The main effect “of the drive for so-called higher standards in schools is that the children are too busy to think,” said John Holt in 1959. Today, an ill-informed version of school reform has been embraced by politicians, corporate executives, and journalists, all demanding “accountability,” which turns out to be a euphemism for more control over what happens in classrooms by people who are not in classrooms. The results: superb educators get tired or fired, and the intellectual life is squeezed out of schools as they are turned into giant test-prep centers. Alfie Kohn, author of THE SCHOOLS OUR CHILDREN DESERVE, explains the difference between authentic challenge and a mindless “harder is better” mentality, as well as the difference between standards as guidelines for better teaching and standards as rigid (and often ridiculous) lists of facts students must know. The latter is described in this session not as a reality to be coped with but as a political movement that...
can be opposed — by people who understand how children actually learn.

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