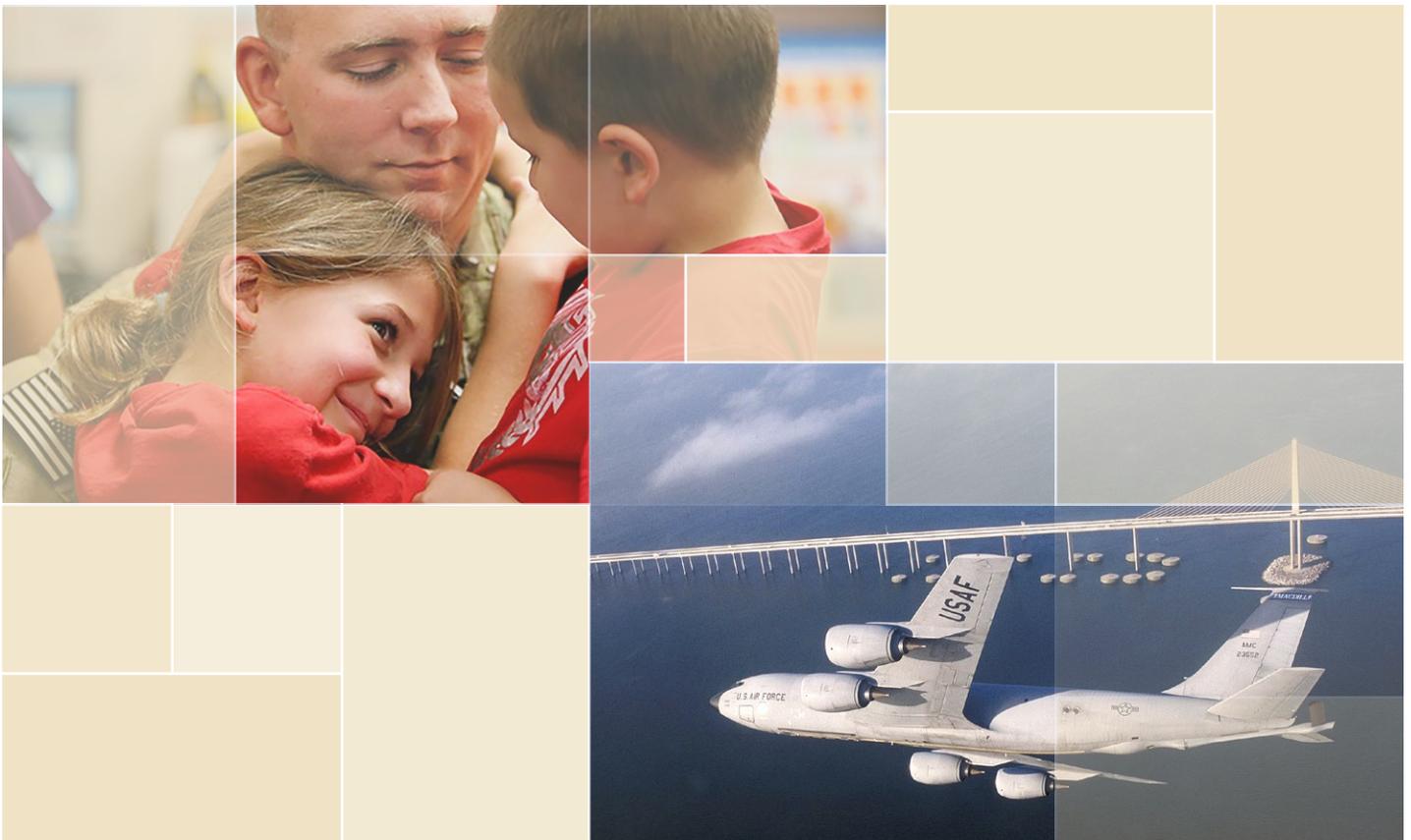


Keeping Our Families and Our Country Strong

Why the Florida Standards and Florida Standards Assessments are crucial for our military



Keeping Our Families and Our Country Strong

SUMMARY:

While one does not often hear the words “national security” and “the Florida Standards” in the same sentence, there are two key reasons why they are clearly linked. First, retired military leaders know the Florida Standards and the Florida Standards Assessments are vital for ensuring there will be well-educated individuals who are prepared to defend the nation. Second, their continued implementation may impact Florida’s ability to retain its military bases.

