



MISSION: READINESS

MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

Omaha Youth: Ready, Willing but Unable to Serve

Omaha's high-quality early childhood education program can help solve the education, crime and weight problems that put military service out of reach for most young adults in the state

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: A 2009 U.S. Army report, *Strong Students, Strong Futures, Strong Nation*, documented that, in the coming decade, "the United States will face a significant workforce shortfall and both the civilian and military sectors may not have the skilled labor required to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy."¹

One indication of this grim assessment is that 75 percent of young Americans are now unable to join the military, primarily because of their poor education, excess weight, or criminal records.² In Omaha, almost half of all young people do not graduate on time from high school. Fifteen percent of

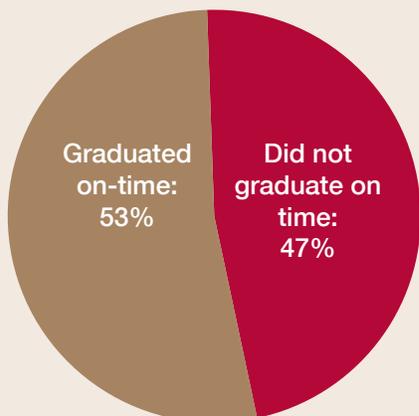
the students in Nebraska who do graduate and try to join the military cannot do well enough on the military's test of math and literacy skills to be able to serve.³ Others have serious criminal records, are too overweight or obese, or have other medical reasons why they cannot join. A limited recruitment pool jeopardizes our military readiness and threatens future national security.

High-quality early childhood education is the foundation for effective public education – it can help prepare children to succeed in school, stay on the right side of the law, and even reduce their risk of becoming obese. In 2011, 63 percent of 4-year-olds in Nebraska were not being served by either state pre-kindergarten or Head Start.

Nebraska policymakers must expand the reach of early education programs and continue improving their quality to ensure that more of our youth are prepared in mind, body and character to succeed.

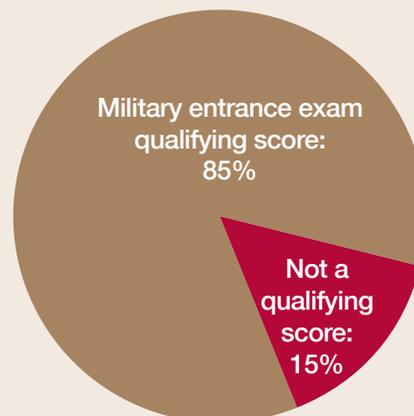
High School Graduation and Military Entrance Exam Qualifying Rates Among Young Nebraskans

Proportion who do not graduate: Almost one in two Omaha youth do not graduate high school on time.



Source: Education Week, 2012

Proportion who score too low: Out of those young Nebraskans who do graduate and then try to join the Army, almost one in six cannot join because they score too low on the military's entrance exam:



Source: The Education Trust, 2010



The Problem

The latest available data show that most young adults in Omaha and statewide lack the basic skills and qualifications to serve in today's military.

Omaha and Nebraska:

- 16 percent of young people in Nebraska do not graduate from high school on time, according to a common way of measuring graduation; and in Omaha, 47 percent do not graduate on time;⁴
- 15 percent of those statewide in Nebraska who do graduate and try to join the military do not do well enough on the military entrance exam to be able to serve, and in Omaha that figure is likely higher given the city's low graduation rates;⁵
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's criteria, which are broader than the military's, 44 percent of young adults in Nebraska are overweight or obese, up from 30 percent thirteen years ago;⁶ and
- One in every 44 adults in Nebraska is in jail, in prison, on probation or on parole. in 2007.⁷ Even more have a criminal record that would keep them from serving.

Nationwide:

When you add up all young adults who have not received an adequate education, have too much involvement in crime, are too overweight or have other reasons why they cannot serve, 75 percent of young Americans cannot join the military.⁸

Early Childhood Education: a Solid Foundation for Reform

Whether it is improving young people's education, keeping them on the right side of the law, or keeping them physically fit, early education has shown it can provide the foundation on which to build real success.

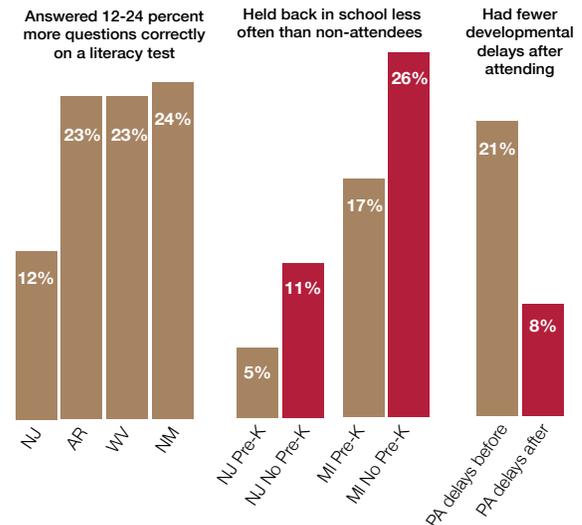
1. Improving Education

Three long-term studies of early education programs show impressive education outcomes:

