the most significant and far reaching endeavor was The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The NCLB was an aggressive and elaborate attempt by the federal government to progress American education. However, the NCLB has gradually become ineffective in its one size fits all approach. Recently, the purposed National School Test is said to be the solution to the nation's educational crisis. They believe the need to maintain an academic advantage over international peers requires the federal government to set national standards for education and actively enforce them.

The National School Test is a bold approach for the Federal Government to assist in furthering the nation's educational program. It risks causing conflict of power between that of the States and Federal government in its goal for ascendancy. Traditionally, education has been handled almost exclusively by state and local governments. This tradition stemmed from the widespread comprehension that education was a family and kinship endeavor, not a government program. The National School Test coerces the States to change their approach in increasing the proficiency of students in order to obtain federal benefits.