



**MISSION: READINESS**  
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS



# A STRONGER AMERICA

We need the Oklahoma Academic Standards and aligned assessments to achieve a stronger military and a more productive economy





## WHO WE ARE

MISSION: READINESS is the nonprofit, nonpartisan national security organization of more than 400 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](http://www.missionreadiness.org).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# SUMMARY

While there are other major disqualifying factors – including being overweight and having a criminal record – poor educational achievement is one of the biggest reasons why an estimated 75 percent of all young Americans are unable to join the military. More than one-fifth of young Oklahomans do not graduate high school on time and even among those who graduate from high school, nearly a quarter of those seeking to enlist in the Army cannot join because of low scores on the military's entrance exam for math, literacy and problem solving. These alarming figures raise a critical question: Will shortcomings in our state and local education systems become a threat to national security?

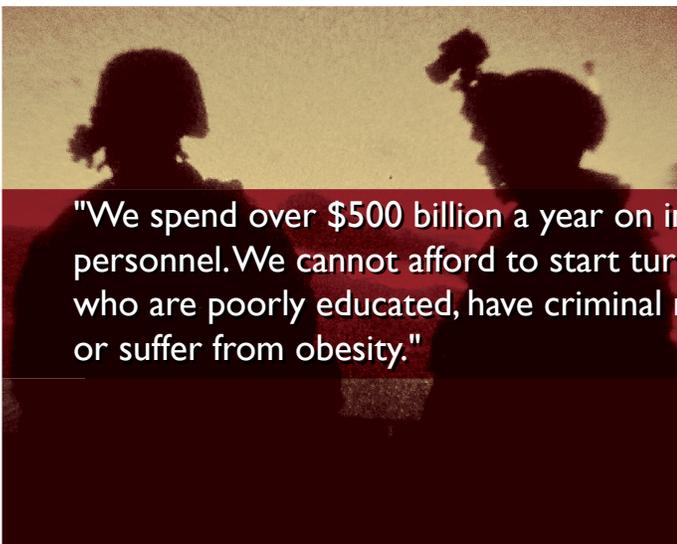
We need enough skilled men and women available to serve in tomorrow's armed services, to ensure the future strength of our military. What happens in our classrooms today will determine our future military readiness. Businesses in the private sector are seeking many of the same skill sets and running into the same challenging deficits. The Oklahoma Academic Standards can help ensure that students are receiving a high-quality education, so that all students are prepared for success in postsecondary education, the civilian workforce or the military, if they choose to serve. They can also help ensure that children who move frequently, including military children, receive a consistent, high-quality education across districts and states.

The Oklahoma Academic Standards are a rigorous set of educational standards for English language arts and mathematics for K-12 education. In addition to essential

academic content, the standards focus on critical thinking, complex problem solving and effective communication—all key skills for today and tomorrow's military, as well as for many other careers. The Oklahoma Academic Standards, developed by teachers, school administrators and other experts, were adopted by the Oklahoma State Board of Education in June 2010 and began implementation starting in the 2010-2011 school year and expect to be completed by the end of the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>1</sup>

But standards alone are not enough. To have an impact on student outcomes, there must be accountability. Standards must be accompanied by assessments, based on 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. Oklahoma started implementing assessments aligned to the standards in 2010-2011.<sup>2</sup>

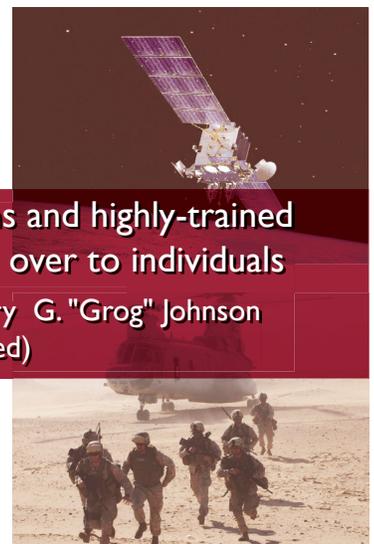
The Oklahoma Academic Standards and aligned assessments will not magically turn things around overnight. Because the new standards are more rigorous than prior standards, at first there is likely to be a decrease in test scores, compared to previous assessments. But having high standards and accountability through related assessments will move us closer to all students doing well. Oklahoma is moving in the right direction to ensure that more than one in four young adults will be eligible to join the military. Oklahoma should continue on this course.



