

# Early Childhood Education: A National Security Imperative

Greater access to high-quality early childhood education in Washington can help improve military readiness

## **70 percent of young adults in Washington cannot join the military<sup>1</sup>**

Our national security depends on young adults who are ready, willing and able to serve in the U. S. military. However, military leaders are increasingly concerned that there are not enough qualified candidates to defend our nation, due to problems including inadequate education, obesity, crime and drug abuse.

Early brain development sets the stage for children's future success.<sup>2</sup> Sixty-one percent of Washington children under age five have parents or a single parent who work outside the home, and many of these children are not in high-quality early education.<sup>3</sup> Statewide, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) serves just nine percent of four-year-olds and only five percent of three-year-olds. Without improvements to our early education system, our nation risks an even smaller military recruiting pool in the future.

## **High-quality early childhood education can help improve military readiness**

Research shows that high-quality early education can support children's success, and military readiness, in three categories:

### **1. Education**

High-quality preschool can improve early math and literacy skills, putting children ahead in elementary school compared to their peers who did not attend preschool.<sup>4</sup> Data from fall 2018 show that 33 percent of children who had received six or more months of ECEAP were fully ready for kindergarten in all six developmental domains. Only 27 percent of other low-income children were ready, even though this group included children who participated in Head Start and had a higher income cut-off. There are also longer-term effects: students who participated in ECEAP scored significantly higher in third- to fifth-grade math and reading, compared to their peers who had not participated in the program.<sup>5</sup>

**517**

**the number of children in ECEAP (2018-19) who have a parent in the military, National Guard, or reserves.**

## 2. Obesity

Early education programs emphasizing healthy eating and physical activity can help reduce children's obesity risk. A study of the Abecedarian early care and education program found that girls who participated were less likely to become obese as adults and boys had fewer risk factors for heart disease, stroke and diabetes.<sup>6</sup> Two randomized studies of Head Start nutrition programs found that participating children had a lower risk of obesity two years later.<sup>7</sup>

## 3. Behavior

Studies of two high-quality pre-K programs found that participating children were less

likely to have criminal records as adults.<sup>8</sup>

By age 18 or 19, the Tulsa, OK pre-K program decreased the likelihood that black children were charged with a misdemeanor or felony crime.<sup>9</sup>

### **Washington policymakers should continue to promote access to high-quality early education**

Policymakers must commit to strengthening the quality of early education in our state and ensure that more young children have access to ECEAP. Support for high-quality early childhood education is an investment in our future national security.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense (2017, November). Qualified Military Available (QMA). Data acquired from the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nap.edu/read/9824/chapter/1#ii>

<sup>3</sup> <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/pam.21734> ; <http://nieer.org/research-report/201311apples205th20grade-pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1576/Wsipp\\_Outcome-Evaluation-of-Washington-States-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Assistance-Program\\_Report.pdf](http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1576/Wsipp_Outcome-Evaluation-of-Washington-States-Early-Childhood-Education-and-Assistance-Program_Report.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4028126/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15870664>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11343481> ; <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED366433>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sole-jole.org/16422.pdf>

### **Mission: Readiness**

Retired admirals and generals strengthening national security by ensuring kids stay in school, stay fit, and stay out of trouble.

**Council for a Strong America** is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

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