



Pre-K Around the Beltway

High-Quality Early Education in the Metropolitan
Washington, DC Area Can Help Build a Stronger Country



MISSION: READINESS
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS



Summary

While there are other major disqualifying factors – including being overweight and having a criminal record – poor educational achievement is the leading reason why an estimated 75 percent of all young Americans are unable to join the military.¹ In Virginia, 18 percent of young people do not graduate from high school on time; in Maryland 17 percent do not.² In addition, 26 percent of high school graduates in Virginia and 27 percent of graduates in Maryland seeking to enlist in the Army cannot join because of low scores on the military's entrance exam for math, literacy and problem-solving.³ Without enough skilled men and women available to serve in tomorrow's armed services, we endanger the future strength of our military.

High-quality pre-kindergarten can help disadvantaged children succeed in school and avoid criminal involvement, opening the doors to college, careers and military service, if they choose to serve. While in Montgomery County all eligible low-income 4-year-olds whose families want pre-kindergarten are served in high quality programs with excellent results, in Fairfax County 56 percent of eligible low-income children are not served, hundreds of children are on the waiting list, and funds budgeted for pre-kindergarten are being returned to the state.

These alarming figures raise a critical question: Will shortcomings in our local and state education systems become a threat to national security? We know what works to help more children do well in school and in life. Long-term studies of high-quality early childhood education show that at-risk children benefit greatly from these

programs. For example, children who participated in the Chicago Child-Parent Centers were 29 percent more likely to have graduated from high school.⁴ In addition, high-quality state early education programs are now beginning to show they can increase the early literacy skills of those served and reduce the number of children held back in school.⁵

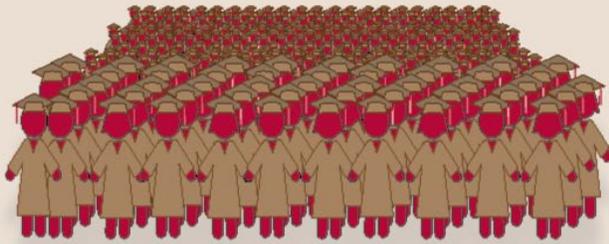
We attempted to determine how many at-risk children in Washington, DC and its surrounding counties are being left out of quality pre-kindergarten programs. The numbers provided to us do not allow for exact, simple comparisons. But based on available data, it appears that this is how local jurisdictions are doing:

- Montgomery County: All eligible low income children reportedly served
- Prince George's County: All eligible low income children reportedly served
- District of Columbia: Universal eligibility, with most 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled, but some programs have waiting lists
- Arlington County: All state-funded slots for eligible children are filled
- Alexandria: 10 percent of eligible children unserved using a new funding formula. But 63 percent were unserved last year using the old formula (see box in text). 50 children are currently on waiting list



447

One Thomas Jefferson High School Graduating Class



890

On Waiting List for Pre-K in Fairfax County



- Fairfax County: 56 percent unserved; **890 children on waiting list** — The equivalent of two graduating classes at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology

Fairfax County returns money to the state because it fails to match state funding to provide services for most of the children who are eligible for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). The failure to match state funding is partly related to the fact that the per-student funding has not increased since 2008. The actual cost of providing pre-K exceeds the funding provided by the state and the mandated local match. Therefore, counties or programs must also provide the additional funding necessary to meet actual program costs. Lack of funding for start-up costs and lack of space have also been cited as reasons for failure to fully participate in VPI.⁶

This failure is especially unfortunate because not only do national studies of pre-kindergarten show its many benefits, but local efforts claim these successes:

- Montgomery County kindergarteners previously enrolled in public pre-K programs, many of whom have multiple risk factors, are as fully ready for school as students statewide.⁷
- Virginia Preschool Initiative graduates are less likely to repeat kindergarten and more likely to meet or exceed minimum levels of competency in literacy. These benefits persist until the end of first grade for the highest risk students.⁸

- Quality preschool in Virginia yielded benefits of two billion dollars over 17 years in special education savings, child welfare savings, decreased grade retention, reductions in juvenile crime, reductions in adult crime, increased earnings by parents, and increased tax contributions.⁹

“**There are no waiting lists for pre-K in Montgomery County...**

...There are 890 children on the waiting list in Fairfax County, eligible for VPI, but not being served.”