Keeping the standards and assessments on track will help address military recruiting challenges. Although Floridians have a proud history of serving in the military, currently approximately 71 percent of the state’s 17-to 24-year-olds are not qualified for military service. Nationally, about one in 10 cannot qualify because they have a criminal record. One in three are physically unfit. Even among those in Florida who have high school diplomas and tried to join, 21 percent could not pass the military entrance exam that tests mathematics, literacy, and critical thinking skills.

Though the news that they do not “measure up” to the honor of military service is undoubtedly unnerving to young adults and their parents, it also points to a significant challenge for national security. Today’s military is a cutting-edge, high-tech enterprise. The military needs personnel whose education has provided them with strong reading and math skills and the ability to master challenging technology, think critically, and work effectively as part of a team. The country will face significant problems if there are not enough men and women who can perform the challenging jobs the military requires.

For these reasons and more, hundreds of retired admirals and generals stand in strong support of the Florida Standards and Florida Standards Assessments. Both the standards and aligned assessments are critical components of the educational experience that prepare young people to meet the demands of the 21st century economy and the military as well.

“If they [states] want to keep the military in their communities, they’d better start paying attention to the schools that are outside and inside our installations, because as we evaluate and as we make decisions on future force structure, that will be one of the criteria.”



Source: Military Times, 2014

**Army Chief of Staff
General Ray Odierno**

While parents, educators, policymakers, and the general public all have a vested interest in keeping implementation of this effort on track, there are issues that hit us particularly close to home.

- 1. The standards and aligned assessments will foster student success and improvements to schools.** It is standard operating procedure in the military, and among many successful businesses and sports teams, to have concrete measures of performance. The military uses the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) to assess recruits to determine if they meet its criteria to serve. Educational standards and assessments give parents, schools and districts a clear sense of student achievement based on clearly defined benchmarks for learning, and for measuring that learning. Maintaining standards and assessments will provide schools and districts with “apples-to-apples” comparisons of student achievement. It should also encourage schools and districts, where students are struggling, to look for solutions from other schools that are making more progress working with similar students.
- 2. The standards and aligned assessments may even help states retain their military bases.** With the next round of base realignments being discussed, the quality of public schools near bases will reportedly be included in criteria used to determine base realignments and closures. Rigorous standards and assessments can help schools serve military families and improve at a faster pace. This is especially important in light of recent studies showing that public schools near some military installations are lower on some measures of performance, including high school graduation rates, than other schools in the state.

Keeping Our Students and Our Country Strong

The links between academic standards and national security:

The Department of Defense reports that **71 percent of young Americans are currently unable to join the military**; the figure for Florida is also 71 percent.¹ This is due in part to the epidemic of childhood obesity and crime or substance abuse problems, along with the fact that 24 percent of young people in Florida do not graduate from high school on time.² An additional 21 percent of Florida graduates who tried to join could not pass the military's entrance exam to qualify.³

The military increasingly needs highly qualified individuals to run its cutting-edge defense systems. Yet those individuals must be fit and of high moral caliber. That means that although the military is the largest employer in the country, it is **competing with colleges and businesses for a smaller pool** of qualified applicants. Failure to solve current educational deficits is unacceptable for safeguarding national security.

1 Helping schools improve and more students succeed

Education experts agree that high standards alone are not enough. To have an impact on student outcomes, there must be accountability. Standards must be accompanied by assessments based on the standards, and a system for reporting results, so everyone will know how students are really faring.⁶

There is currently a lot of confusion about student achievement levels because, prior to the development of the Common Core, each state developed its own standards and assessments. Comparing state test scores to the Nation's Report Card (NAEP), the well-respected assessment of what American students know and can do, reveals how state tests can set the bar too low. For example, in 2009, in Florida, only 36 percent of fourth grade students scored

The Florida Standards and Florida Standards Assessments

The Florida Standards in English language arts and mathematics establish the content and skills that children must learn at each grade level, but they do not tell teachers how to teach, nor do they specify a curriculum; these important decisions remain under teacher or local control. The standards also do not require collecting any personal data on children or families.

The Florida State Board of Education adopted the standards in July 2010. In February 2014 the Board adopted a package of improvements to the standards and they are being fully implemented in the 2014-2015 school year.

