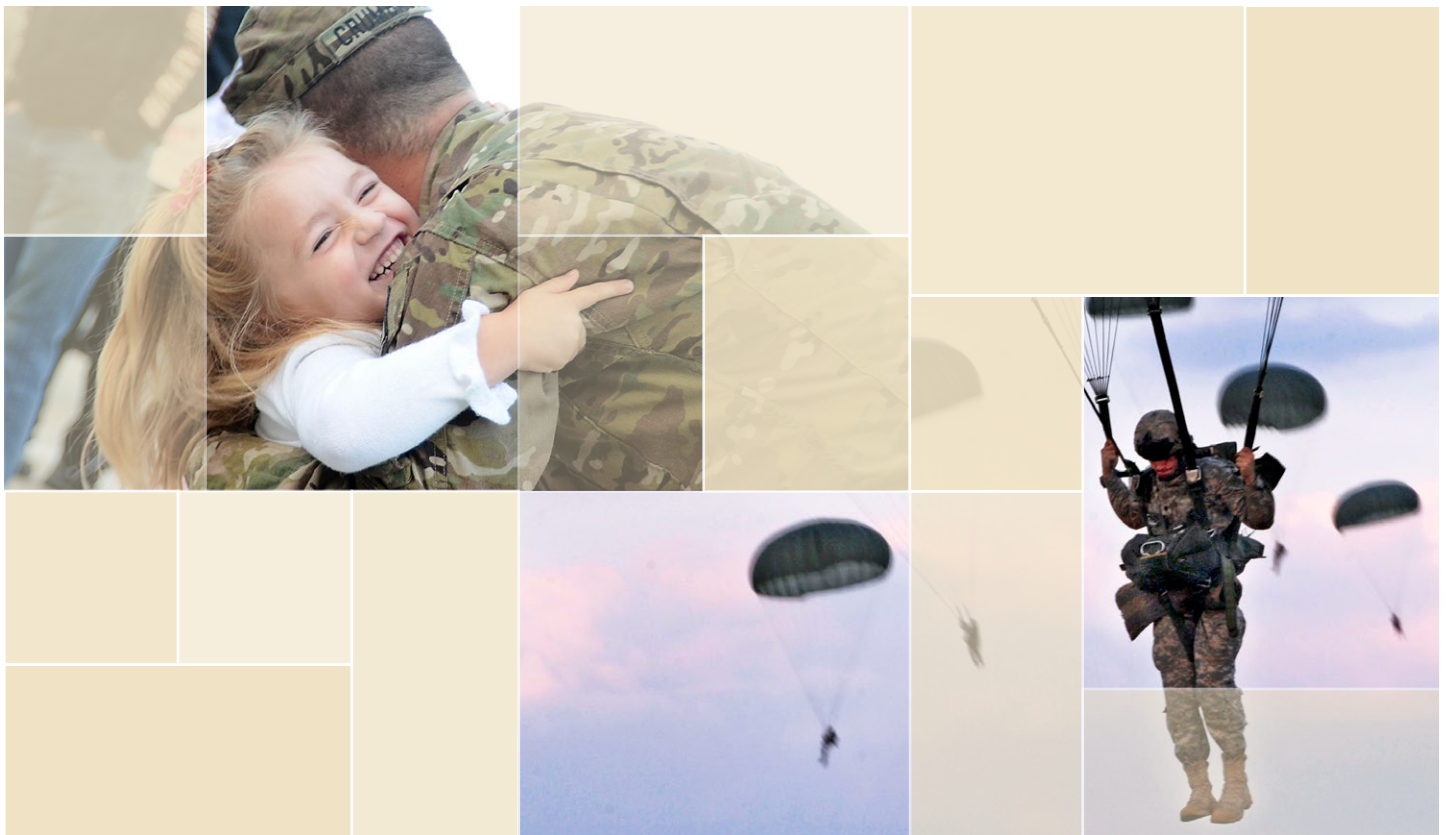


Keeping Our Families and Our Country Strong

Why North Carolina's education standards and aligned 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 North Carolina Career and College Ready Standards” in the same sentence, there are three key reasons why they are clearly linked. First, retired military leaders know the standards and aligned assessments are vital for ensuring there will be well-educated individuals who are prepared to defend the nation. Second, military families depend on consistent standards for students who typically attend schools in many different districts during their K-12 years. Third, their continued implementation may impact North Carolina’s ability to retain its military bases.