**"We spend over \$500 billion a year on integrated weapon systems and highly-trained personnel. We cannot afford to start turning our defense systems over to individuals who are poorly educated, have criminal records, or suffer from obesity."**



Admiral Gregory G. "Grog" Johnson  
US Navy (Retired)



# A STRONGER AMERICA

We need the Oklahoma Academic Standards and aligned assessments to achieve a stronger military and a more productive economy

Poor educational achievement is one of the biggest reasons why an estimated 75 percent of all young Americans are unable to join the military.<sup>3</sup> In Oklahoma, 22 percent of young people do not graduate on time and 23 percent of high school graduates seeking to enlist in the Army cannot join because of low scores on the military's entrance exam for math, literacy and problem-solving.<sup>4</sup> These shortcomings in our state and local education systems can become a threat to national security. We need enough skilled men and women available to serve in tomorrow's armed services, to ensure the future strength of our military. Businesses in the private sector are seeking many of the same skill sets and running into the same challenging deficits.

In addition, children in military families are frequently burdened by variations in educational standards. Military children attend six to nine different schools during their K-12 school years.<sup>5</sup> These differences in standards, expectations

and assessments can negatively impact their academic experience. For example, a military child might take algebra for three years in different schools, but never learn geometry. Many non-military children are also mobile: more than 2.5 million children moved out of their home counties in 2011.<sup>6</sup>

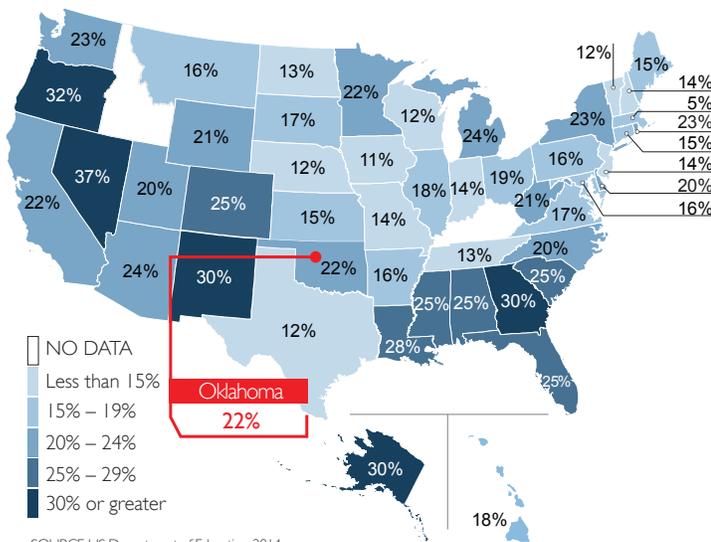
## MOVING AHEAD BY RAISING EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

The Oklahoma Academic Standards offer a way out of these dilemmas. The standards for English language arts and mathematics are rigorous learning goals that outline what students should know at each grade level and upon high school graduation. For example, by the end of kindergarten, children should print many upper- and lowercase letters and count to 20, orally and in writing. By the end of third grade, children should be able to read grade level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression. By high school

### INADEQUATE EDUCATION PREVENTS YOUNG AMERICANS FROM SERVING

Proportion Who Do Not Graduate

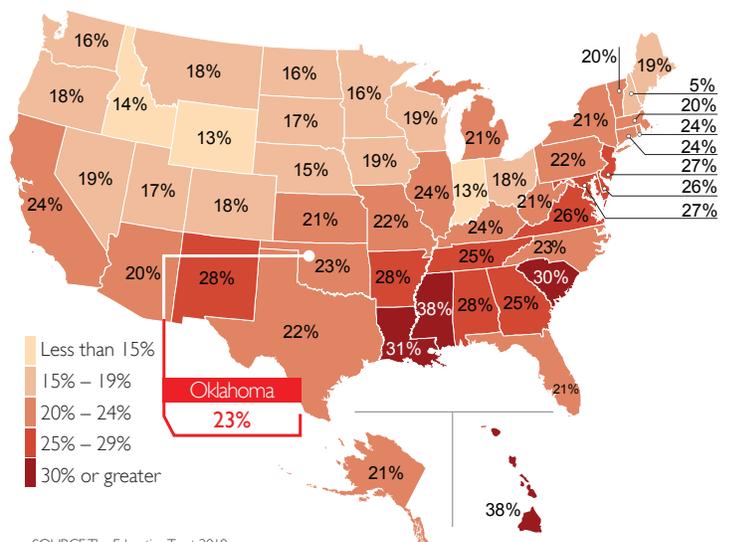
Nationwide, **one in five** young Americans do not graduate on time from high school. In some states it is even worse.



