



snapshot

International Lessons About National Standards



Should the United States embrace national academic standards for its schools? The present alternative isn't working very well in most states and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute has concluded that solid national standards (and tests) would be a better option for 21st Century America.

Today, 47 states are participating in the "Common Core" State Standards Initiative in reading/writing and math, and Education Secretary Arne Duncan has pledged hundreds of millions of dollars in stimulus funds to help develop common tests. Yet innumerable questions and pitfalls remain.

The newest Fordham study looks beyond our borders for examples and guidance. How have other countries navigated these tempestuous waters? What do their systems look like? How did they get there?

Michigan State University Distinguished Professor William Schmidt and his team examined national standards and testing in **Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, the Netherlands, Russia, Singapore** and **South Korea**. Here are a few of the lessons they gleaned:

1. It's **not true** that national standards portend loss of local control.
2. An independent, quasi-governmental institution is needed to oversee the **development and implementation** of national standards and tests.
3. Washington should **encourage** the standards-setting process but shouldn't meddle inappropriately.
4. We ought first to develop **coherent, focused, rigorous** standards for English, math and science.



Considering these insights, the "Common Core" State Standards Initiative is off to a promising start but doesn't come close to completing the job. There's no durable organizational structure. Other countries have learned that something this important can't be sustained over time in ad hoc fashion. America needs a major act of organizational creativity — akin to inventing the Federal Reserve, National Academy of Sciences or National Assessment Governing Board.

We hope this report — and its lessons gleaned from around the world — will shed light and help move the process toward success.

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