



# High-Quality Early Education and Care: An Investment in National Security

## Summary

Currently, 68 percent of all young people in Maine are unable to serve their country in uniform. A shrinking pool of eligible recruits is a threat to our military preparedness and national security. High-quality early care and education programs can help improve that statistic, helping at-risk children succeed in school, become healthy and fit adults, and avoid criminal behavior, opening the doors to college, careers, and military service, if they choose to serve. Programs must be high quality to improve children's chances of success.

## The Problem

Sixty-eight percent of young Mainers are unable to join the military, primarily because they are too poorly educated, too overweight, or have a record of crime or substance abuse.<sup>1</sup> For example:

- Almost 13 percent of students in Maine do not graduate from high school on time, and the military rarely accepts recruits who do not have a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly one-third of young adults cannot serve because they are too overweight; excess weight is one of the leading medical disqualifiers.<sup>3</sup>
- One in ten young adults does not qualify because of a record of crime or substance abuse.<sup>4</sup>

## High-quality early childhood care and education can improve educational outcomes, graduation rates, and health

- At-risk Maine children who attended public pre-K as four-year-olds scored four to seven percentage points higher on reading and math assessments compared to children who did not attend the high-quality program, by third and fourth grade.<sup>5</sup>
- Participants in Michigan's state pre-K were held back in school 51 percent less often than non-participants.<sup>6</sup> New Jersey's pre-K program found its children were held back 40 percent less often.<sup>7</sup>
- Studies of two high-quality pre-K programs found that participating children were less likely to have criminal records as adults.<sup>8</sup>
- Head Start programs that emphasize healthy eating, physical activity, and parent engagement can help lower childhood obesity rates by five to 24 percent.<sup>9</sup>
- A longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care were better prepared for school at age four compared to children in lower-quality child care. At age 15, they were still performing slightly above their peers.<sup>10</sup>

## Early childhood education also saves money

A well-respected and independent cost-benefit analysis of rigorous studies of state- and district-funded preschool programs for disadvantaged children showed that preschool can return, on average, a net return to society of nearly \$27,000 per child served.<sup>11</sup>

## There is still more to do in Maine

In Fall 2020, 4,746 Maine four-year-olds were enrolled in public pre-K programs, which represents 38 percent of Maine four-year-olds.<sup>12</sup> This is a 23 percent decrease from last fall, pre-pandemic (when 6183 children, 49 percent of four-year-olds) were enrolled. It is expected that enrollment rates will return to earlier levels, post-pandemic.

Only 40 percent of eligible Maine children participated in Head Start programs, prior to COVID-19. During the pandemic, this number decreased by approximately 50 percent, and is gradually moving back toward 40 percent.<sup>13</sup>

Although the number of families receiving CCDBG vouchers has increased in recent years, most eligible families are not served.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

Investing in high-quality early childhood education is essential for the future strength of our military. If more young people are not available to serve in tomorrow's armed services, our national security will be at risk.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense. (2017) Qualified Military Available (QMA). Data acquired from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in November 2017. Also see Jordan, M. (2014, June). Recruits' ineligibility tests the military. Wall Street Journal.

<sup>2</sup> Maine Department of Education Graduation Rates & Dropout Rates Data. <https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-reporting/reporting/warehouse/graduation-dropout-data>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense. (2017) Qualified Military Available (QMA). Data acquired from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in November 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense. (2017) Qualified Military Available (QMA). Data acquired from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in November 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Application for grants under the Preschool Development Grants-expansion, Maine.

<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/applications/meapplicationpdg2015.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Summary of Great Start Readiness Program Evaluation Findings 1995-2011 <http://bridgemi.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/GSRP-evaluation-may-21-12.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Barnett, W. S., Jung, K., Youn, M., & Frede, E. C. (2013, March 20). Abbott Preschool Program longitudinal effects study: Fifth grade follow-up. <http://nieer.org/research-report/201311apples205th20grade-pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Reynolds, A. et. al. (2001). Long-term effects of an early childhood intervention on educational achievement and juvenile arrest. JAMA, 285, 2339-2380; Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., & Weikart, D. P. (1993). Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 27. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.

<sup>9</sup> Fitzgibbon, M. L., Stolley, M. R., Schiffer, L., Van Horn, L., Kaufer Christofel, K., & Dyer, A. (2005). Two-year follow-up results for Hip-Hop to Health Jr.: A randomized controlled trial for overweight prevention in preschool minority children. Journal of Pediatrics, 146 (5), 618-625.

<sup>10</sup> NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2010). Do effects of early child care extend to age 15 Years? Results from the NICHD study of early child care and youth development. Child Development. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2938040>

<sup>11</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy. Benefit-cost summary State and district early education programs. <https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/270>

<sup>12</sup> Data provided by Maine Department of Education, December 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Data provided by the Maine Department of Education on October 27, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> 2019 Maine Kids Count [https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/1241/kidscount\\_2019.pdf](https://www.mekids.org/site/assets/files/1241/kidscount_2019.pdf)