



Not Logged In

## ★chron | Viewpoints, Outlook

N  
5

NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFE TRAVEL BLOGS **JOBS HOMES CARS CLASSIFIEDS**



25 Comments



0 Recommend

### Early-childhood education: an issue of national security

By RICK NORIEGA  
Feb. 3, 2010, 7:47PM

#### Share

Print

Share

Del.icio.us

Digg

Twitter

Yahoo! Buzz

Facebook

StumbleUpon

Early-childhood education is not just an education imperative — it needs to be a national security priority. Let me tell you why.

Seventy-five percent of young Americans are not qualified to join the military, according to the U.S. Department of Defense. The three primary reasons are inadequate education, criminality and physical unfitness.

According to the U.S. Army Accession Command, approximately one out of four young Americans lacks a high school diploma. One in 10 young adults is ineligible due to a criminal conviction, and 27 percent of young Americans cannot enlist because they are too

overweight to meet military physical requirements.

I want to focus on the education piece. Though sometimes a high school diploma requirement can be waived, about 30 percent of potential recruits with a high school diploma fail the Armed Forces Qualification Test. The 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, reported that 69 percent of the nation's eighth-graders scored below proficiency level in math, and 70 percent scored below proficiency level in reading. Seventh and eighth grade is about the time that students start dropping out of school or mentally checking out of school.

Couple these facts with the upcoming U.S. Census data that will show tremendous growth in the very communities that will be needed to populate our armed forces. The very students we will need in uniform tomorrow are increasingly failing in school today. In the 2008-09 Texas school year, 51 percent of kindergartners were Hispanic and 65.4 percent of pre-kindergartners were Hispanic, foretelling the future population of possible military recruits. At the same time, this group arguably has the highest dropout rate in the state.

A recent report titled "Ready, Willing, and Unable to Serve" by the nonprofit organization Mission: Readiness, Military Leaders for Kids states that "early education is an investment in national security." Improved educational outcomes increase the ability of the military to recruit the warriors we need to ensure America's safety.

A recent report titled "Ready, Willing, and Unable to Serve" by the nonprofit organization Mission: Readiness, Military Leaders for Kids states that "early education is an investment in national security." Improved educational outcomes increase the ability of the military to recruit the warriors we need to ensure America's safety.

The research behind early education is irrefutable. Thirty years of research has demonstrated that 90 percent of a person's adult brain weight is achieved by age 5. In the Institute of Medicine report "From Neurons to Neighborhoods," brain scans and neuroscience demonstrated that the best time to influence a child's intellectual development is when the brain is under most intense development. The most important changes in brain structure and development occur during the first five years.

We at Avance have been doing an intensive parent-child curriculum that addresses this in predominantly Hispanic communities for 37 years — a program that is built on the mother as the first teacher and home as the first classroom.

Our results? In the Dallas Independent School District, we have tracked Avance children to demonstrate that 95 percent of these students graduated from high school. In El Paso our Avance kids have consistently outperformed either the district average or the state average on the third-grade TAKS test.

Nobel laureate economist James Heckman estimates that for every dollar we fail to invest in early-childhood education, it will cost us \$8 in addressing other social needs. He states that "early intervention reduces crime, promotes high school graduation and college attendance, reduces grade repetition and special education costs, and helps prevent teenage births. (It also) raises achievement as measured by test scores." Although the financial consequences to our society are obvious and tangible, this call to action is not about our nation's financial security. This is about investment for our national security.

Most people understand the importance of education in the success of America's economic engines — the need for educated workers, the importance of continued innovation driving our prosperity. I would like to add to that understanding the importance of an educated pool of possible recruits for our military forces and public safety professionals, such as firefighters or police. The safety of our future and our nation depends on it.

*Noriega is the new national president/CEO of Avance Inc., an early-childhood education program. He is a*

Search

advanced search

 Chron.com  Web Search by YA

**HOUSTON★CHRON**  
Only \$2 a week **SUBSC**

advertise here

**POWERFUL RELIEF and SA**

Prescription NASONEX<sup>®</sup> effectively treats these indoor *and* outdoor nasal allergy symptoms:

- ✓ CONGESTION
- ✓ SNEEZING
- ✓ ITCHY NOSE
- ✓ RUNNY NOSE

**Important Safety Information**  
Side effects were generally mild and included headache, viral infection, sore throat, nosebleeds, and coughing.  
Click here for important product information.

