



MISSION: READINESS

MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

Our Troubled Education System: A Threat to National Security

High-Quality Early Education & Other School Reforms Cannot Wait

MISSION: READINESS is the organization of over 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 and will enable more young adults to join the military if they choose to do so.

SUMMARY: One in four young people in America does not graduate from high school on time.¹ Even among our nation's high school graduates, nearly one in four seeking to enlist cannot join the Army because of low scores on the military's basic exam for math, literacy and problem-solving, according to a new analysis of the military's data by The Education Trust.²

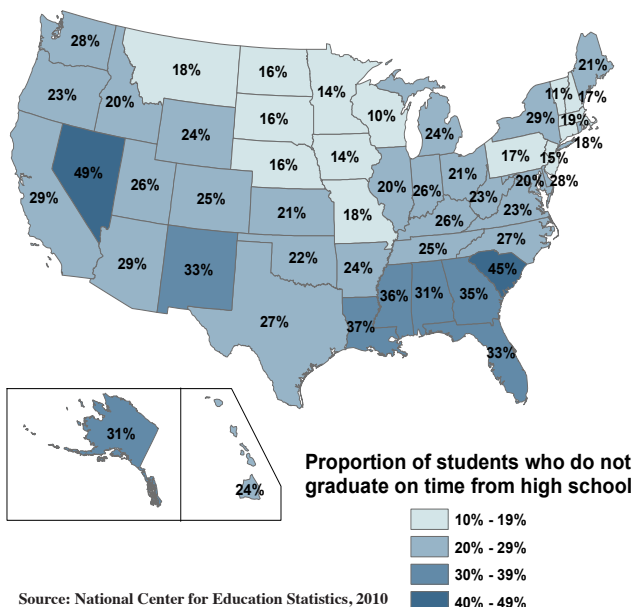
While there are other major disqualifying factors – including being overweight and having a criminal record – poor education is probably the biggest reason why an estimated 75 percent of all young Americans are unable to join the military.³

These alarming figures raise a critical question: Will our 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

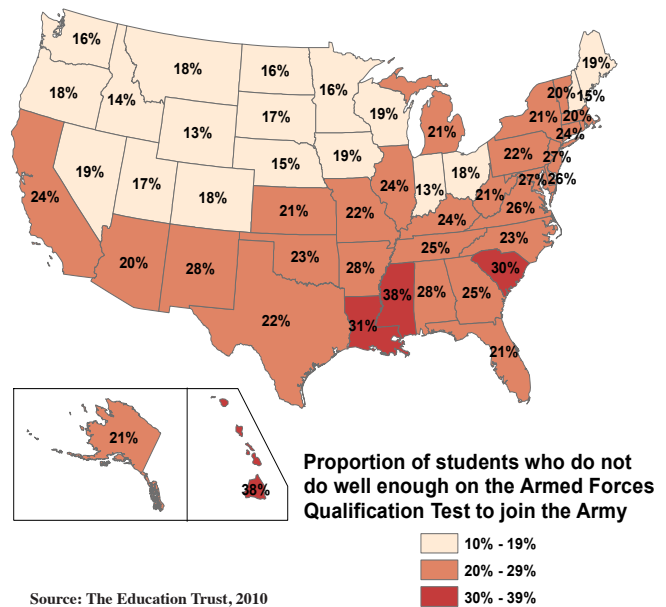
We know what works to help more children do well in school and in life. Long-term studies of high-quality early education show that at-risk children benefit greatly from these programs. For example, children who participated in the Perry Preschool Project were 44 percent more likely to graduate high school than those who did not.⁵ In addition, high-quality state early education programs are now beginning to show they can increase the literacy skills of those served 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:



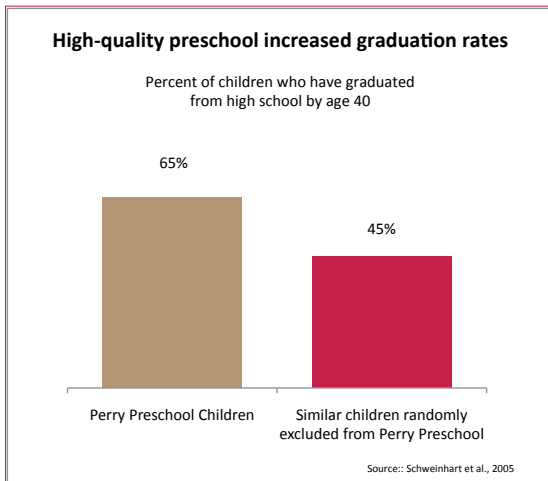
PROPORTION WHO SCORE TOO LOW: Out of those who do graduate and then try to join the Army, nearly one in four cannot join because they score too low on the military's entrance exam:





High-Quality Early Education 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 brief focuses on the impressive results that can be achieved with high-quality early education. For example:

The **High/Scope Perry Preschool Project** in Ypsilanti, Michigan, randomly assigned disadvantaged 3- and 4-year-



The Modern Military Needs Well-Educated Recruits

olds to a high-quality pre-kindergarten program or to no intervention. 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

