

EARLY LEARNING IN MICHIGAN: A NATIONAL SECURITY **IMPERATIVE**

High-Quality Early Interventions Will Help Address the Problems that Disqualify the Vast Majority of Michigan Young Adults from Military Service



Acknowledgments

Mission: Readiness is the nonprofit, nonpartisan national security organization of more than 575 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.

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Summary

The nation needs each generation to be **successful, productive and healthy to remain competitive and strong**. However, as military leaders look ahead to the coming years, they are increasingly concerned that there are not enough qualified candidates to defend our nation. This concern stems from problems including education, obesity, crime and drug abuse that render **71 percent of today's young adults** in Michigan and nationwide **ineligible for military service**.¹

If society does not address such problems early on in children's lives, the nation risks a shortage of qualified recruits—one that will leave the country vulnerable for years to come and threaten the strength of the future military.

Mounting research shows that the early years of life are incredibly important for later learning, behaviors and health. This helps to explain why high-quality early interventions can help vulnerable children succeed in school, stay on the right side of the law and achieve a healthy weight. These outcomes can help children succeed at whatever they choose in life, and keep military service as an option on the table.

Michigan is one of only a handful of states that has implemented a high-quality state preschool program, but more vulnerable



All young Michiganders should have the chance to excel at whatever they choose. Access to high-quality early education can help children develop the strength in mind, body and character they need to succeed.”

— Major General (Ret.) Gerald A. Miller, U.S. Army

children in the state could benefit.² **60 percent of low-income children in Michigan currently do not attend a preschool program**, let alone a high-quality one.³ Similarly, voluntary parent coaching programs such as the Nurse-Family Partnership have been proven to promote health and reduce the risk of crime among vulnerable children, yet they only reach a fraction of those who could benefit.⁴ (For more information on voluntary parent coaching programs in Michigan, see the report “What are the Odds?” at MissionReadiness.org/Research.)

Policymakers at the state and national levels must continue to encourage the expansion of high-quality early interventions to ensure that all children are prepared in mind, body and character to succeed in life.

This cannot be accomplished without a focus on youth of color, who will likely make up more than half of the U.S. child population by 2020, but disproportionately lack opportunities for success.⁵ Ensuring that children of every race have a fair chance to succeed will not only ensure that the nation is creating a strong future workforce in every sector, but also strengthen the military.

The vast majority of young adults are not eligible for military service

An alarming **71 percent of all young adults in Michigan and nationwide are currently unable to join the military.**⁶

One credential missing from the recruiting pool is a quality education. The military

Working Towards Racial Equity with Early Education

The U.S. has made important strides towards racial equity. Between 2003 and 2011, achievement in math rose by 50 percent among Hispanic fourth graders and 70 percent among black fourth graders.¹⁷ In reading, achievement grew by roughly 25 percent for both groups.¹⁸ Similarly, graduation rates for black and Hispanic students increased by 10-11 percentage points between 2007 and 2013, and their achievement gap with white students shrunk by four and eight percentage points respectively.¹⁹ Hispanic youth are now graduating at a rate higher than the national average in 2007.²⁰

Yet huge disparities remain. Children of color still face many hurdles in society that adversely affect their ability to succeed at whatever career they choose. These disparities are driven by historical segregation and disparities in income,

access to quality education, affordable quality food and health care among other factors.²¹

High-quality early interventions are an important step toward reducing some of these disparities. Most of the studies featured in this report achieved strong results for children of color and low socioeconomic status. For example, children who participated in the Perry Preschool project were primarily African American. In addition, children of color benefited the most from Michigan’s Great Start Readiness Program.²² In Boston’s universal preschool program, Hispanic children made larger gains than their white peers on pre-reading, pre-math and early executive functioning skills, and the Nurse-Family Partnership has a proven record of success with African American and Hispanic children.²³

Army Soldiers During Basic Training



today very rarely accepts applicants without a high school diploma, yet 23 percent of Michiganders do not graduate from high school on time.⁷ Even among high school graduates in Michigan, 21 percent who try to join the Army score too low on the military's entrance exam to qualify.⁸

Other young adults have records of crime or drug abuse, are too overweight or have other medical reasons why they cannot join. **Nearly one in three young adults nationwide is too overweight to join the military—roughly the same proportion of youth who are overweight or obese in Michigan.**⁹ One in ten has a criminal record that would prevent them from qualifying.¹⁰

While the barriers to military service are high for young people from every walk of life, they are even more serious for young men and women of color. Youth who are African American, for example, are 18 percent less likely to graduate from high school (and 26 percent less likely in Michigan), 41 percent more likely to be

obese, and 29 percent more likely to have an arrest record than youth who are white.¹¹

A limited recruitment pool jeopardizes our military readiness and threatens future national security. **High-quality early education and parent coaching programs provide the foundation for real success—particularly among vulnerable children—by helping them succeed in school, maintain a healthy weight and stay on the right side of the law.**

Three ways high-quality early interventions can help address these problems:

I. Improving education

Long-term studies of model early education programs show impressive differences in children's educational outcomes. For example, children who participated in Michigan's Perry Preschool project were 40 percent more likely to graduate from high school.¹² Participants in another early learning program, the Abecedarian project, were four times more likely to earn a four-year college degree than those in the control group.¹³

While most state preschool programs have not been around long enough to measure outcomes into adulthood, programs that have invested in quality have already demonstrated strong results. **Michigan's Great Start Readiness (GSRP) state preschool program, for example, reported a 50 percent reduction in being held back in school and a 60 percent increase in on-time high school graduation for children of color (see Figure 1).**¹⁴ The program also found positive but smaller benefits for white children.