- The children who participated in the Perry Preschool project were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school.⁹
- Children not served by the Abecedarian project were 75 percent more likely to be held back in school.¹⁰
- By age 30, Abecedarian project participants were four times more likely to have earned a 4-year college degree than those not in the program.¹¹
- The participants in the Chicago Child-Parent Centers were 29 percent more likely to have graduated from high school.¹²

While high-quality state pre-kindergarten programs have not been around long enough to follow the children served into adulthood, the programs that have invested in high quality can already demonstrate strong results as seen in this graph:

State early education improves educational outcomes



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

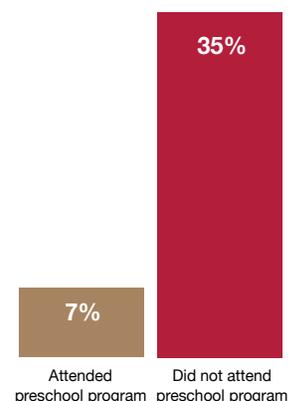
2. Reducing Crime

Two long-term studies on early education have strong results on preventing crime:

- By age 27, those who did not attend the Perry Preschool were five times more likely to have been chronic offenders than the children who participated.¹³
- By age 18, children left out of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers program were 70 percent more likely than participants to have been arrested for a violent crime.¹⁴

High-quality early education cuts future crime

Chronic law breakers by age 27



Source: Schweinhart et al., 1993



Children who had been in Omaha's Educare for three or more years averaged a score of 96 on a standard vocabulary test they took before starting kindergarten – a full 20 points higher than the children who had been in the program less than one year.

Source: St. Clair et al., 2008-09

3. Reducing Obesity

There is even new evidence showing how early learning programs can help reduce America's rising rates of childhood obesity. In New York City, child care centers improved the nutritional quality of the food served to children and increased their physical activity. Additionally, experts coached the children, teachers and parents on how to adopt healthy eating and exercising habits.¹⁵ These efforts, along with other reforms citywide, helped reverse the rise in childhood obesity.

In just four years, obesity rates for 5- to 6-year-old children citywide were down:

- 6 percent for Hispanic public school children,
- 7 percent for black school children, and
- 24 percent for white school children.¹⁶

An intervention with Head Start programs in Chicago used a randomized controlled trial to show that working with both children and their parents can reduce weight gain. The children not in the program gained 16 percent more weight over the next two years than the children receiving the program.¹⁷

The dramatic drop in obesity rates experienced in New York and the success in a more controlled trial in Chicago indicate that, if the lessons can be adapted successfully elsewhere, early education programs may become an excellent

opportunity to help children develop healthy, lifelong eating and exercising habits.

Success in Omaha

An evaluation of Omaha's Educare early childhood education program shows very promising results. Researchers found that the program scored high on the quality of services the centers provide, and that the children were making meaningful progress. For example, the more time children spent in Educare, the higher their vocabulary scores. Children who were in Educare for less than 1 year had an average score of 76 on a standard vocabulary test they took before starting kindergarten. Every additional year of Educare that children had received before entering kindergarten produced a higher average score. Children who had been in Educare for three or more years averaged 96, a full 20 points higher on the test than the children who had been in the program less than one year.¹⁸

Early Education Pays for Itself and More

The cost of failure is staggering. On average, a child who drops out of school, uses drugs and becomes a career criminal costs society \$2.5 million.¹⁹ That goes a long way in explaining why early education can produce such outstanding savings:

Net savings per student over their lifetime from early education investments

High/Scope Perry Preschool	\$244,812 ²⁰
Chicago Child-Parent Centers	\$92,220 ²¹

Nebraska Needs to Keep Improving and Expanding Services

In 2011, state pre-kindergarten reached 10,182 at-risk children ages 3 to 5 in Nebraska, 10 percent of Nebraska 3-year-olds, and 27 percent of 4-year-olds.²² An additional 388 at-risk infants and toddlers were served by the Sixpence program with public and private funding.²³ Head Start,

“America needs young people who are well-educated, physically fit and law-abiding citizens who are service-ready. High-quality early childhood education can help deliver results on all three of those goals.”

– Major General Mark R. Musick,
US Air Force (Ret.),
Lincoln, NE



Photo courtesy of the US Department of Defense



In 2011, 63 percent of 4-year-olds in Nebraska were not being served by either state pre-kindergarten or Head Start.

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2011

the federally funded program, served 4,442 children in Nebraska, 7 percent of 3-year-olds and 10 percent of 4-year-olds.²⁴ The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) provided subsidies for 12,800 children's child care, helping poor working parents with children aged 0-13 years old (for school-age children the funds are for their after-school care or summer care).²⁵ The key point is that, in 2011, 63 percent of 4-year-olds in Nebraska were not being served by either state pre-kindergarten or Head Start.

High-quality early care and education, starting with parent coaching at birth, has gained bipartisan support in Nebraska because it is a solid investment in our future. Local, state and federal policymakers should continue striving in these challenging times to provide even better quality opportunities to more children in the state.

Conclusion: Preserve and Expand Early Education, Focus on Improving Quality

High-quality early education builds a solid foundation and helps more young people develop in mind, body, and character so they can succeed at whatever career path they choose, including military service. In short, it is an investment in America's future economic prosperity and national security.

Nebraska's local, state and national policymakers need to act boldly and decisively to protect, expand, and continue improving the quality of early education.

Endnotes

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