



MISSION: READINESS

MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

High-Quality State Early Education for the Mississippi Delta: A Wise Investment in Our National Security

MISSION: READINESS is the national security organization of more than 300 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's young people have a long tradition of answering the call to serve in our armed forces. Just in 2010 alone, almost 1,500 young men and women joined the military. Over the years, many have served with great distinction, for example, Mississippi native General Louis Wilson, Jr. not only received the Congressional Medal of Honor during World War II, he went on to become Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps.

Many who wanted to join, however, could not. Alarming, today, only one in four young adults in America can join the military.¹ Along with other disqualifiers, too many young people are overweight, poorly educated or involved in crime. Some have more than one reason they cannot join. As bad as that one-in-four figure is, it is worse in Mississippi, and worse yet in the Delta. Therefore, it is likely that less than one in ten young adults from the Mississippi Delta can join the military.

Over one third, 38 percent, of young people in Mississippi do not graduate on time from high school, and among those who do, an additional third who try to join the military are not allowed in because they do not do well enough on the military's entrance exam. Mississippi also leads the nation in the percentage of overweight 18- to 24-year-olds.

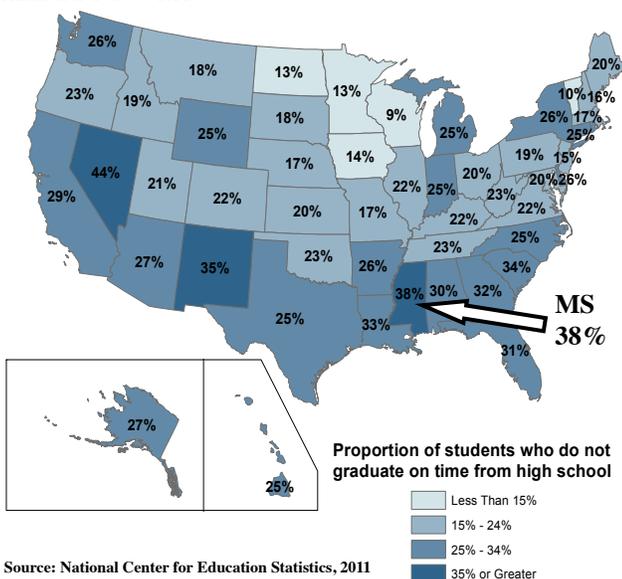
The data for the Delta is worse. On average, 44 percent of Delta students in ten selected districts did not graduate from high school on time. As for obesity, out of 82 counties in the state, Delta counties make up 10 of the 20 counties with the most overweight adults in Mississippi. (See map on page 2).

Research shows that high-quality early childhood development and learning can improve graduation rates, cut crime, and even help reduce the number of young people who are overweight. But Mississippi has yet to fully harness this engine for growth. Neighboring Arkansas, Louisiana and Tennessee have high-quality programs that are beginning to see results.

To build the strongest possible America and a strong Mississippi, we need to start with well-educated, fit and responsible young people. The best military hardware in the world will not keep us safe if we do not have qualified young adults ready to serve. Even during these challenging economic times, Mississippi should not wait to initiate more intensive efforts to ensure that all disadvantaged children in the state have access to high-quality early childhood development and learning. The Delta is an excellent place to start.

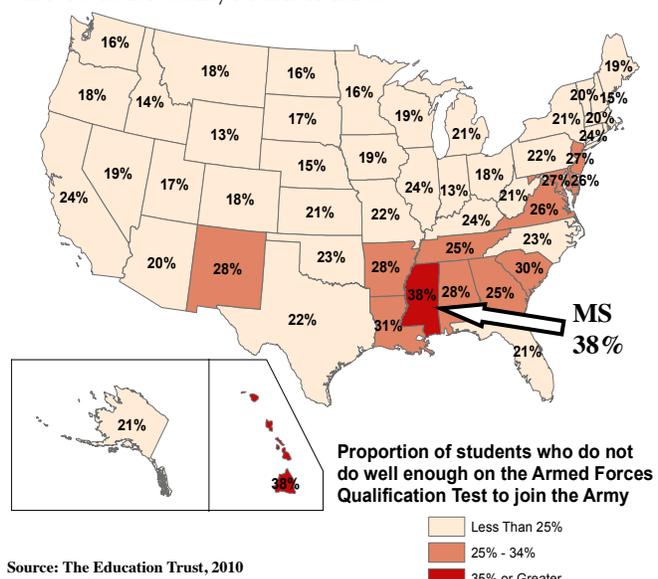
Inadequate Education Prevents Young Americans From Serving

