States set school standards

It is true that the federal government does periodically administer an examination to students in all states known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Even though No Child requires all states to participate in the assessment, it examines only a sample of students in each state, and there are no policy consequences or financial sanctions attached to the results. The bar for proficiency that matters for the National Assessment is something that varies from state to state.

Perhaps the nation will someday adopt a type of national curriculum with a single national test. That sort of unified system is a common practice in other countries, many of which we consider to be our closest educational and economic rivals. For now, the United States continues to cling to its traditions of allowing states and local governments to determine what American students learn and how well they need to learn it. No Child Left Behind has done nothing to change that.

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