Keeping the standards on track and implementing aligned assessments will also address military recruiting challenges. Although North Carolinians have a proud history of serving in the military, currently approximately 72 percent of the state’s 17-to 24-year-olds are ineligible 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 North Carolina who have high school diplomas and tried to join, 23 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 complex, 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 North Carolina Career and College Ready Standards. Both the standards and implementing 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 educators, policymakers, and the general public all have a vested interest in keeping implementation of this effort on track, there are several 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. Common standards and assessments give schools, districts, and states 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 uniform “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. **Common standards, like those included in the North Carolina Career and College Ready Standards, are essential for children from military families.** Most children from military families move between multiple states during their K-12 years. These children are significantly disadvantaged without continuity in standards and assessments among school districts and states. For example, when they move from school to school, children in military families may repeat algebra but miss out on geometry. North Carolina has more than 59,000 school-aged children of active duty military, Guard, and Reserve, so this issue is particularly important to military families whose children currently attend North Carolina’s public schools.
3. **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. Common 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, including Fort Bragg in North Carolina, are lower on some measures of performance, including high school graduation rates, than other schools in the state.

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The links between academic standards and national security:

The DoD reports that **71 percent of young Americans are currently unable to join the military**, including 72 percent in North Carolina.¹ This is due in part to the epidemic of childhood obesity and crime or substance abuse problems, along with the fact that 17 percent of young people in North Carolina do not graduate from high school on time.² An additional 23 percent of North Carolina 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

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. For example, in 2009, in North Carolina, only 32 percent of fourth grade students scored above proficient on the Nation's Report Card assessment (NAEP), versus 69 percent on the state test.⁶

Maintaining North Carolina's Career and College Ready Standards and implementing aligned assessments are crucial to improving the education system.

Evidence for how this works is provided by recent successes in raising high school graduation rates. Congress acted to require states to include graduation rates among its accountability measures and to publicly report the results. However, **each state could use its own inconsistent and**

often misleading system for measuring and reporting graduation rates. This process hid more than it revealed.⁷ To address this problem a task force of the National Governors Association (NGA) researched the best methodologies and came up with a uniform standard that all states have now adopted.⁸ 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.⁹ Using a common way to measure graduation rates is not the only reason graduation 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.¹⁰

This matches the situation in the military, and it is standard operating procedure among many successful businesses and sports teams across America. The U.S. military has become the strongest fighting force in history by using accurate data to continually improve its operations. Similarly, imagine if every American business used a different currency, every football team chose the

length of its own field, or each baseball team used different ways to compute the batting average of their players.

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 North Carolina Career and College Ready Standards and aligned 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. The NGA and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) have played a crucial role in facilitating that process by helping to develop and disseminate the Common Core State Standards, which states have adapted and incorporated into their own standards.

2

Good for military children

North Carolina is home to the fourth largest active military population in the U.S. and has more than 59,000 school-aged children whose active duty military parents are temporarily assigned to facilities in the state.¹¹ Military families move as often as every year and military children attend an average of six to nine different schools during their K-12 school careers.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 Other non-military families also move across state or county lines—more than 2.5 million children moved out of their home counties in 2011.¹⁴

Differences in standards and assessments can negatively impact the academic experiences of students who move frequently. For example, they might learn about algebra for two years in different schools but never learn anything about geometry.

Nearly 80% of children in military families attend local public schools.

North Carolina's Career and College Ready Standards and Aligned Assessments

North Carolina's Career and College Ready Standards establish the skills that children must achieve 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.



State leaders, working through the NGA and the CCSSO, developed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and mathematics. Most states around the country then reviewed them according to their own processes and incorporated them into their own standards. In 2010, the North Carolina Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the CCSS as North Carolina's English language arts and math standards. Implementation started in the 2012-2013 school year.⁴ Assessments aligned to the standards are also being adopted by many states.

In addition to essential academic content, North Carolina's Career and College Ready 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, districts, and states and what approaches are delivering the best results.

In light of recent criticism, North Carolina set up a commission charged with recommending whether the state should keep, revise, or drop the standards.⁵ The commission should maintain the standards and implement assessments aligned to the standards.



