



MISSION: READINESS

MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

Ensuring Our National Security

High-Quality Early Childhood Development and Learning And Other School Reforms in Mississippi Can Help Build a Strong Country

MISSION: READINESS is the national security organization of more than 200 retired generals, admirals and other senior military leaders who support policies and investments that will help young Americans succeed in school and later in life, thus enabling more young adults to join the military if they choose to do so.

SUMMARY: Mississippi has an opportunity to make tremendous strides. One in three young people (36 percent) does not graduate from high school on time, compared to one in four young people nationwide.¹ Even among the state's high school graduates, 38 percent of those seeking to enlist in the Army cannot join because of low scores on the military's basic exam for math, literacy and problem-solving, according to a new analysis by The Education Trust.²

Poor education outcomes are probably the top reason why an estimated 75 percent of all young Americans are unable to join the military, followed by other disqualifying factors like being overweight or having a criminal record.³ Based on Mississippi's education and health outcomes, MISSION: READINESS estimates

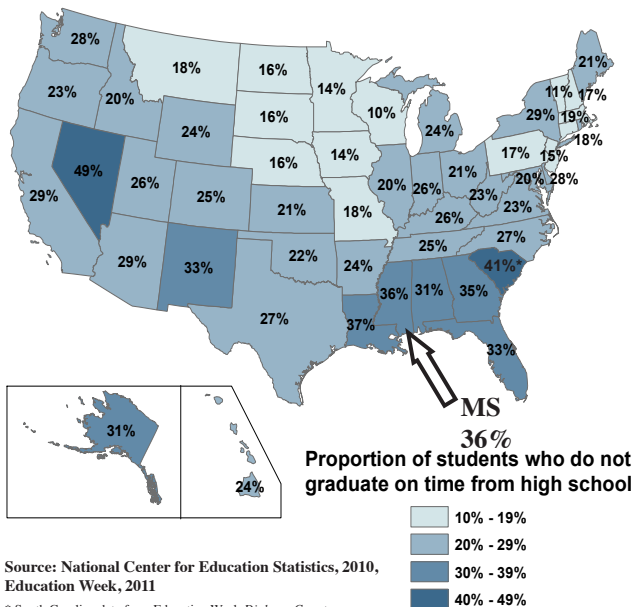
that 80 to 90 percent of young Mississippians are closed off from having the choice to join the military.

These alarming figures raise a critical question: Will our national education crisis soon become a national security crisis? While the military services are currently meeting their recruitment goals due in part to the poor economy, Defense Department officials have expressed concerns to Congress that such factors as inadequate education, obesity, poor physical fitness and involvement in crime have severely limited the pool of young adults qualified for military service and ultimately could pose a threat to our national security.⁴

Mississippi has a tremendous opportunity to help its children and the nation's security. We now know what works to help more children do well in school and in life. Long-term studies of high-quality early childhood development and learning programs show that at-risk children can benefit greatly. For example, participants in Michigan's Perry Preschool Project were 44 percent more likely to graduate high school than nonparticipants.⁵ High-quality state pre-kindergarten programs are also beginning to show that they can increase literacy skills and reduce the number of children held back in school.⁶

Too Uneducated to Join

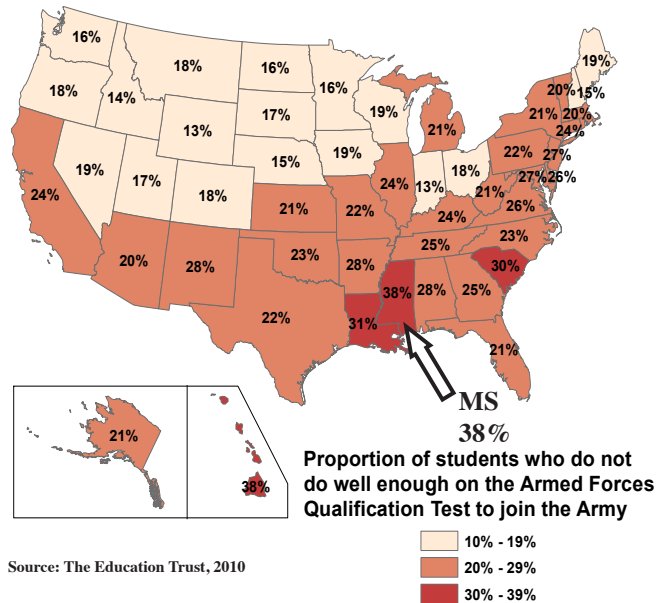
PROPORTION WHO DO NOT GRADUATE: Nationwide, one in four young Americans does not graduate high school on time. In some states it is even worse:



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, Education Week, 2011

* South Carolina data from Education Week Diploma Counts

PROPORTION WHO SCORE TOO LOW: Out of those who do graduate and then try to join the Army, nearly one in four cannot join because they score too low on the military's entrance exam:



