



MISSION: READINESS
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

To: Members of the Tennessee General Assembly

March 24, 2015

As retired generals and admirals, and members of the national security organization MISSION: READINESS, we can appreciate the variety of tough decisions that confront you during the legislative session. Recently there has been much attention placed on our state's academic standards. Before taking any action to modify these standards, we strongly encourage you to allow the current review process to fully unfold and to consider the standards' impact on our future military readiness.

We are gravely concerned that 71 percent of 17- to 24-year-olds nationwide—and 74 percent here in Tennessee—are unfit to serve, primarily because of issues related to poor educational achievement, physical fitness, and involvement in crime or drug abuse. Without enough educated and fit young men and women available to serve in tomorrow's Armed Services, we cannot maintain the necessary capabilities the Nation needs.

Rigorous academic standards will foster student success and improvements to schools. It is standard operating procedure in the military, and among many successful businesses and sports teams, to have concrete measures of performance. Consistency in these standards and assessments give schools, districts, and states a clear sense of student achievement based on clearly defined benchmarks for learning, and for measuring that learning.

Consistent standards are also critical for children from military families whose parents' assignments require them to move between multiple states during their K-12 years. These children are significantly disadvantaged when the academic standards to which they are held accountable change, often dramatically, as they move state to state.

Just as every good battle plan requires a sound underpinning strategy, so do education standards. In addition to standards, our state needs aligned assessments, or tests that will ultimately tell us if student achievement is rising. Truthful reporting of these aligned test results will help make our schools more accountable to students and parents.

Last fall, our state announced a full vetting of our English language arts and math standards. This review is currently providing an opportunity for all Tennesseans to share feedback on the standards. After this process is complete, Governor Haslam feels that Tennessee will have its own high standards.

We salute the governor, state Adjutant General, and leaders in the state legislature who support high academic standards so that our students graduate from high school with the skills needed for college, careers and the military for those who choose to serve.

Tennessee has made significant gains in recent years as a result of higher standards and other education reforms. We encourage you to keep Tennessee on this path and allow the current review process to fully unfold before making additional changes to the standards.

Very respectfully,

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