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, 2011

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



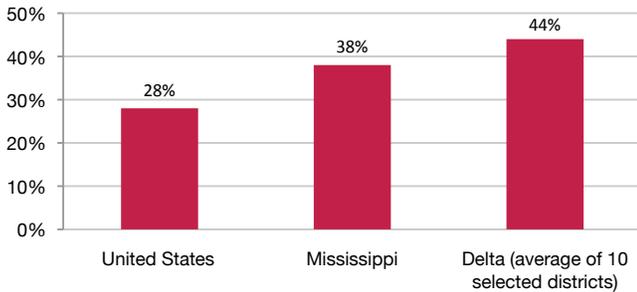
Military Service is Out of Reach for Too Many

Mississippi should be proud of the many young people who are bringing honor to the state. Mississippi's young people have answered the call again and again to serve in our military with 76 having paid the ultimate sacrifice during the latest wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.²

Today's modern military needs well-educated and fit individuals more than ever before. When it comes to our national security, we cannot afford to be second best. There should be concern that the state is not preparing enough young people to meet the military's high standards:

- Childhood obesity has tripled in America and half of all 18- to 24-year-olds in Mississippi are now overweight or obese, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.³

Failure-to-graduate-on-time rates



Source: Education Week, 2011

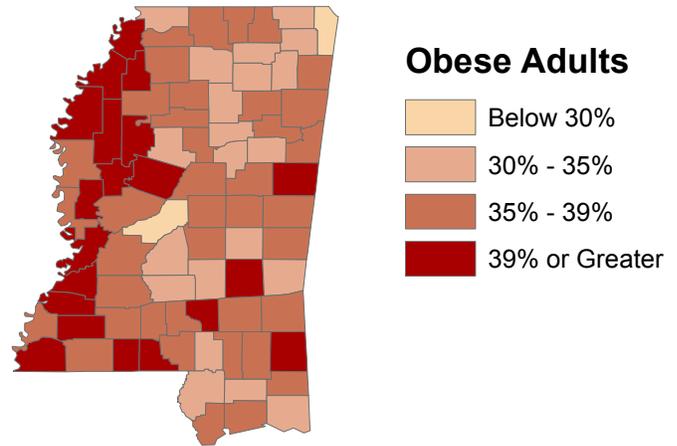
Mississippi Delta Cities Failure-to-Graduate-on-Time Rates

Location	Rate
Yazoo City	53%
Vicksburg	50%
Ruleville	48%
Greenville	48%
Cleveland	43%
Greenwood	39%
Indianola	36%
Clarksdale	30%
Leland	25%
Hollandale	25%
Weighted Average for These Districts	44%

Source: Education Week, 2011

- 38 percent of young adults in Mississippi have not graduated from high school on time.⁴
- Of those who have graduated, an additional 38 percent of those who try to join the military cannot because they do not do well enough on the military's entrance exam.⁵

Percent Obese Adults in Mississippi, 2009



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The available data for the Mississippi Delta counties indicate that the figures are worse for both obesity and high school graduation:

- Mississippi has 82 counties, 20 of which make it into the highest category for obesity, and 10 of those 20 counties are in the Delta. (see the map above).
- The average high school failure-to-graduate-on-time rate for 10 representative Delta school districts is 5 percentage points higher than it is statewide (44 percent vs. 38 percent). (see the table on left).

High-Quality Early Childhood Education Works

It may not be news that many young people in the Delta are facing daunting challenges. The good news is that high-quality early childhood development and learning can go a long way toward helping young Delta residents to overcome many of those challenges.

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 to succeed in school and later in life.⁶ While other reforms are also necessary – such as the effective



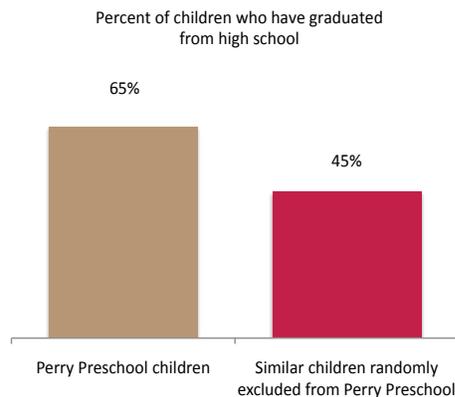
use of data collection and analysis and making sure teachers are all performing well – this report focuses on the impressive and proven results that can be achieved with high-quality early childhood education, including increased graduation rates, reduced crime and even lower obesity.