Results from Massachusetts demonstrate the importance of rigorous academic standards. In 1993, Massachusetts passed standards-based education reform legislation. Since that time, students in the Commonwealth have had dramatic academic growth, including leading the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test (NAEP; the Nation's Report Card, a periodic assessment of what American students know and can do.)⁴

In addition to essential academic content, the Florida Standards focus on critical thinking, complex problem solving and effective

communication—key skills needed in today's military and many other careers.

To have an impact on student outcomes, there must be accountability.

Standards must be

accompanied by assessments aligned to the standards, and a system for reporting results so everyone will know how students are really faring across schools and districts, and what approaches are delivering the best results.

The Florida Department of Education contracted with the American Institutes for Research to develop and administer the new Florida Standard Assessments. The assessments move beyond simple multiple-choice questions to focus on children's reasoning and deeper learning. Testing began in Spring 2015. These assessments will provide rich data to inform parents and teachers on how well students are learning the Florida Standards.⁵ Teachers can use data from the assessments to tailor their instruction. Parents will know how their children are learning and will be able to hold schools accountable.



above proficient on the NAEP, versus 74 percent on the state test.⁷ If parents and teachers do not know how students are really performing, they do not know the scope of the problem, nor can they make informed efforts to solve it.

Maintaining the Florida Standards and Florida Standards Assessments are crucial to improving the education system.

Evidence for how this works is provided by recent successes in raising high school graduation rates. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required states to include graduation rates among its accountability measures and to publicly report the results. Once states started accurately measuring graduation rates and paying attention to them, graduation rates soared.

After being largely stagnant for decades, in just five years, from 2007 to 2012, graduation rates improved by five percentage points among white students, 10 percentage points among African American students, and an astounding 15 percentage points among Hispanic students.⁸ Accurately measuring graduation rates is not the only reason rates improved so dramatically, but it was likely an important contributing factor.

Results from Massachusetts, ranked first in the nation on the Nation's Report Card, also demonstrate the importance of rigorous academic standards and aligned assessments. In 1993, Massachusetts passed standards-based education reform and created the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) to accurately measure progress toward achieving those new educational standards. Results are reported for individual students, allowing teachers and parents to see how each child is faring and schools and districts to learn from each other which approaches are producing the best results. Experts credit the combination of rigorous standards and aligned assessment for the best-in-the-nation results Massachusetts achieved in recent years.⁹

This matches the situation in the military, and it is standard operating procedure among many successful businesses and sports teams across America. The military uses the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) to assess recruits to determine if they meet its criteria to serve. The military has become the

strongest fighting force in history by using accurate data to continually improve its operations.

Far from crushing innovation, common rules and ways to measure results help fighting formations, businesses, and sports teams compete. Each can see where its problems are, discover who is more successful, and continually strive to learn new ways to do better. That is also how America's schools will become stronger. The Florida Standards and Florida Standards Assessments will light the fire of innovation. Just as with businesses, the military, and sports teams, each school will need to find its own way to improve.

2 Keeping military bases in state during BRAC downsizing

The quality of schools near bases will reportedly be one factor weighed by the committee involved in deciding which to realign or close, a process that started with hearings in 2014.¹⁰ Of concern, an initial study found that public schools near some Army installations had lower high school graduation rates compared to other public schools in the state.¹¹ Although this study did not examine any military installations located in Florida, an examination of the graduation data in the table on page 6 shows that 61 percent of the counties (8 of 13) where military installations are located in Florida have high



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Melissa Paradise/released

“Military installations are vital to Florida’s future and contribute more than \$70 billion to Florida’s economy – more than nine percent our total gross state product. Every single business in the Sunshine State is within 100 miles of a military installation and the economic footprint of the military and defense industry touches all of us.”

Florida Chamber of Commerce, 2014

schools that are performing below the state average on percentage of students graduating on time. It is not yet clear when downsizing decisions will be made, but efforts to improve these schools need to start immediately.

Finally, the military is concerned about the quality of public schools in many communities where its bases are located because most children in military families (nearly 80 percent) attend local public schools.¹² Many of these children are likely to follow in their parents’ footsteps: children of military veterans are far more likely, compared to the general public, to join the military.¹³ Thus, it is important to ensure states with large bases are making strong progress in improving education, especially in the nearby schools. This is often not the case, but rigorous educational standards and aligned assessments can help.

CONCLUSION

To remain competitive and attract and retain businesses and military installations, Florida must prove itself as a desirable place to raise and educate children. The Florida Standards, along with the Florida Standards Assessments, are the clearest way to demonstrate Florida’s commitment to a world-class education and show measurable results.