SOURCE: US Department of Education, 2014

Proportion Who Score Too Low

Out of those who do graduate and try to join the Army, **over one in five** cannot join because they score too low on Armed Forces Qualification Test.



SOURCE: The Education Trust, 2010.

graduation, students should read, analyze, and compare historically and culturally significant works of literature and use a variety of math problem-solving strategies. In addition to essential academic content, the standards will help students develop higher-order skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving, being able to comprehend and communicate complex text—skills essential for today’s and tomorrow’s military, as well as for many other jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

Given the rigor of the Oklahoma Academic Standards, it is likely that their implementation will result in more military applicants being able to score highly enough on the military’s entrance exam to join (the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, or ASVAB). Parents will also benefit from the standards, as they will know what their children should learn at each grade level, and can hold schools accountable.

The Oklahoma Academic Standards establish the content and skills that children must learn 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. The standards also do not require collecting any new data on children or families.

In 2009, the Oklahoma State Board of Education began its periodic process of adapting state educational standards, in every content area, to match current demands from colleges and the workplace. As part of this process, in June 2010, the Board voted to adopt the more rigorous standards for English language arts and math and began implementation in the 2010-2011 school year.<sup>7</sup>

Results from Massachusetts demonstrate the importance of rigorous academic standards. In 1993, Massachusetts passed standards-based education reform legislation. Since that time, students in the Commonwealth have had dramatic academic growth, including leading the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test (also known as NAEP or the Nation’s Report Card), a periodic assessment of what American students know and can do.<sup>8</sup>

## ASSESSMENT IS ESSENTIAL

Education experts agree that standards alone are not enough—research has shown only weak relationships

between the quality of state educational standards and achievement test scores. To have an impact on student outcomes, there must be accountability. Standards must be accompanied by assessments based on the standards, and a system for reporting results, so everyone will know how students are really faring.<sup>9</sup> There is currently a lot of confusion about student achievement levels, because each state developed its own standards and test. For example, in 2009 in Oklahoma, for 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading, only 28 percent of students scored proficient or higher on the NAEP, versus 62 percent on the state test.<sup>10</sup> If we do not know how students are really performing, we do not know the scope of the problem, nor can we make informed efforts to solve it.

Results following implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act demonstrate the importance of

accountability in improving outcomes, and the role of accurate measurement: when states were required to use a valid method of computing graduation rates and publicly report the results, graduation rates increased.<sup>11</sup> States could no longer manipulate how graduation rates were computed in order to maximize their results. Instead, they had to implement real reforms that contributed to a real change in student outcomes: more students graduating. Rigorous

assessment was also a significant component of the Massachusetts school reform effort. They developed an assessment, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), aligned to their educational standards. Results are reported for individual students, allowing both teachers and parents to see how each child is faring. The MCAS was also high stakes: after an implementation phase, students had to pass the MCAS in 10<sup>th</sup> grade in order to graduate from high school. Experts credit the combination of rigorous standards and aligned assessment for the excellent results Massachusetts has achieved in recent years.<sup>12</sup>

Oklahoma started implementing assessments aligned to the standards in 2010-2011.<sup>13</sup> Assessments allow educators to determine how students are doing and to use this information to improve education by learning what is working in other schools, districts or states.