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School Failure is a National Security Threat

While there are other major disqualifying factors – including being overweight and having a criminal record – poor educational achievement is the biggest reason why an estimated 75 percent of all young Americans are unable to join the military.¹⁰ In Virginia, 18 percent of young people do not graduate high school on time; in Maryland 17 percent do not.¹¹ In addition, 26 percent of high school graduates in Virginia and 27 percent of graduates in Maryland seeking to enlist in the Army cannot join because of low scores on the military's entrance exam for math, literacy and problem-solving, according to an analysis by The Education Trust.¹² 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. Businesses in the private sector are seeking many of the same skill sets and running into the same challenging deficits. High-quality pre-kindergarten can help disadvantaged children succeed in school and avoid criminal involvement, opening the doors to college, careers and military service, if they choose to serve.

High Quality Early Childhood Education Works

Early education can provide a solid foundation upon which effective school reform is built. Research following the

graduates of preschool programs up to age 40 have shown that early education can produce very strong and lasting results.¹³ More recent studies of state programs provide further proof that high-quality early education can help disadvantaged children succeed.

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 no intervention, and followed them over time. 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.



From Left to Right: Major General David Edginton (Ret.), Admiral James Loy, (Ret.) and General Richard Hawley (Ret.) on the deck of Battleship Wisconsin in Norfolk, Virginia following a press conference on the value of early learning for national security.

- By age 40, those who attended the Perry Preschool were earning more on average and were, for example, one third more likely to own a car than those who did not attend.¹⁴

The **Abecedarian** home visiting and preschool program randomly assigned disadvantaged children in North Carolina, starting in infancy, to a high-quality early care and 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 four-year college at age 21.¹⁵

The Chicago **Child-Parent Centers** pre-kindergarten programs have served over 100,000 at-risk children and have produced 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.
- Participants were 29 percent more likely to have graduated from high school.¹⁶

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 (11 percent vs. 5 percent).¹⁷
- An evaluation of pre-k in Michigan which followed students through their high school years found that participants were 35 percent more likely to graduate from high school on time than a comparison group of children not in the program.¹⁸
- In Oklahoma, New Jersey, Arkansas, West Virginia and New Mexico, studies show clear gains in early literacy if the children attended pre-kindergarten programs, and Pennsylvania has shown impressive gains in reducing the number of children needing special education.¹⁹

"Children who did not attend high-quality pre-kindergarten in New Jersey were twice as likely to be held back by second grade."

In Fairfax County, 89 percent of single mothers with children age birth to 5 years are in the labor force and 59 percent of two-parent families with children birth to 5 have both parents in the labor force. For low-income single mothers, high quality early childhood education not only offers them the ability to work to support their families, it also provides their children a way out of poverty.

Fairfax County Demographics and Data; <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/demogrph/graphs/childwork.pdf>

High Quality Early Childhood Education Works in Metropolitan Washington, DC

Local data on outcomes for children who participate in pre-K echo the national research that demonstrates that high-quality early education can help disadvantaged children succeed.

Montgomery County pre-kindergarten programs are successful in getting children ready for school:

- Kindergarteners previously enrolled in public pre-K programs, many of whom have multiple risk factors, are as fully ready for school as students statewide.
- 82 percent of kindergarteners who participated in public pre-K programs were rated as fully ready for school, up from 55 percent in 2001-2002.²⁰

The Virginia Preschool Initiative delivers solid benefits for the students it serves:

- VPI graduates were less likely to repeat kindergarten and more likely to meet or exceed minimum levels of competency in literacy, compared to a control group.
- VPI benefits persisted until the end of first grade for students who were Black, Hispanic or had disabilities.²¹



"...the benefit of quality early education for Virginia was two billion dollars over 17 years, in special education savings, child welfare savings, decreased grade retention, reductions in juvenile crime, reductions in adult crime, increased earnings by parents, and increased tax contributions."