How Early Childhood Education Can Raise Graduation Rates, Cut Crime and More

The **High/Scope Perry Preschool Project** in Ypsilanti, Michigan, randomly assigned disadvantaged 3- and 4-year-olds to a high-quality early education 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.⁷

Children in high-quality early education had a 44 percent higher graduation rate than children left out of the program



Source: Schweinhart et al., 2005

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

- The children not in Abecedarian were 75 percent more likely to be held back in school.
- The children served by Abecedarian were 2.5 times more likely to be attending a 4-year college at age 21.⁸



The **Child-Parent Centers** early education 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.⁹

How Early Childhood Education Can Help Cut Childhood Obesity

The sooner children learn good eating and exercising habits, the better. Though the Mississippi Delta may seem to have very little in common with New York City, they did have one common problem – rising obesity rates among their children. New York City has discovered that its child care centers are a crucial part of efforts aimed at reducing childhood obesity, a success other localities around America can borrow lessons from and adapt for their own conditions. The city worked to improve the nutrition of meals and snacks served to children in child care centers, provided additional funding for play equipment at some centers, and provided dieticians to help the teachers, kids and especially their parents to learn about the importance of starting early to build healthy eating habits.

It is paying off. The city employs an approach called Fitnessgram to measure the height, weight, and physical fitness of all its children in public schools in the school district – the



Mississippi has a proud tradition of service to our country



General Louis H. Wilson Jr.
Mississippi native, Medal of Honor recipient and 26th Commandant of the Marine Corps

At the time of his death, an online tribute noted, “As a 24-year-old Marine captain during World War II, Wilson led his company through a bloody assault on Guam in July 1944. On the fourth day of fierce fighting, he led a successful attack to seize a heavily defended hill. Wounded three times, he continued to lead his men throughout the night.”

He later became Commandant of the Marine Corps as the military was in the middle of its difficult transition to an all-volunteer force after the war in Vietnam. He raised the percentage of Marines with a high school degree from less than half in 1975 to 69 percent two years later, and he insisted that anyone who did not have a high school degree must get the equivalent of an A on qualifying tests. He also was uncompromising about physical fitness, warning that “If I see a fat Marine, he’s got a problem, and so do his commanding officers.” He was instrumental in creating the professional, integrated fighting force that characterizes today’s Marine Corps.

General Wilson was also the first Commandant to serve full time on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Source: Cyril J. O’Brien,
former Marine correspondent
during World War I

The Medal of Honor citation read that he “repeatedly exposed himself to the merciless hail of shrapnel and bullets, dashing 50 yards into the open on one occasion to rescue a wounded Marine lying helpless beyond the front lines.”

largest school district in America. They have found that thanks to the efforts in their child care programs and other efforts throughout the city, rates of obesity among white 5- to 6-year-old students dropped by 24 percent within just four years, and by 7 percent and 6 percent among black and Hispanic children. This proves that it is possible to bring childhood obesity down and that starting early to reach children and their families through child care centers and other efforts is an effective way to reverse this epidemic of childhood obesity.¹⁰

Other State Early Education Programs Point the Way for Mississippi

A growing body of research now shows that state early childhood development and learning programs – if they are of high enough quality – can deliver solid results.

Evaluations of neighboring state programs

- **Arkansas:** The Arkansas Better Chance program (ABC) has improved math, vocabulary and early literacy skills, with significant results maintained through first grade. For example, children receiving ABC entered kindergarten four months ahead on vocabulary scores than similar children not in the program.¹¹

- **Tennessee:** A randomized controlled trial (the gold standard) showed that the children in the Tennessee Voluntary Pre-K program made more gains in early literacy and math than the kids randomly assigned to not receive the program. Those gains ranged from 37 percent greater improvement on one measure of early math skills to 176 percent greater gains on vocabulary. Kindergarten teachers further confirmed that the children receiving Pre-K arrived in their classrooms significantly better prepared to start school than the children not receiving Pre-K.¹²
- **Louisiana:** Mississippi’s next-door neighbor, Louisiana, has its LA 4 state early education program. It helps more children achieve above-basic

The research indicates that, for low-income children attending early education, the program alone eliminates nearly half the gap in academic performance between the early education children and their more advantaged peers.

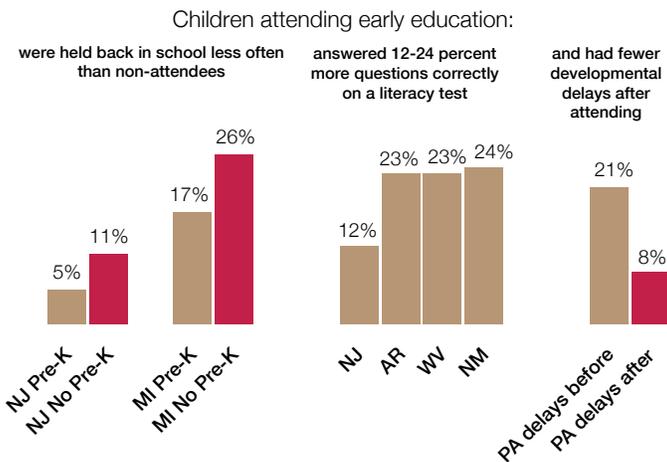


levels of academic proficiency by 3rd and 4th grades. For example, 3rd grade children are 22 and 17 percent more likely to score above basic on English and math, respectively, if they attended the state early education program. The research indicates that, for low-income children attending early education, the program alone eliminates nearly half the gap in academic performance between the early education children and their more advantaged peers.