Source: The Education Trust, 2010



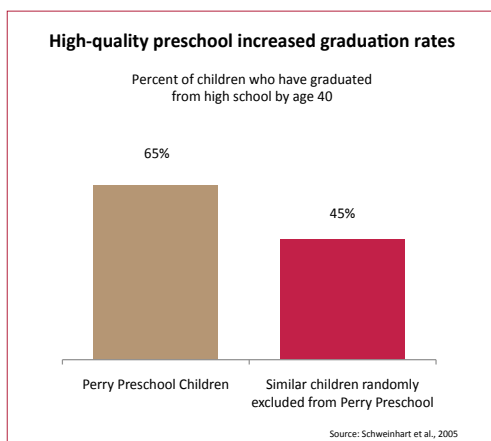
High-Quality Early Childhood Development and Learning Works

There are several approaches that education experts say can help improve our schools. We know, for example, that better and more current data on what is happening in our schools, more sophisticated analysis of that data, and more accountability for results in the classrooms are essential building blocks for success in schools, just as they have been in police departments, America’s top companies and certainly in the military.⁷

When we speak of school reform, we should be speaking of “early education to graduation” reform, not just K-12 reform. Research clearly shows that getting kids off to the right start in life can provide the crucial foundation for helping disadvantaged kids in particular to succeed in school and later in life.⁸ While other reforms are also necessary, this report focuses on the impressive results that can be achieved with high-quality early childhood development and learning. For example:

The **High/Scope Perry Preschool Project** in Ypsilanti, Michigan, randomly assigned disadvantaged 3- and 4-year-olds to a high-quality pre-kindergarten program or to a control group with no intervention, and followed them. The results:

- By age 14, almost half of the disadvantaged children in the project were performing at a basic achievement level or better in school compared to just 15 percent of the children in the control group.
- The children who participated in the project were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school.
- By age 27, those who did *not* attend the Perry Preschool were five times more likely to have been chronic criminal offenders than the children who participated.
- By age 40, those who attended the Perry Preschool were earning more on average and were, for example, a third more likely to have a car than those who did not attend.⁹



The **Abecedarian** home visiting and preschool program randomly assigned disadvantaged children in North Carolina, starting in infancy, to a high-quality early childhood development and learning program or to no intervention. The results:

- The children *not* in Abecedarian were 75 percent more likely to be held back in school.



The Modern Military Needs Well-Educated Recruits

- The children served by Abecedarian were 2.5 times more likely to be attending a 4-year college at age 21.¹⁰

The **Child-Parent Centers** pre-kindergarten programs in Chicago have served over 100,000 at-risk children with long-term results:

- By age 18, children left out of the program were 70 percent more likely than participants to have been arrested for a violent crime (and, if convicted, the individual would usually not be able to serve in the military).
- By age 20, the children left out were almost twice as likely to have been placed in foster care.
- By age 20, participants were 29 percent more likely to have graduated from high school.¹¹

State pre-kindergarten programs now have evaluations proving that – if they are of high enough quality – they can deliver solid results:

- Children who did not attend high-quality pre-kindergarten in New Jersey were twice as likely to be held back by second grade.¹² Michigan’s evaluation showed that the children who did not participate in the state’s program were 51 percent more likely to be held back in school.¹³

Other Military Disqualifiers

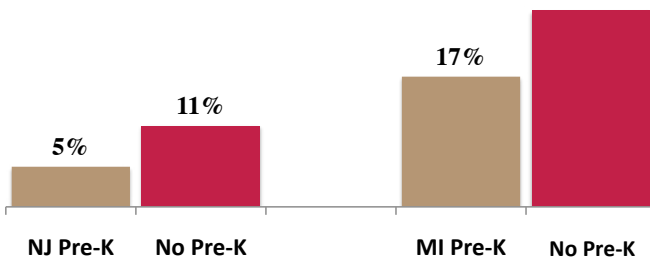
While an estimated 75 percent of young Americans nationwide are unable to join the military, 80 or 90 percent of young Mississippians may be ineligible. In addition to low graduation rates, Mississippi has the highest child and adult obesity rates in the nation.²² Approximately half of Mississippi young adults are overweight or obese. To be within a healthy weight range with a Body Mass Index under 25, these young adults would have to collectively lose 3.8 million pounds – the equivalent of 32 Abrams tanks.²³



Pre-k helps reduce grade retention

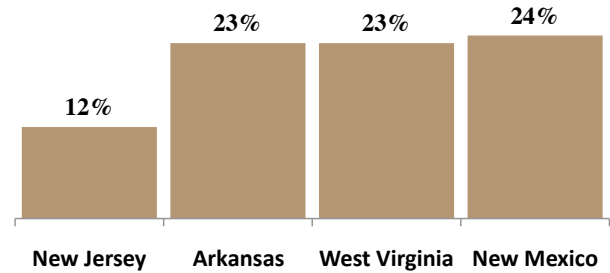
Children left out of New Jersey pre-k were twice as likely to be held back
Percent of students held back by second grade