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.²² So what works to help disadvantaged children succeed can produce substantial savings later. The Chicago Child-Parent Centers had a net savings of \$92,220 per student over their lifetime.²³ An analysis by the Economic Policy Institute and The Commonwealth Institute determined that the benefit of quality early education for Virginia was two billion dollars over 17 years, in special education savings, child welfare savings, decreased grade retention, reductions in juvenile crime, reductions in adult crime, increased earnings by parents, and increased tax contributions.²⁴

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

Current Status of Pre-Kindergarten in the Metropolitan Washington, DC Area

Uniform and comprehensive data on access to and the quality of pre-kindergarten in the metropolitan area are not easily available. This is a problem nationwide, particularly at the local level, because pre-K can be funded by a variety of funding streams (state, Head Start, IDEA, etc.), making data collection difficult.²⁵ Nevertheless, it is obvious that there are important differences in the availability and quality of early education in local jurisdictions.

Montgomery County

In 2002, Maryland passed legislation mandating that local boards of education provide pre-kindergarten to all economically disadvantaged 4-year-olds by the 2007-2008 school year.²⁶ In Montgomery County, pre-K is provided in both the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) and in community settings, through both state-funded pre-K and Head Start. In 2012-2013, 2,793 children are being served (2,145 in pre-K and 648 in Head Start). There are no waiting lists for pre-K in Montgomery County, as all income-eligible families who apply must be served.²⁷

Concerning quality, the MCPS pre-K program is an integral part of a comprehensive education reform plan begun in the 1990s. In that plan, pre-K was closely linked to the K-12 system and its goal of college readiness. Rigorous standards were introduced for pre-K, for both teachers and students. All pre-K teachers are required to have at least a bachelor's degree and attend a 36-hour training focused on pedagogy and assessment. Pre-K teachers are treated like any other teacher in the MCPS system (certification, pay, accountability, etc.). There is a focus on teacher accountability, through a system of peer review and support, as well as ongoing opportunities for professional development. There is a research-based curriculum and teachers use assessments to monitor and guide their instruction. Indicators for school readiness were established and children must meet benchmarks by the end of pre-K. There is also a focus on creating strong school-family partnerships, beginning with outreach to register children for pre-K, followed by phone contacts, home visits and referral to any needed community services. Parents are invited to participate in training opportunities and in school governance.²⁸



Pre-kindergarten data from other localities in metropolitan Washington, DC

The **District of Columbia** passed legislation establishing universal pre-kindergarten, with all 3- and 4-year-olds eligible, in 2008. Enrollment is reportedly high: 98 percent of 4-year-olds;⁴¹ 72 percent of all 3- and 4-year-olds.⁴² However, universal access may not yet have been achieved: an audit by Child Trends and the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education in 2011 found that many programs had waiting lists.⁴³ Public school programs (which serve about half of all pre-kindergartners) are rated higher quality than those in public charter schools.⁴⁴

Prince George's County currently serves 3,694 children in public pre-K programs. There are no waiting lists, as seats must be available for all income-eligible children who apply.⁴⁵ Data on program quality are not readily available.