Results for literacy, special education, and avoiding grade retention

- **Literacy and special education gains across states:** In Oklahoma, New Jersey, Arkansas, West Virginia and New Mexico, studies show clear gains in literacy if the children attended early education programs, and Pennsylvania has shown impressive gains in reducing the number of children needing special education.¹³
- **Reductions in children held back:** Children who did not attend high-quality early education in New Jersey were twice as likely to be held back by second grade.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

State Early Education Improves Educational Outcomes



Sources: Frede 2009; Maloffeva 2007; Lamy 2005; Hustedt 2007; Hustedt 2009; Bagnato 2009

Clear lessons:

Combining the research results from the longer-term Perry, Child-Parent Centers and Abecedarian studies with the more recent state studies of high-quality programs clearly demonstrates that high-quality early education programs can build a secure foundation upon which to construct meaningful school reform.

Early Education Quality Matters

Numerous research studies have documented the key characteristics of high-quality early learning programs, including:

- Highly skilled teachers with appropriate compensation;²¹
- Comprehensive and age-appropriate curricula;²²
- Strong family involvement and effective parent coaching;²³
- Small staff-to-child ratios to ensure each child gets sufficient attention;²⁴
- Small, age-appropriate class sizes;²⁵ and
- Screening and referral services for developmental, health or behavior problems.²⁶

These are the key features of early learning programs that research indicates are essential for delivering good early education and care.

Many of the successful state efforts are in states next to or near Mississippi. Mississippi can also learn two important lessons by looking at programs farther away:

- New Jersey shows it is possible to get strong results by initially targeting programs to localities that have more at-risk kids, such as the Delta; and
- As cited above, New York City shows that, using early childhood development and learning opportunities, it is possible to start turning the childhood obesity epidemic around by focusing on reaching younger children and their parents at a time when the children are first establishing their lifetime eating habits.

Mississippi Has an Advantage

Mississippi has experimented with what can be done to improve the quality of its early childhood development and learning in the state. For example, efforts include Mississippi Building Blocks, Excel by 5, Allies for Quality Childcare Project and the state Quality Rating and Improvement System, along with the Mississippi Child Care Resource and Referral Network, but there is not yet a statewide early childhood development and learning system. Mississippi



Mississippi can now build on experiences in the state combined with the experiences of successful states around the country to come up with a truly first-class system that delivers strong results.

can now build on experiences in the state combined with the experiences of successful states around the country to come up with a truly first-class system that delivers strong results. In the interest of raising upcoming generations who are mentally, physically, and morally prepared to succeed in life and serve their nation if they choose to, Mississippi must expend the effort and funding to ensure high-quality early childhood development and learning is available in our state.

The risk is not behind us

During the height of the Iraq War, some sections of our military fell short of recruitment goals. For example, in 2005, the active duty Army failed to meet its goals by 8 percent and the number of high school graduates slipped; the Army reserve missed its goal by 16 percent; and the Navy Reserve missed its goal by 1,700 personnel. Congress voted to increase sign-up bonuses and more recruiters were deployed. Stop-loss policies were also used at points during 2005 to keep up to 15,000 additional Army soldiers deployed with their units past their initial enlistment periods.

The recession has temporarily helped with recruitment. But when the impact of the recession is over and fewer people seek to join the military, or if America is drawn into a new conflict, our military could again have trouble finding enough well-educated recruits without excess body fat.

Sources: Congressional Budget Office and the US Army

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 But recent analysis shows that high-quality early childhood development and learning can prevent many of those expenses.

Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman explains why he calls for significant new investments in high-quality

early childhood development and learning systems even during these times of serious fiscal challenge: “Make no mistake, reducing spending in some areas is necessary and warranted [to reduce federal and state deficits]. 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

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

Conclusion

There are more than 300 retired admirals and generals who are members of MISSION: READINESS.²⁰ We know 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 the quality of and increase access to high-quality early learning, especially for their most disadvantaged children. If early childhood development and learning is done right, it can also be our most effective approach for reducing the epidemic of childhood obesity. Mississippi should take advantage of the opportunity to build a first-class early childhood development and learning system that takes the lessons already learned and creates a system that delivers high-quality results.

Our nation’s future security depends on having enough educated and fit young men and women available to serve in uniform. Investing in high-quality early childhood development and learning is investing in our national security.



Endnotes

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