**SAVE UP TO \$15**

► Learn about NASONEX<sup>®</sup>

[Manly's Super Bowl ring now symbol victories](#)

[County Line co-owner dead in car in fl creek](#)

[Houston mom accused of fatally starvi](#)

[Pasadena school worker accused of m student](#)

[2 found dead at SW Houston apartmen](#)

[Fighting for re-election, Perry stays tru ideals\(161\)](#)

[Care at immigrant facilities falls short\( U.S. jobless rate falls to 9.7 pct\(132\)](#)

[Senate Dems vow to take action on jol Student from Sugar Land going to pris spring break theft\(92\)](#)

[Obama budget continues long era of irresponsibility](#)

[Froma Harrop: There's no reason to pi against one another](#)

[E.J. Dionne: Biden goes off-message ; hidden issue](#)

[Letters: Now, a word for the geezers](#)

[TAKS changes public school landscap Is too much emphasis placed on test s](#)

[Where to get more information](#)

[Texas faces deadline for new languag curriculum](#)

[Harris County area high school valedic](#)

colonel in the Texas Army National Guard and an appointee to the Military Leadership Diversity Commission.

## Comments

Readers are solely responsible for the content of the comments they post here. Comments are subject to the site's [terms and conditions](#) of use and do not necessarily reflect the opinion or approval of the Houston Chronicle. Readers whose comments violate the terms of use may have their comments removed or all of their content blocked from viewing by other users without notification.

You must be logged in to comment. [Login](#) | [Sign up](#)



**ScrapIron** wrote:

Two points-

1) Education begins in the home. Parents must instill the idea that education is important. Parents should read to their children and they should read themselves Quick! Name the last BOOK you read.

2) Just what are they teaching in school? I could read by the time I started first grade. If schools aren't teaching the "three R's) then we have a problem that early education may not solve.

2/4/2010 5:40:28 AM

Recommend: (29) (4)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



**Nan1964** wrote:

There is no consequence for dropping out of school or failing. We never blame the kid or the parents. It is always the teachers fault. Make all 3 accountable and you may see a difference. Schools have to deal with so many social problems it is hard to get to the teaching part ....

2/4/2010 6:28:25 AM

Recommend: (27) (1)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



**Bad\_Man\_Behind\_Blue\_Eyes** wrote:

ScrapIron,

I am currently reading a book about the Red Army during WWII, "Ivan's War". It chronicles the hardships and the massive losses to the uneducated soviet peasantry under Stalin. Eight million deaths in the Red army from 1939-1945.

My kid is reading the last in the "Twilight" series (BLAH!).

I agree that we should get back to basics. There's too much social engineering and political indoctrination going on in our schools. MMM, mmm, mmm...

2/4/2010 6:57:32 AM

Recommend: (21) (5)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



**hillcountry777** wrote:

I agree with the premise of this op-ed and what Nan1964 and ScrapIron have added. There is another aspect that I believe to be critical. That is discipline in the schools and allowing teachers and principals to punish kids who are misbehaving therefore not allowing kids who want to learn to do so. A friend of mine who has 25 years of teaching experience was recently canned because she grabbed a student's arm to keep her from hitting another student. This is insane.

2/4/2010 7:21:49 AM

Recommend: (17) (3)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



**HighAnxiety** wrote:

(0)

[How to to read the school reports](#)  
[Primer on how to read the reports](#)  
[How to read the school reports](#)  
[Grades are in: HISD makes gains on T.](#)  
[TAKS help sought for English-deficien](#)

advertise here



**ADOBE ACROBAT 9 PRO**

Combine video, audio, and documents  
all in a single PDF Portfolio.