Arlington County's current VPI participation rate is 100 percent, with all 537 state-funded slots filled.⁴⁶ Many VPI programs in Arlington County do not participate in VSQI, so data on program quality are not readily available.⁴⁷

Alexandria's VPI participation rate is 90 percent with 336 of the 374 budgeted slots filled. However, this high rate is due to the introduction of a new funding formula. In 2011-2012, under the previous funding formula, there were 862 budgeted slots and 316 children served, a participation rate of 37%.⁴⁸ Currently, there are 50 children on the waiting list⁴⁹ and an additional 3 VPI classrooms have been proposed in the FY 2014 budget.⁵⁰ With regard to program quality, 8 VPI programs in Alexandria are participating in VSQI.⁵¹

Child care standards and oversight in Metropolitan Washington, DC

Standards and oversight for child care in the metropolitan area paint a picture similar to the situation with pre-K: The District of Columbia and Maryland are doing well; Virginia less so. Virginia ranks last in the nation for standards and oversight for family child care homes.

National Rank on Standards and Oversight

	Child Care Centers ^a	Family Child Care Homes ^b
District of Columbia	3 rd	8 th
Maryland	11 th	6 th
Virginia	14 th	52 nd

Given these rankings, it is extremely concerning that Arlington County has recently proposed eliminating all County code regulating child care and preschools, defaulting to Virginia state regulations.

A new formula⁵² for deciding how many slots are needed for eligible children in Virginia had a substantial impact on the number of slots to be funded by the state in Alexandria. In 2011-2012, there were 862 state-funded slots and 316 children were served, so 63 percent of eligible children were then unserved. Under the new formula, the number of state-funded slots dropped from 862 to 374. While only 20 more children are being served now in Alexandria than in 2011-2012 (336), the current rate of unserved children has dropped to 10 percent. The change in formula had only a minimal effect on the number of state-funded slots in Arlington or Fairfax Counties.

Sources:

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b. NACCRRA (2012). Leaving children to chance NACCRRA's ranking of state standards and oversight for small family child care homes 2012 update, <http://www.naccrra.org/about-child-care/state-child-care-licensing/2012-leaving-children-to-chance-child-care-homes>

Virginia Preschool Initiative

The Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) was established in 1995 to serve at-risk 4-year-olds who do not participate in Head Start. Most children are served in public schools, although localities can subcontract with private programs or Head Start.²⁹ State funds are allocated to local school districts or social service departments based on free and reduced price meal eligibility, and a local match is required. Localities can opt to decline state funds, if they do not want to match them. The funds declined by localities are returned to the state general fund, rather than remaining allocated to early education. Since 2008, the state has set the per-student VPI cost at \$6000 and contributes up to \$3000 of that cost to the locality. Localities are required to contribute matching funds, based on their ability to pay, up to \$3000

per child.³⁰ In some localities, the actual cost of providing pre-K exceeds the amount provided by the state and the mandated local match. Therefore, programs must provide the additional funding necessary to meet actual program costs, a disincentive to VPI participation. Lack of funding for start-up costs and lack of space have also been cited as reasons for failure to fully participate in VPI.³¹ Localities can define their own at-risk criteria for participation; most children served by VPI come from low-income families or meet other criteria that put them at risk for not being ready for school (e.g., non-English speaking parents, moderate developmental delays).³²

In 2012-2013, approximately 29 percent of VPI state-funded slots are unused due to a lack of local matching funds, leaving more than 7,000 children statewide eligible for VPI who are not served. Participation rates vary widely from



The current status of military recruiting

Due in part to the economic slowdown, military services are meeting or exceeding their recruitment goals. However Dr. Curtis Gilroy, former 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.⁵⁴

county to county, with the percentage of eligible children served ranging from 4 – 100 percent.³³ There were proposed budget amendments in the 2013 legislative session that would have lowered the match for localities and thereby hopefully increase access to VPI; however, they did not make it into either the House or Senate version of the budget.³⁴ In 2012, a bill was introduced mandating that unused funds be used for other costs related to early education, but it failed to pass the state legislature.³⁵

