

Who's best for overseeing the schools?

By Tribune News Service, adapted by Newsela staff

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LOCAL GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BE IN CONTROL OF SCHOOLS

The U.S. Department of Education began 36 years ago. Its purpose was to make guidelines for education in the United States. It also collects information on schools and makes sure they treat all students equally. Its supporters promised the department would save the country money. They also said students would do much better in school. Instead, the government has spent much more money, and students are doing about the same.

Clearly, politicians do not know best. It is time for the government to stay out of America's schools. Parents and their local school boards should be back in charge.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is the oldest test given to all students in America. The results are known as the Nation's Report Card.

Results in both math and reading are reported on a scale of zero to 500. Students who score 300 or above can solve somewhat difficult math problems and read somewhat difficult books.

Many 17-year-olds are in their last year of high school. They have gotten only slightly better in math. In 1978, about half of students scored 300 or above. In 2012, about 6 out of 10 students scored 300 or above.

Reading scores remained the same. Just 4 out of 10 students scored 300 or above in both 1971 and 2012.

. . . . [When the Department of Education first began we] were promised that everyone would be able to read by 1984. We were promised that 9 out of 10 students would graduate from high school by the year 2000. We were promised that American students would be leaders in math and science. None of this has happened.

Lawmakers have not learned from these broken promises. Instead, they give us programs that do not work and cost too much.

It is time to shut down the Department of Education and put parents and local officials back in charge. They are the real experts.

In most states, parents are choosing their children's schools.

When parents have more choices, both students and schools do better. Students do better at a lower cost. Schools have to compete for students and money so they improve.

We need to put the real experts — parents and their local elected officials — back in charge of education. Until we do, we can expect education that promises too much and does too little.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD BE IN CONTROL OF SCHOOLS

The government should be more involved in schools. It should not leave education only up to local school boards.

Across the country, schools are not equal. There are wealthy schools and poor schools, good schools and bad schools. In some schools, all students are treated equally, and in others, they are not. Local school boards simply are not up to dealing with all these problems

California, for example, is one of the richest states in our nation. You would never know it from its schools.

Half of California's 6 million public school children are poor. Many students come to school just for a hot meal.

Over half a million of these children are homeless. A total of 8 out of 10 have parents that work but do not make enough to support their children.

Nearly 1 in 4 of California's students was born in a different country, and English is not the first language. One in 10 has a learning disability. They may have trouble learning how to read or do math.

These kids need a lot of help, and the state simply will not pay. Of all the states, California spends among the least on every student. Last year, the American government gave \$7 billion to education in California. The state needed this money just to keep the schools open.

Yet, the government provides more than just money.

. . . . School boards all have different standards. They tell their schools they must teach different thing One local board may decide that its students will not be taught about global warming. Meanwhile another teaches it.

Even more important, the government makes sure that schools are fair. The government protects the rights of all students no matter where they live.

. . . . In 2001, Congress passed a law called the No Child Left Behind Act. It says schools must test students in reading and math. It makes sure schools are doing a good job and teaching students what they need to learn.

The idea makes good sense. If we want to improve education, schools must make sure each and every student does well. We need a national department to help us keep on track.

Local governments are important, too Local governments can lead the way in making schools better.

Hopefully, we can work together to build excellent schools. All children should have an equal chance to succeed.

Education is about our kids. If the American government stays out of it, our kids will suffer.