Free down

So, is he saying the "answer" to the problem is to "invest in early-childhood education" - as in, send in many taxpayer dollars to set up special programs for mainly Hispanic children, that funding additional "early intervention" programs will prevent all the social ills he identifies? How about if we require parents to only have children they can support, to send them to school prepared to participate with their homework and study done, and to have our schools go back to the old way of requiring discipline in class and teaching the basics in English. If the kids don't speak English, don't dumb down the classes to accommodate them. Mr Noriega should be aiming his plea at the families of those "at-risk" kids, telling them to shape up and use the education resources we have - wisely - teach those kids some personal responsibility and teach them the value of education and the part it plays in becoming a productive adult. We already have an "early intervention" program in place - it's called "school". Let's use schools to educate kids, not just babysit them.

2/4/2010 7:45:05 AM

Recommend:  (14)  (11)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



**LLC1923** wrote:

Taxpayers with financial questions and parents who have children who "qualify" for preschool in Texas should ask how thousands of low-income three and four-year-olds are used for federal and state grant funding, adult self-promotion, and profit making by state universities, child care providers, "researchers," and testing corporations. Does Avance participate in the state's for-profit "school ready" scheme? If so, how can the results be trusted if Avance receives state grant funding and higher federal Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) reimbursement rates for participation? The child care propaganda is like the "HISD Dropout Miracle." It is not a question of national security. It's about the money.

2/4/2010 7:07:36 PM

Recommend:  (4)  (2)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)



**Bad\_Man\_Behind\_Blue\_Eyes** wrote:

jwwestiii wrote:

Badman wrote: War is a kind of social Darwinism where the least promising members of society end up as infantry, i.e., cannon fodder.

++++++

No that is called military deferments....for additional information see Dick Chaney...

=====

You really are reaching with that one. Just another cheap shot along the lines of "It's Bush's fault". I was essentially agreeing with a liberal author on his analysis of how the military operates, and you, in a backhanded way, berate that opinion. Fussel observed, from his own experiences in the army, that the brightest recruits were skimmed off to serve in relatively safe technical duties, while the the less intellectually gifted were assigned to the sharp end of war, the infantry. Hence the social Darwinism I refered to since the infantry has the highest casualty rates in war.

Fortunately for us there are exceptional people who could have avoided the "sharp end" and served anyway. Fussel, Vonegut, John and Joe Kennedy, Bob Dole, John McCain, and others.

2/4/2010 5:16:03 PM

Recommend:  (5)  (2)

[\[Report abuse\]](#)

MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR COMMUNITY  


Won't you please help? | good fellows | HOUSTON CHRONICLE 

[Read all comments \(25\) »](#)

**[Obama Urges Homeowners to Refinance](#)**

Rates as low as 3.616% APR!  
[www.SeeRefinanceRates.com](#)

**[Make Less Than \\$45,000/Year?](#)**

You May Qualify for a Grant to Go Back to  
[www.SeeCollegeDegrees.com](#)

**[Refinance Now at 4.0% Fixed](#)**

\$160,000 Mortgage for \$633/mo. Free.  
[MortgageRefinance.LendGo.com](#)

**[Obama Approves Credit Card Bill](#)**

Do You Qualify for a Credit Card Bailout?  
[www.LowerMyBills.com/Debt](#)

Ads by Yahoo!

**chron.com**

- [Home](#)
- [Houston & Texas](#)
- [Nation](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Life](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Blogs](#)

- [Chron Commons](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Traffic](#)

**Topics**

- [PetsHouston](#)
- [MomHouston](#)
- [HoustonBelief](#)
- [Houston gardening](#)
- [29-95](#)

**Marketplace**

- [Jobs](#)
- [Homes](#)
- [Cars](#)
- [Classifieds](#)
- [Personals](#)
- [Post an ad](#)
- [Contests](#)

**Local Services**

- [Houston Attorneys](#)
- [Houston Salons](#)

**Services**

- [Help](#)
- [Business Directory](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Send us tips](#)
- [Chronicle In Education](#)
- [About the company](#)
- [Home delivery](#)
- [Advertise with us](#)
- [Buy a banner ad](#)

**Membership**

- [Sign up](#)
- [Already registered? Log in](#)

**Other editions**

- [Mobile](#)
- [RSS feeds](#)
- [e-Edition](#)
- [E-mail newsletters](#)

[Privacy statement](#) | [Terms of service](#) | [About Our Ads](#)

Copyright © 2010 The Houston Chronicle

**HEARST** newspapers