

The United States' failure to educate its students leaves them unprepared to compete and threatens the country's ability to thrive in a global economy and maintain its leadership role, finds a new Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)–sponsored Independent Task Force report on U.S. Education Reform and National Security.

"Educational failure puts the United States' future economic prosperity, global position, and physical safety at risk," warns the Task Force, chaired by **Joel I. Klein**, former head of New York City public schools, and **Condoleezza Rice**, former U.S. secretary of state. The country "will not be able to keep pace—much less lead—globally unless it moves to fix the problems it has allowed to fester for too long," argues the Task Force.

The report notes that while the United States invests more in K-12 public education than many other developed countries, its students are ill prepared to compete with their global peers. According to the results of the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international assessment that measures the performance of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science every three years, U.S. students rank fourteenth in reading, twenty-fifth in math, and seventeenth in science compared to students in other industrialized countries.

Though there are many successful individual schools and promising reform efforts, the national statistics on educational outcomes are disheartening:

- More than 25 percent of students fail to graduate from high school in four years; for African-American and Hispanic students, this number is approaching 40 percent.
- In civics, only a quarter of U.S. students are proficient or better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- Although the United States is a nation of immigrants, roughly eight in ten Americans speak only English and a decreasing number of schools are teaching foreign languages.
- A recent report by ACT, the not-for-profit testing organization, found that only 22 percent of U.S. high school students met "college ready" standards in all of their core subjects; these figures are even lower for African-American and Hispanic students.
- The College Board reported that even among college-bound seniors, only 43 percent met college-ready standards, meaning that more college students need to take

remedial courses.

The lack of preparedness poses threats on five national security fronts: economic growth and competitiveness, physical safety, intellectual property, U.S. global awareness, and U.S. unity and cohesion, says the report. Too many young people are not employable in an increasingly high-skilled and global economy, and too many are not qualified to join the military because they are physically unfit, have criminal records, or have an inadequate level of education.

"Human capital will determine power in the current century, and the failure to produce that capital will undermine America's security," the report states. "Large, undereducated swaths of the population damage the ability of the United States to physically defend itself, protect its secure information, conduct diplomacy, and grow its economy."

The Task Force proposes three overarching policy recommendations:

- *Implement educational expectations and assessments in subjects vital to protecting national security.* "With the support of the federal government and industry partners, states should expand the Common Core State Standards, ensuring that students are mastering the skills and knowledge necessary to safeguard the country's national security."
- *Make structural changes to provide students with good choices.* "Enhanced choice and competition, in an environment of equitable resource allocation, will fuel the innovation necessary to transform results."
- *Launch a "national security readiness audit" to hold schools and policymakers accountable for results and to raise public awareness.* "There should be a coordinated, national effort to assess whether students are learning the skills and knowledge necessary to safeguard America's future security and prosperity. The results should be publicized to engage the American people in addressing problems and building on successes."

The Task Force includes thirty-one prominent education experts, national security authorities, and corporate leaders who reached consensus on a set of contentious issues. The report also includes a number of additional and dissenting views by Task Force members. The Task Force is directed by **Julia Levy**, an entrepreneur and former director of communications for the New York City Department of Education.

The Task Force believes that its message and recommendations "can reshape education in the United States and put this country on track to be an educational, economic, military, and diplomatic global leader."