Children left out of Michigan pre-k were 51 percent more likely to be held back
Percent of students held back by eighth grade



Pre-k improves literacy skills

Children attending pre-k answered 12-24 percent more questions correctly on a literacy test than children without pre-k



Percent more questions answered correctly on TOPEL or PRE-CTOPPP Print Awareness Test

Sources: Frede 2009; Lamy 2005; Husted 2007; Husted 2009

- In Oklahoma, New Jersey, Arkansas, West Virginia and New Mexico, studies show clear gains in literacy if the children attended pre-kindergarten programs, and Pennsylvania has shown impressive gains in reducing the number of children needing special education.¹⁴

Combined, the longer-term studies and the more recent state studies of high-quality programs provide solid evidence that early childhood development and learning programs can build a secure foundation upon which to construct meaningful school reform in America.

Early Childhood Development and Learning in Mississippi

Mississippi does not have a state-funded pre-kindergarten program, but they serve 26 percent of 3-year-olds and 34 percent of 4-year-olds with the federally funded Head Start program. Head Start serves over 26,000 Mississippi children at a cost of \$167 million and the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) helps provide 27,000 children with child care at a cost of \$78 million.¹⁵

Mississippi also has a private-public partnership called Mississippi Building Blocks that seeks to improve quality in child care centers. This effort includes a quality rating system, the Mississippi Child Care Quality Step System Program, to inform parents and improve quality care. Ensuring that programs are high-quality is critical to promote the positive outcomes seen in long-term and recent pre-k studies. Other efforts to improve quality include Excel by 5, Allies for Quality

Care and Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK).

Savings from Early Education

The costs of failure can be very high. For example, each child who grows up to drop out, use drugs and become a career criminal costs society, on average, \$2.5 million.¹⁶ So what works to help disadvantaged children succeed can produce substantial savings:

Net Savings Per Student Over Their Lifetime from Early Education Investments

High/Scope Perry Preschool	\$244,812 ¹⁷
Chicago Child-Parent Centers	\$92,220 ¹⁸

As Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman has explained his strong call for high-quality early childhood education, "Make no mistake, reducing spending in some areas is necessary and warranted [to reduce the deficit]. However, when one has dug themselves into a hole, the solution is not to stop digging as much as to start digging the hand and toe holds that facilitate climbing out."¹⁹

Conclusion

There are more than 200 retired admirals and generals who are members of MISSION: READINESS.²¹ We wish to make clear that investing wisely now in education reform across America – especially improvements in early childhood development and learning – is a necessary investment in our national security. As an essential part of education reform, we support efforts to ensure that states improve and increase access to high-quality early learning, especially for their most disadvantaged children. Without enough skilled men and women available to serve in tomorrow's armed services, we cannot maintain the strength of our military.

We strongly support state policymakers' efforts to improve quality in Mississippi's Head Start and child care programs, and federal efforts to fund Head Start and CCDBG. We also support the federal Early Learning Challenge, an effort to encourage states to more aggressively pursue high-quality early learning. Combined, these wise state and federal efforts can produce the strong results America needs.

The Current Status of Military Recruiting

Due to the economic slowdown, military services are meeting their recruitment goals. However, Dr. Curtis Gilroy, Director of Accession Policy in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, has warned that when the economy gains strength, recruitment and retention challenges could return if America does not do a better job now of producing more young men and women qualified for service.²⁰



Endnotes

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- 2 Theokas, C. (2010). *Shut out of the military: Today's high school education doesn't mean you're ready for today's Army*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust. Retrieved on February 22, 2011 from http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/ASVAB_4.pdf. Nationally, 22.6 percent of individuals seeking enlistment did not achieve a qualifying score on the Army's entrance exam. Of the 3,000 African Americans that took the ASVAB in Mississippi, half did not score high enough to qualify for the Army.
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- 6 To access a selection of state pre-kindergarten evaluations with evidence of effectiveness, see: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. (2010). *Research shows state pre-k works*. Washington, DC: Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. Retrieved on March 10, 2011 from www.fightcrime.org
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- 23 This calculation of the excess pounds 18- to 24-year-old American women and men would have had to lose to be of healthy weight (below a BMI of 25) in each state and nationally was calculated by the CDC's epidemiologist who processes BRFSS data, Liping Pan, and was provided in a table to MISSION: READINESS in a personal communication, March 18, 2010 and was originally reported in our national *Too Fat to Fight* report. Other findings for this survey can be found at: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion. (2009). Prevalence and trends data – Overweight and obesity. *Behavioral Risk Factor and Surveillance System*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved on April 1, 2010 from <http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/BRFSS/list.asp?cat=OB&yr=2008&qkey=4409&state=All>. The tank estimate is from: *M1 Abrams main battle tank*. Retrieved on March 29, 2011 from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/ground/m1-specs.htm> One tank equals 60 tons, or 120,000 lbs. 3.8 million pounds that must be lost equals almost 32 tanks.

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