Florida will be well served by sticking with its standards and assessments aligned to those standards. Florida must provide children with a quality education and help prepare the next generation of Americans to defend national security.

ENDNOTES

- 1 According to the 2013 Qualified Military Available (QMA), based on personal communication with the Accession Policy and Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies teams at the Department of Defense in July 2014.
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- 8 America’s Promise Alliance (2014, April). Building a grad nation. Retrieved from: http://gradnation.org/sites/default/files/17548_BGN_Report_FinalFULL_5.2.14.pdf
- 9 Mass Insight Education (2013). Education reform in Massachusetts 1993-2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.massinsight.com/publications/ACSC/226/file/3/pubs/2013/05/10/EdReformReport.pdf>
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- 11 WestEd (2014, January 28). “School Performance in Army-Connected Schools: A Report to the US Department of Army, Child, Youth and School Services—School Support.” No installations located in Florida were examined in this study. The study included Fort Rucker, located mostly in Alabama. Some children of service members at Fort Rucker attend schools in Florida.
- 12 Department of Defense Education Activity (n.d.). All About Military K-12 Partners. Military K-12 Partners, DODEA. Retrieved from <http://www.militaryk12partners.dodea.edu/about.cfm>
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State and County Data: Obesity, High School Graduation and Crime

	Adult Obesity (2011) ¹	Not Graduating on Time (2011-2012) ²	Violent Crime Rate (2010-2012) ³		Adult Obesity (2011) ¹	Not Graduating on Time (2011-2012) ²	Violent Crime Rate (2010-2012) ³
Statewide	26%	25% (24%, 2013)	514	Lake	31%	22%	363
Alachua	25	30	626	Lee	26	28	359
Baker	37	27	205	Leon	27	27	717
Bay	29	26 worse than state average	518	Levy	32	28	356
Bradford	36	36	398	Liberty	37	37	142
Brevard	29	15	573	Madison	36	32	776
Broward	25	24	485	Manatee	25	24	629
Calhoun	37	22	117	Marion	31	25	506
Charlotte	25	21	243	Martin	21	15	263
Citrus	27	22	326	Miami-Dade	21	24	709
Clay	29	26 worse than state average	412	Monroe	20	31 worse than state average	489
Collier	20	22	294	Nassau	27	11	205
Columbia	36	35	614	Okaloosa	29	17	426
DeSoto	35	32	556	Okeechobee	34	41	516
Dixie	36	22	402	Orange	25	26 worse than state average	730
Duval	29	32 worse than state average	646	Osceola	29	22	569
Escambia	30	38 worse than state average	773	Palm Beach	22	23	503
Flagler	27	25	274	Pasco	29	23	325
Franklin	25	42	848	Pinellas	24	28 worse than state average	605
Gadsden	38	39	689	Polk	31	32	389
Gilchrist	31	12	219	Putnam	33	41	820
Glades	36	32	307	St. Johns	23	15	308
Gulf	32	12	371	St. Lucie	30	29	401
Hamilton	39	42	414	Santa Rosa	28	23	158
Hardee	37	36	309	Sarasota	21	22	360
Hendry	34	30	629	Seminole	25	20	355
Hernando	29	26	329	Sumter	29	22	190
Highlands	30	38	287	Suwannee	32	41	420
Hillsborough	26	27 worse than state average	394	Taylor	37	37	690
Holmes	32	27	287	Union	38	27	277
Indian River	23	19	319	Volusia	27	33	494
Jackson	34	31	463	Wakulla	37	30	288

Counties near MacDill Air Force base

All counties with military bases

1. Percentage of adults who are obese (2011). This is a way of comparing obesity rates in FL across counties but is not a figure for how many young adults cannot join the military. 2. Percent not graduating in 4 years (2011-2012)*. 3. Violent Crime Rate per 100,000 (2010-2012). Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2015) County Health Rankings and Roadmaps. *County data not yet available for 2012-2013.

WHO WE ARE

MISSION: READINESS is the nonprofit, nonpartisan national security organization of more than 500 retired generals, admirals and other senior retired military leaders who work to ensure continued American security and prosperity into the 21st century by calling for smart investments in the upcoming generation of American children. It operates under the umbrella of the nonprofit Council for a Strong America. For a full listing of our membership, please see our website at www.missionreadiness.org

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