Figure 1

Children Who Participated in Michigan's State Preschool Program Did Better in School

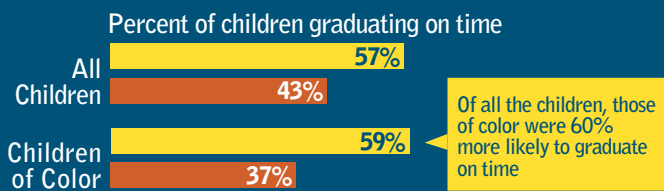
32% LESS LIKELY TO BE HELD BACK

Children who participated in Michigan's state preschool program were 32% less likely to fail two or more grades



33% MORE LIKELY TO GRADUATE ON TIME

Children who participated in Michigan's state preschool program were 33% more likely to graduate on time



Source: HighScope/Michigan Department of Education, 2012

Meanwhile, New Jersey's preschool program reported that **children in the program were three-fourths of a year ahead in math and two-thirds of a year ahead in literacy** in the fourth and fifth grades. Similarly, children in North Carolina's More at Four and Smart Start programs made gains equivalent to five months of learning in reading and three to five months in math by the third grade.¹⁵ More at Four also resulted in a 10 percent reduction in special education placement by grade three.¹⁶

2. Encouraging a healthy weight

There is new evidence that **early learning programs can help reduce America's high rates of obesity**. For example, one preschool program in Chicago worked

with children and their parents to reduce weight gain. A randomized study of the program found that children in the control group gained 16 percent more weight over the following two years than those in the program.²⁴ Similarly, preschools in New York City, Philadelphia and Mississippi that served nutritious food, increased physical activity among children and coached parents on these topics saw declines in child obesity of five to 24 percent.²⁵

Long-term studies have also demonstrated how early childhood interventions can greatly impact physical health behaviors and outcomes. For example, a randomized trial of the Abecedarian early education program found that boys who participated were nearly **four times more likely to exercise regularly and less likely to be substance abusers as young adults, and had significantly lower risk factors for heart disease, stroke and diabetes** by their mid-30s.²⁶ Meanwhile, girls who participated in the program were more likely to exercise regularly as young adults and less likely to become obese as older adults.²⁷ Similarly, a recent study showed that boys who participated in the Perry Preschool Project were 29 percent less likely to be smokers and 65 percent more likely to report improving their diet for health reasons as adults, while girls in the program were eight times more likely to exercise regularly as adults.²⁸

3. Reducing crime

Long-term studies of high-quality early education programs have demonstrated they can help to prevent crime. For example, children left out of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers program were 70 percent more likely than participants to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.²⁹

Similarly, a long-term study of Michigan's Perry Preschool Program found that children in the control group were five times more likely to be chronic offenders with five or more arrests by their late 20s.³⁰

One high-quality parent-coaching program for vulnerable pregnant and new mothers has also been shown to impact crime. In a randomized study, the Nurse-Family Partnership voluntary parent-coaching program found that disadvantaged girls who participated had 90 percent less convictions when they reached the age of 19 compared to those in the control group.³¹

Early interventions are also good for the economy

A well-respected, independent cost-benefit analysis of more than 20 different studies found that high-quality early education programs return, on average, over \$26,000 to society for every child served.³² These savings largely result from reductions in crime, special education and grade retention.

Another cost-benefit analysis found that investing in the healthy development and school readiness of at-risk children in Michigan would produce an average net benefit of \$47,000 per child over a lifetime.³³

The path forward

Over the past few years, Michigan has made a huge investment in high-quality early education.³⁴ Only eleven states allot more resources to their state preschool programs.³⁵ Still, 60 percent of low-income three- and four-year-olds in the state do not attend a preschool program.³⁶

For this reason, Michigan policymakers should continue to strengthen the Great

The Importance of Diversity to the Military

On July 26, 1948, President Truman charted the course toward desegregation with Executive Order 9981, forbidding discrimination against military personnel because of race, color, religion, or national origin. In his order, he stated:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.

The military has made tremendous progress since President Truman's directive. There are now large units composed mostly of white service members led by service members of color, and there are large units composed mostly of men led by women. In addition, promotions and pay scales are all based on rank, and equal employment regulations make it difficult to take much else into consideration.

According to a study of over 30,000 active duty personnel, **the Armed Forces' social hierarchy—explicitly based on rank—overrides many of the racial or gender biases in civilian society**, which tend to act as barriers for minorities and women in career advancement.