Fairfax County

Examining data from Fairfax County, 1,119 of the 2,545 state-funded slots are currently filled, meaning that 56 percent of eligible children are unserved. There are 890 children on the waiting list in Fairfax County, eligible for VPI, but not being served—the equivalent of two graduating classes at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology.³⁶ The Fairfax County Office for Children has recently proposed a \$1.2 million expansion of services, to attempt to serve 104 children from the waiting list (50 in VPI and 54 in Head Start). However, funding for this expansion is not in the proposed budget, so in order to move forward, the Board of Supervisors would have to add funding during the budget review.³⁷ The demand for pre-K is likely to remain high, as Fairfax's student population is growing, and the number of children eligible for free and reduced price meals has increased 35.5 percent since FY 2009.³⁸ Fairfax returns money to the state because it fails to match state funding to provide services for most of the children who are eligible for VPI. The failure to match state funding may be partly related to the fact that the state-set per-student cost (\$6000) has not been increased since 2008.

With regard to pre-K quality, the Virginia Star Quality Initiative (VSQI) is a quality rating and improvement system that assigns from 1 to 5 stars to participating programs, based on performance in four areas (staff education and training; teacher-student interaction; teacher-student ratio and group size; learning environment and instructional practices.³⁹) VSQI also provides recommendations and support to programs to increase their quality. VSQI was established in 2007 and has not yet expanded statewide, due to funding limitations. Participation in VSQI is voluntary and preliminary data from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation indicates that only 29 VPI programs currently participate.⁴⁰ In Fairfax County, just three VPI programs are participating in VSQI.

Conclusion

There are more than 300 retired admirals and generals who are members of MISSION: READINESS.⁵³ We wish to make clear that investing wisely now in early childhood education is a necessary investment in our national security. As an essential part of education reform, we support efforts to ensure that districts across the country, including Fairfax County, increase access to high-quality early learning, especially for their most disadvantaged children. High-quality pre-kindergarten can help disadvantaged children succeed in school and avoid criminal involvement, opening the doors to college, careers and military service. Without enough skilled men and women available to serve in tomorrow's armed services, we endanger the future strength of our military.

We strongly support state policymakers' efforts to expand and protect funding for the Virginia Preschool Initiative and improve the quality of early learning programs through the Virginia Star Quality Initiative, and urge Fairfax County to take full advantage of these state programs. Combined, these wise state and local efforts can produce the strong results Virginia and our country need.



Endnotes

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52 For the 2012-2013 school year, a new funding formula for VPI slots was introduced. School divisions now estimate the number of eligible children by using either the Virginia Employment Commission's (VEC) data on the projected number of 4-year-olds (as in previous years) or the actual current kindergarten enrollment in the division. The number of eligible children and state-funded slots is based on the smaller number of the two estimates. (To compute the number of eligible children /state-funded slots, the formula takes the number of 4-year-olds or the current kindergarten enrollment, multiplied by the percentage of free and reduced lunch eligible children in the division, then subtracts out the number of children served by Head Start.) The change in the funding formula had a substantial impact on the

number of state-funded slots in Alexandria, as described in text. VEC data projected 2,364 4-year-olds in Alexandria, but only 1,394 children enrolled in kindergarten, likely due to the fact that many children enroll in private schools. The change in formula had only a minimal effect on the number of state-funded slots in Arlington (610 in 2011-2012 vs. 537 in 2012-2013) or Fairfax (2043 in 2011-2012 vs. 2545 in 2012-2013) Counties, as these two localities likely had fewer children enrolling in private schools than in Alexandria.

53 For an up-to-date list, see our website www.missionreadiness.org/

54 Personal communication with Dr. Curtis Gilroy, Director, Accession Policy (Military Personnel Policy), US Department of Defense, February 7, 2011.



Who We Are

MISSION: READINESS is the nonprofit, nonpartisan national security organization of more than 300 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.

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This report was written by Sandra Bishop-Josef and Amy Dawson Taggart.

David Carrier, Miriam Rollin, William Christeon, Chris Beaky, Mike Jayne, September Jones and Soren Messner-Zidell also contributed to this report.



MISSION: READINESS
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

1212 New York Avenue NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 464-5224
www.MissionReadiness.org