Fort Bragg, North Carolina (U.S. Army)

After careful consideration, DoD decided to adopt the Common Core for schools they run on military installations (Department of Defense Education Activity schools). However, most children in military families (nearly 80 percent) attend local public schools.¹⁵ Military parents are already concerned about having to move to states where the Common Core has not been adopted because it is harder for their children to adjust.¹⁶

3 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 2014.¹⁷ Of concern, a recent study found that public schools close to Fort Bragg had much lower high school graduation rates compared to other public schools in the state. Specifically, six out of the eight public schools near Fort Bragg were in the lowest performing quarter of schools in terms of high school graduation rates.¹⁸ It is not yet clear when 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 of military families attend schools off-base. Since many children of military families join the military, 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, common standards and aligned assessments can help.

Most public high schools near Fort Bragg underperform compared to schools statewide

Fort Bragg School District	Academic Performance	Graduation Rate	ACT Performance
E.E. Smith High	●	●	●
Jack Britt High School	●	●	●
Pine Forest High	●	●	●
Seventy-First High	●	●	●
South View High	●	●	●
Westover High	●	●	●
Overhills High School	●	●	●
Hoke County High	●	●	●

● 1st-25th percentile (lowest) ● 26th-74th percentile ● 75th-99th percentile (highest)

Source: WestEd (2014) analysis of 2013 data from North Carolina Public Schools

CONCLUSION

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

North Carolina will be well served by sticking with its Career and College Ready Standards and by implementing assessments aligned to those standards. Lowering educational standards cannot be an option when it comes to providing children with a quality education and preparing 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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State and County Data: High School Graduation Rates (2010-11)

Statewide	83%*	Franklin	79%	Pasquotank	77%
Alamance	76	Gaston	75	Pender	82
Alexander	77	Gates	83	Perquimans	88
Alleghany	83	Graham	88	Person	77
Anson	76	Granville	67	Pitt	70
Ashe	81	Greene	76	Polk	88
Avery	84	Guilford	83	Randolph	83
Beaufort	76	Halifax	74	Richmond	74
Bertie	79	Harnett	73	Robeson	79
Bladen	75	Haywood	79	Rockingham	72
Brunswick	79	Henderson	83	Rowan	77
Buncombe	78	Hertford	84	Rutherford	71
Burke	85	Hoke	70	Sampson	74
Cabarrus	84	Hyde	N/A	Scotland	66
Caldwell	81	Iredell	86	Stanly	79
Camden	93	Jackson	77	Stokes	81
Carteret	81	Johnston	79	Surry	81
Caswell	76	Jones	78	Swain	74
Catawba	84	Lee	80	Transylvania	78
Chatham	75	Lenoir	72	Tyrrell	N/A
Cherokee	86	Lincoln	83	Union	89
Chowan	78	McDowell	75	Vance	68
Clay	88	Macon	85	Wake	81
Cleveland	73	Madison	83	Warren	80
Columbus	81	Martin	76	Washington	83
Craven	81	Mecklenburg	74	Watauga	87
Cumberland	78	Mitchell	83	Wayne	75
Currituck	80	Montgomery	78	Wilkes	81
Dare	90	Moore	72	Wilson	69
Davidson	79	Nash	75	Yadkin	83
Davie	77	New Hanover	74	Yancey	78
Duplin	69	Northampton	79		
Durham	74	Onslow	82		
Edgecombe	75	Orange	85		
Forsyth	79	Pamlico	83		

*The statewide graduate rate is for 2012-13

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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following individuals contributed to this report: Chris Beakey, Sandra Bishop-Josef, Stefanie Campolo, David Carrier, Bill Christeson, Kara Clifford, Amy Dawson Taggart and David Osborne. MISSION: READINESS NORTH CAROLINA is supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations. MISSION: READINESS NORTH CAROLINA accepts no funds from federal, state, or local governments.

Major funding for MISSION: READINESS is provided by: Alliance for Early Success • Betterment Fund • The Bingham Program • Frances Hollis Brain Foundation • The California Education Policy Fund • The California Endowment • The Annie E. Casey Foundation • Robert Sterling Clark Foundation • CME Group Foundation • Sam L. Cohen Foundation • The Colorado Health Foundation • Early Care and Education Funders Collaborative of The Washington Area Women's Foundation • Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Foundation • Ford Foundation • Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation • The Grable Foundation • George Gund Foundation • The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust • The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation • Robert Wood Johnson Foundation • W.K. Kellogg Foundation • The Kresge Foundation • Oscar G. and Elsa S. Mayer Family Foundation • Meadows Foundation • The David & Lucile Packard Foundation • William Penn Foundation • The J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation • Raise Your Hand Texas • Rauch Foundation • Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium Fund.



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