



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on July 27, 2012

CFR Task Force Calls for Education Reform

It seems as if the American elite establishment has finally discovered that our public schools are doing a lousy job of educating American children and that a drastic overhauling of the system is needed. That's the conclusion of the Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force Report on U.S. Education Reform and National Security. Of course, I've been writing about the failures of American education for over 40 years, and national magazines have been publishing articles about the "dumbing down" of America and the decline of literacy skills for decades. But the elite wasn't listening.



Now, all of a sudden, they are listening, mainly because there has been a change in personnel at the CFR. The CFR has always been concerned with security issues, but now they've discovered that a strong security force requires a well-educated citizenry. The CFR's press release states:

"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.

Note that Joel Klein and Condoleezza Rice are neoconservatives who are not known for wandering too far from the establishment ranks. While the neo-liberal and neoconservative elite may recognize that the system has problems, their solutions always entail more government intervention. They provide a litany of what's wrong with the system: More than 25 percent of students fail to graduate from high school; for African-American and Hispanic students, this number is nearly 40 percent. In civics, only one-fourth of our students are proficient or better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. And eight in 10 Americans speak only English, and fewer schools are teaching foreign languages. The press release states:

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-



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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.”

That’s quite an indictment: a system that is literally destroying our future viability as a great and productive nation. But what are the recommendations of the task force? The usual: a partnership between the federal government and private industry and expansion of the Common Core State Standards. They also recommend structural changes “to provide students with good choices.” That probably means more public charter schools.

The task force also believes that there ought to be a “national security readiness audit” to hold the schools and policymakers accountable for results and to raise public awareness. The problem, of course, is the faceless, anonymous “policymakers” who have been making policy for our public schools since John Dewey set the progressives on their crusade to dumb down America and reduce literacy among Americans. The present policymakers are masters at pretending to initiate reform which is nothing more than a rehash of previous reform programs. And I doubt that the task force will be able to get the policy makers to do anything they really don’t want to do, and for several reasons: The policy makers have more public money than Midas, are trained liars, control many of the nation’s legislators through the National Education Association, and have an agenda from which they will, under no circumstances, deviate. The report states:

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.

Wasn’t the National Assessment of Educational Progress supposed to do all of that? Since no accountability has come out of that national test, does anyone think the policymakers are having sleepless nights because of some threatened “national effort to assess” their performance? The CFR’s call for education reform is nothing new. There have been many such calls for reform — No Child Left Behind is just one of the latest — and it too has been a failure.

Periodic calls for education reform have become a feel-good ritual that gives the public the impression that the so-called reformers really care about education. If they did, we would not have a situation in Highland Park, Michigan, in which the public schools are an academic and sanitary disaster relegating most of their students to dismal lives in the underclass. Those public schools are a disgrace to our nation, and nothing in the CFR’s reform efforts will change a thing.

Indeed, the Michigan PTA has launched its own criticism of the parents at Highland Park who, with the help of the ACLU, are suing the schools. The PTA contends that the schools cannot “be sued into success” because the suit will not improve education and will only serve as a distraction. According to Michigan PTA President Shaton Berry, the cause of the problem in Highland Park is lack of funds. She states in MLive:

“When the Legislature cuts funding for public education, this is the result: students who are years behind grade level in reading and mathematics and districts without the resources to provide adequate instruction or remediation.”



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Berry wrote that improvement in the schools will come from “adequate school funding, a commitment to attracting and retaining skilled educators, and a resurgence of parent and family engagement in Highland Park.”

Berry is the representative voice of the policymakers who will tell the nation: If you want reform, it will cost you billions of dollars. The billions they already have are never enough for clean bathrooms, good reading instruction, or a traditional curriculum that stresses grammar, history, geography, math, foreign language, science, art, and music. But give them billions more and you will see no improvement, because money is not the problem. The problem is an agenda based on an ideology that the critics are afraid to identify.

I’ve never heard a member of the establishment call John Dewey a socialist. Yet, that’s what he was. Nor do they ever call the progressives socialists. Yet that is what they are. Of course, they still quibble over the definition of socialism. In short, the system is based on lies and deception, and “policymakers” will take the money and use it for their own purposes.

By the way, according to the ACLU, the lawsuit against the Michigan state government is the first of its kind ever filed on behalf of a school district and the students’ “right to read.” Indeed, there was a “right to read” program during the Nixon administration which led to nowhere.

The CFR task force includes 31 prominent education and national security experts, plus corporate leaders who managed to reach a consensus on a host of contentious issues. The report also includes several dissenting views by some of the members.

One aspect of education that is always conspicuously missing from these secular reform proposals is any mention of the spiritual lives of the students. Since God has been evicted from the public schools, the idea that you can reform atheist schools to perform at the same level as schools with a strong spiritual foundation is ludicrous. That is why no one proposes reforming Catholic parochial schools. While the Catholic schools have been infiltrated with humanist values through teachers who’ve attended secular universities, their religious values are their *raison d’être*. Without God, no amount of education reform will be able to provide the students with the sense of spiritual purpose that gives life its ultimate meaning. The only thing the secular reformers can try to do is turn the kids into efficient, soulless robots. But believe it or not, they won’t even be able to do that.



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