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opinion

## Nation's students not on same page

**Rigorous national standards for math and reading would give parents, educators and policy makers an important yardstick.**

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Declining nationwide math scores again underscore the the need, we think, for national standards in reading and math.

Such an effort is under way, with 46 states voluntarily banding together to decide what students in each grade ought to know.

It's important for states to get honest about where their students really are, academically, and to stop relying on state-developed assessment tests that too often seem designed to show high passage rates.

That need became more clear this week with the release of results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The test, taken earlier this year by 330,000 students, showed that fewer than four in 10 eighth-graders and fourth-graders nationally are proficient in math. Colorado scored better, with proficiency levels at

40 percent for eight-graders and 45 percent for fourth-graders.

Colorado is one of the states involved in the development of national standards.

A rigorous national standard would give parents, educators and policy makers an objective yardstick for educational progress.

Think about it: If you see that your state ranks low in achievement but high in per-student funding, you might be inclined to ask why and demand better. To be clear, such standards would not be a mandate, and they would not require states to teach the same way. For instance, it wouldn't matter if a state used phonics or whole word recognition to teach reading, so long as students could read at grade level.

It's a good step away from what we think was an unintended effect of No Child Left Behind, the Bush-era effort to improve education through sanctions for non-compliance. States were allowed to choose their own standards and many, fearing punishment, dumbed down their assessment tests.

A national standard of achievement could be indexed against other countries in the world, an increasingly important measure. We need to prepare young people for a world in which they not only compete against each other, but in a global economy.

"The goal obviously is to raise the bar for