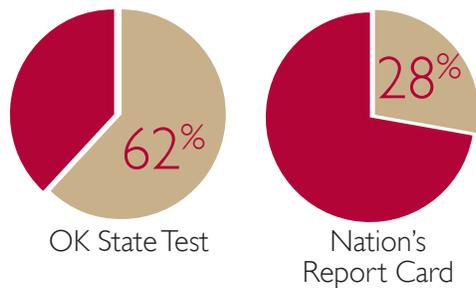
In order to affect student outcomes, we also need better curricula, compatible with the Oklahoma Academic

**In addition to core academic content, the Oklahoma Academic Standards focus on critical thinking, complex problem solving and effective communication — all essential skills for today and tomorrow’s military, as well as for many other careers.**

## REAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The “Nation’s Report Card” currently helps just states see how they are doing, but common assessments will let individual school districts determine how well they are doing and will also let them learn from the districts that are seeing real changes.

### OKLAHOMA STUDENTS: 4th Grade Reading Proficiency



Standards, as well as improved quality of teaching (including through better pre- and in-service training).<sup>14</sup> Teachers must also receive support to connect the standards to everyday life, develop curricula and lesson plans, and learn how to use assessment data effectively. Districts are implementing curricula, instructional materials, and accountability systems, as well as teacher professional development aligned to the standards.

The new standards and assessments will not magically turn things around overnight. Because the Oklahoma Academic Standards are more rigorous than prior standards, at first there is likely to be a decrease in student test scores, compared to previous assessments—difficult news to deliver. But rigorous standards and aligned assessments are a solid part of the solution for educating our children, which is essential for not just their future, but also our national security.

## MOVING AHEAD

Military leaders understand that in order to get ahead, all students must be held to high standards and learn both the content and skills necessary for success. The Oklahoma Academic Standards are an important step in this direction and will help ensure that more than one in four young adults will be eligible to join the military. Our state should continue on this course and move forward with the implementation of aligned assessments.

## ENDNOTES

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## ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS – OKLAHOMA

COUNTY	ADULT OBESITY RATE (2010)	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE (2010-11)	ANNUAL VIOLENT CRIMES (2011)	COUNTY	ADULT OBESITY RATE (2010)	HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE (2010-11)	ANNUAL VIOLENT CRIMES (2011)
<b>Statewide*</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>17,939</b>	Latimer	37	72	19
Adair	36	71	76	Le Flore	33	84	117
Alfalfa	33	95	2	Lincoln	32	78	49
Atoka	35	91	20	Logan	34	79	64
Beaver	31	83	5	Love	31	79	13
Beckham	37	66	43	McClain	32	100	54
Blaine	32	88	19	McCurtain	36	81	127
Bryan	33	80	181	McIntosh	35	73	44
Caddo	35	77	88	Major	32	78	6
Canadian	31	85	556	Marshall	34	69	44
Carter	36	80	465	Mayes	36	81	123
Cherokee	35	74	86	Murray	35	78	22
Choctaw	34	84	28	Muskogee	32	80	437
Cimarron	31	100	2	Noble	35	86	12
Cleveland	29	81	886	Nowata	33	88	47
Coal	33	94	7	Okfuskee	35	77	29
Comanche	35	80	966	Oklahoma	30	72	4,970
Cotton	34	86	8	Okmulgee	32	79	132
Craig	36	87	27	Osage	33	27	230
Creek	36	69	133	Ottawa	32	73	74
Custer	29	86	106	Pawnee	36	86	34
Delaware	33	86	95	Payne	31	87	159
Dewey	29	100	3	Pittsburg	34	85	98
Ellis	32	95	7	Pontotoc	39	79	206
Garfield	33	83	241	Pottawatomie	37	78	324
Garvin	32	80	70	Pushmataha	31	80	29
Grady	37	72	177	Roger Mills	32	64	3
Grant	35	91	2	Rogers	31	80	141
Greer	32	82	8	Seminole	39	79	69
Harmon	34	97	5	Sequoyah	38	82	102
Harper	33	80	2	Stephens	29	88	115
Haskell	31	81	40	Texas	31	73	34
Hughes	34	82	23	Tillman	34	74	29
Jackson	33	75	51	Tulsa	30	79	4,712
Jefferson	37	78	10	Wagoner	32	76	193
Johnston	31	77	30	Washington	31	82	147
Kay	36	67	192	Washita	33	88	26
Kingfisher	32	96	6	Woods	32	83	11
Kiowa	32	82	21	Woodward	35	78	36

\*The statewide high school graduation rate is for 2011-12.



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