Physical Fitness: Junk Food Out, P.E. Back In

Based on surveys done for the military and for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about one in four young Americans is too heavy to serve in the military.²⁰ This is mainly due to consuming too much junk food and sugary sodas, so MISSION: READINESS has worked hard with other organizations to help get junk food out of our schools. That’s a start.²¹

Getting kids to be more active is the next battle. Regular exercise can help more young people to control their weight and become eligible to join the military if they so choose. It will also help many other young people who are not too heavy to join, but who are so inactive prior to joining that when they report for basic training they have trouble running two miles as fast as other, more fit recruits. Data shows that recruits who have slow running

times are at higher risk for tendon injuries and stress fractures. Those injuries can force injured recruits to recycle back through basic training or to even leave the military altogether – at considerable cost to taxpayers.²²

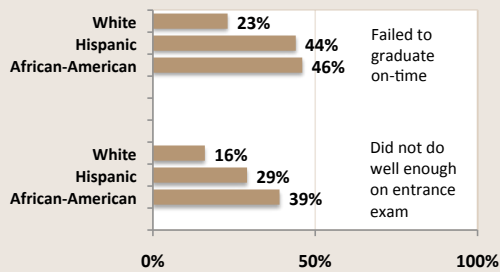
Unfortunately only 25 percent of male high school seniors and just 20 percent of female seniors currently participate in daily physical education classes.²³ So, along with getting the junk food and sugary sodas out of our schools, MISSION: READINESS is calling for education reform to ensure that states and districts report on whether they are meeting nationally recognized standards for physical activity by children. This will encourage states and local school districts to initiate their own efforts to help children adopt healthier lifestyles that can last a lifetime.



Education Problems: Even Worse for Minorities

The overall picture is discouraging enough: one in four young Americans is not graduating on time from high school. But a high school degree is often not enough to ensure entry into the military. Of those who have a degree and try to join the military, nearly one in four cannot do well enough on the military's entrance exam to join the Army. For several subgroups, including African Americans and Hispanics, the picture is even grimmer:

Students who did *not* graduate on-time, or who did *not* do well enough on the military entrance exam to be able to join the Army



Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, 2010
The Education Trust, 2010

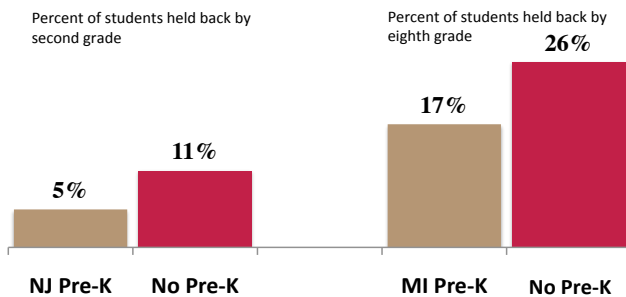
The **Child-Parent Centers** pre-kindergarten programs in Chicago have served over 100,000 at-risk children with long-term results:

- 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.¹⁰

Pre-k helps reduce grade retention

Children left out of New Jersey pre-k were twice as likely to be held back

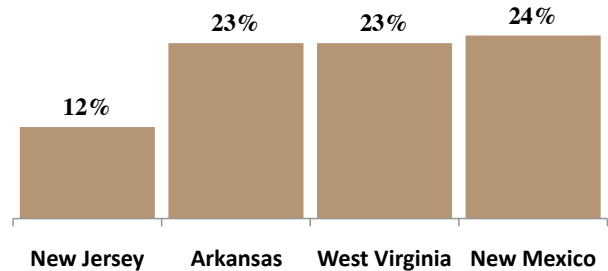
Children left out of Michigan pre-k were 51 percent more likely to be held back



Sources: Frede 2009; Maloffeva 2007

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; Hustedt 2007; Hustedt 2009

The **Abecedarian** home visiting and preschool program randomly assigned disadvantaged children in North Carolina to a high-quality early education 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 21.¹¹

State pre-kindergarten programs are beginning to prove 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 (11 percent vs. 5 percent), and in Michigan, children left out of the state pre-kindergarten program were 51 percent more likely to be held back by eighth grade (26 percent vs. 17 percent).¹²
- 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.¹³

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

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. America also spends \$20 billion a year on child protection and foster care services.¹⁴ So what works to help disadvantaged children succeed can produce substantial savings:

Net Savings from Early Education Investments

High/Scope Perry Preschool	\$244,812 ¹⁵
Chicago Child-Parent Centers	\$70,977 ¹⁶



The current status of military recruiting

Due to the economic slowdown, military services are making 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.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."¹⁷

Conclusion

There are already over 200 retired admirals and generals who are members of MISSION: READINESS.¹⁹ We wish to make clear that investing wisely now in education reform – especially improvements in early education – 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. Without enough skilled men and women available to serve in tomorrow's armed services, we cannot maintain the strength of our military.

Endnotes

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- 19 For an up-to-date list, see our website www.missionreadiness.org
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Acknowledgments

MISSION: READINESS is the non-partisan, nonprofit, national security organization of more than 200 retired generals and admirals. The military leaders of MISSION: READINESS call on all policymakers to ensure America's security and prosperity by supporting interventions proven to help America's youth succeed academically, stay physically fit, and abide by the law.

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