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Invest in Education

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Invest in Education

JANUARY 14, 2013 BY [ANDY BRUNNER-BROWN](#) 0 COMMENTS

National security threats have often been viewed as potential attacks—often foreign—against the United States, as observed in the eight key issue threats established by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s national security threat list:

- Terrorism
- Espionage
- Proliferation
- Economic Espionage
- Targeting the National Information Infrastructure
- Targeting the U.S. Government
- Perception Management
- Foreign Intelligence Activities

More recently, however, national security threats are not just foreign and domestic enemies. Instead of identifiable enemies, new threats still stem from recently experienced and ongoing concerns.

For instance, [climate change](#)—which is much more complicated than ice caps melting—has been labeled a national security threat. Climate change has given New York City “a [hundred-year flood](#) every two years,” is responsible for [floods and droughts](#) that destroy agriculture and livestock, and [strains military](#) resources and capabilities.

Subtly hidden, other legislative policies are creating an impending threat that may only first be experienced in years to come. Education policies are wasting human capital—as is a dramatically [reduced labor force](#) participation rate due to our current economic depression—and are causing the United States to lose its status as an influential world power. Such destructive policies threaten national security because the policies damage the livelihood and capacity of Americans.

The risk of poor education is a reality and education is too important to rely on individual motivation alone; [leaders in education](#) are necessary. The [risk is grave](#), warns the new Council on Foreign Relations–sponsored Independent Task Force: “Educational failure puts the United States’ future economic prosperity, global position, and physical safety at risk.”

To help Americans realize their potential, and to help America realize its national potential, the education system in America needs more support. Legislators must discuss with education policy experts the best policies for each region, but there are some immediate improvements that legislators can make. Such changes may not mean simply throwing funding at the problem because despite the United States already [spends more](#) on public education than other developed countries, K-12 test scores are lackluster and more than 25% of students fail to graduate high school in four years. Instead of just increasing available funds, education policy needs to provide the institutions and the students appropriate support.

Some examples of potential changes include: enhance [equality](#) of education among income groups, increase access to [lunch programs](#) for income deficient students, [increase hours](#) of instruction, increase [after school programs](#) (which can have positive return on investment), increase [vocational programs](#) for students not interested in higher education, reduce higher education costs (which have increased significantly in recent years), and provide more institutional [placements](#) for graduate degree holders. The increased costs in pursuing a higher education decrease the relative incentive to have an educated population because [wages have stagnated](#). But because reducing degree costs is not the same as increasing wages, more [loan repayment programs](#) should also be available for public service work.

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Support needs to be available to a broad range of studies, not just the high-demand fields that provide a “return on investment,” because culture, literature, and the arts are **incredibly important to society** and because the United States needs both **scientists and critical thinkers**. Although there are many allegations that American workers do not have the right skills to match employers needs, such as in fields as math and science, the underlying problem may actually be a **pay mismatch**—not a skills mismatch.

Education is key to national security because of its importance in democracy, just as President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** expressed 1938:

Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education. It has been well said that no .system [sic] of government gives so much to the individual or exacts so much as a democracy. Upon our educational system must largely depend the perpetuity of those institutions upon which our freedom and our security rest. To prepare each citizen to choose wisely and to enable him to choose freely are paramount functions of the schools in a democracy.

Instead of wasting human capital and hurting America’s future, the legislature must address education policy to help ensure the democracy’s security.

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