The Department of Defense has provided opportunities for millions of Americans through its recruiting of a diverse and effective force. However, for our nation to dramatically increase the number of young people who can qualify for military service, it will require not only continued efforts by the DoD, but partnership with and leadership from other sectors of American society. Working across the public and private sectors, we can strive to implement measures that will continue the military's ability to recruit diverse members and strengthen our democracy.

Source: Lundquist, American Sociological Review, 2008

Start Readiness Program (GSRP) in order to provide quality preschool to at-risk children, and support the **Maternal Infant Health Program (MIHP)** to make voluntary parent coaching available to more vulnerable young families.

At the same time, federal policymakers should support **Preschool Development Grants**, which provide critical support to states that want to establish or expand high-quality early learning programs like Michigan has. They should also protect and expand funding for the federal **Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood and Home Visiting (MIECHV)** program, which was enacted in 2010 with bipartisan support and extended for two years in 2015.

Conclusion

High-quality early interventions help build a solid foundation for the next generation to develop in mind, body and character so they can succeed at whatever career path they choose.

Our future national security depends on whether we choose to make these investments in vulnerable children.



How Do Michigan Counties Compare on Poverty, Education, Healthy Weight and Crime?

	Children In Poverty	On-Time Graduation Rate	Adults Who Are Obese	Number Of Violent Crimes Per Year
MICHIGAN	24%	78%	32%	45,866
ALCONA	30	88	31	15
ALGER	24	N/A	32	16
ALLEGAN	18	81	34	236
ALPENA	27	69	35	53
ANTRIM	25	87	32	39
ARENAC	30	86	35	27
BARAGA	24	86	32	15
BARRY	16	84	36	97
BAY	23	76	32	328
BENZIE	21	77	30	19
BERRIEN	26	76	36	604
BRANCH	27	79	35	84
CALHOUN	29	73	35	862
CASS	25	77	36	78
CHARLEVOIX	22	76	27	39
CHEBOYGAN	33	86	33	35
CHIPPEWA	23	75	38	98
CLARE	40	76	31	48
CLINTON	11	90	35	80
CRAWFORD	32	73	29	41
DELTA	23	86	32	66
DICKINSON	18	85	31	N/A
EATON	16	78	34	190
EMMET	15	86	28	40
GENESEE	33	70	37	3,600
GLADWIN	34	78	36	53
GOGEBIC	35	75	27	17
GRANDTRAVERSE	15	84	31	136
GRATIOT	27	73	36	56
HILLSDALE	28	74	33	93
HOUGHTON	19	88	26	31
HURON	25	90	31	39
INGHAM	26	73	32	1,463
IONIA	18	83	34	105
IOSCO	35	74	32	53
IRON	27	89	32	18
ISABELLA	23	74	31	131
JACKSON	29	77	35	578
KALAMAZOO	21	78	29	1,000
KALKASKA	29	76	30	51
KENT	19	76	29	2,472

Source: County Health Rankings & Roadmaps 2015, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

How Do Michigan Counties Compare on Poverty, Education, Healthy Weight and Crime?

	Children In Poverty	On-Time Graduation Rate	Adults Who Are Obese	Number Of Violent Crimes Per Year
KEWEENAW	23%	N/A	33%	3
LAKE	52	N/A	33	33
LAPEER	17	86	33	138
LEELANAU	16	72	24	9
LENAWEE	21	82	32	227
LIVINGSTON	8	84	28	177
LUCE	32	93	35	23
MACKINAC	24	N/A	33	25
MACOMB	20	76	32	2,550
MANISTEE	29	80	30	48
MARQUETTE	18	85	29	106
MASON	27	75	30	72
MECOSTA	32	77	32	233
MENOMINEE	25	77	33	39
MIDLAND	17	86	30	106
MISSAUKEE	26	85	32	9
MONROE	16	83	33	387
MONTCALM	27	86	30	134
MONTMORENCY	37	N/A	32	8
MUSKEGON	28	74	36	811
NEWAYGO	26	75	33	117
OAKLAND	13	80	27	2,687
OCEANA	31	78	33	42
OGEMAW	38	78	35	44
ONTONAGON	32	N/A	34	9
OSCEOLA	34	80	36	61
OSCODA	32	N/A	33	26
OTSEGO	21	82	34	44
OTTAWA	12	86	25	444
PRESQUE ISLE	26	N/A	33	17
ROSCOMMON	40	70	32	49
SAGINAW	30	77	39	1,637
ST. CLAIR	21	80	30	418
ST. JOSEPH	26	81	34	178
SANILAC	25	84	36	82
SCHOOLCRAFT	27	83	29	22
SHIAWASSEE	23	81	36	165
TUSCOLA	25	82	31	91
VAN BUREN	25	75	33	238
WASHTENAW	15	83	24	1,095
WAYNE	37	74	34	19,716
WEXFORD	29	79	33	106

Source: County Health Rankings & Roadmaps 2015, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

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