MISSION: READINESS
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS





PRE-K AROUND THE BELTWAY

Still backed up in Virginia

SUMMARY

While access to pre-kindergarten around the Beltway has improved somewhat since our report last year, discrepancies remain among jurisdictions, and hundreds of children in Fairfax County still lack access. Fairfax County's 2015 proposed budget would improve access slightly, while a provision in the 2015 state budget proposal would decrease access in Arlington County. The retired generals and admirals of Mission: Readiness are calling on policymakers in Fairfax County and in the state legislature to increase their commitment to high-quality pre-kindergarten education.

Poor educational achievement is a leading reason why an estimated 75 percent of all young Americans are unable to join the military. In Virginia, 18 percent of young people do not graduate from high school on time; in Maryland 17 percent do not. 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. Without enough skilled men and women available to serve in tomorrow's armed services, we endanger the future strength of our military and our national security.

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 46 percent of state-funded slots are left unfilled, hundreds of eligible low-income 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. In addition, high-quality state early education programs are now beginning to show they can increase the early academic skills of those served and reduce the number of children held back in school.

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 currently doing:

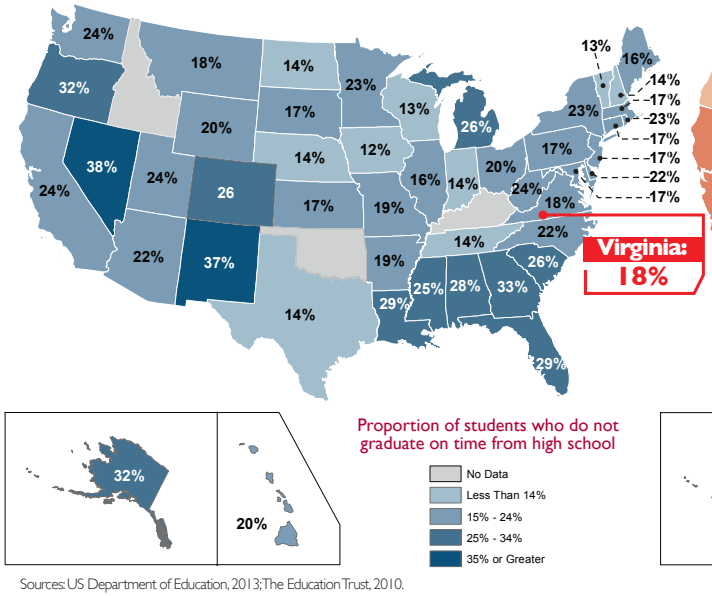
Montgomery County	All eligible low income children reportedly served.
Prince George's County	All eligible low income children reportedly served.
District of Columbia	Universal eligibility, with most 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled, but some programs have waiting lists.
Arlington County	All state-funded slots for eligible children filled.
Alexandria	Nearly all (97 percent) state-funded slots filled.
Fairfax County	About half (54 percent) of state-funded slots filled; 660 children on waiting list.

Fairfax County returns money to the state because it fails to match state funding to provide services for many 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.

INADEQUATE EDUCATION PREVENTS YOUNG AMERICANS FROM SERVING

Proportion Who Do Not Graduate

Nationwide, more than one in five young Americans do not graduate on time. In some states it is even worse:

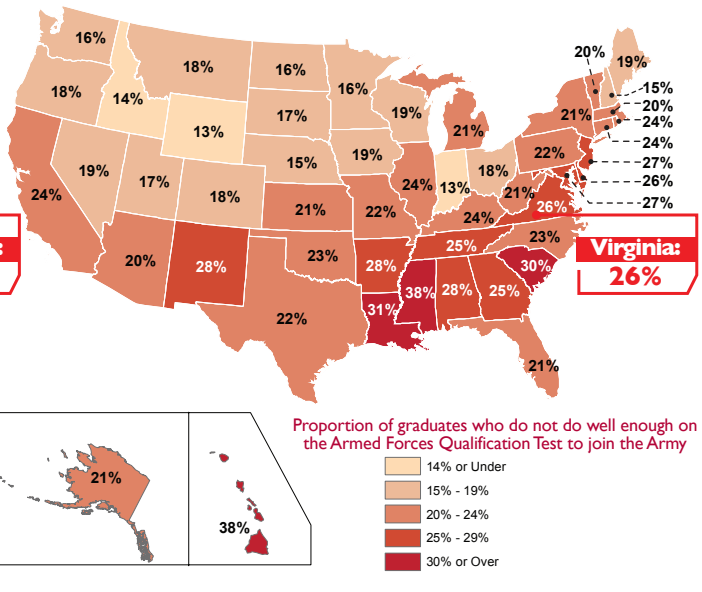


Proportion of students who do not graduate on time from high school

- No Data
- Less Than 14%
- 15% - 24%
- 25% - 34%
- 35% or Greater

Proportion Who Score Too Low

Out of those who do graduate and try to join the Army, over one in five cannot join because they score too low on the military's entrance exam.



Proportion of graduates who do not do well enough on the Armed Forces Qualification Test to join the Army

- 14% or Under
- 15% - 19%
- 20% - 24%
- 25% - 29%
- 30% or Over

Sources: US Department of Education, 2013; The Education Trust, 2010.

Fairfax County's 2015 proposed budget would add $150,000 to the Office for Children's budget for VPI matching funds, to serve children in community-based pre-K settings. The 2015 state budget proposal includes a provision that would result in more than 50 needy children losing their access to pre-K in Arlington County, due to a change in the formula allocation.

The failure to provide pre-K to all eligible children in Virginia is especially unfortunate because not only do national studies of pre-kindergarten show its many benefits, but local efforts claim these successes:

1. 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 through the end of first grade for the highest risk students.

2. 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.

There are no waiting lists for pre-K in Montgomery County... There are 660 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.[1] In Virginia, 18 percent of young people do not graduate high school on time[2]; in Maryland 17 percent do not.[3] 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.[4] These alarming figures raise a critical question: Will shortcomings in our state and local education systems become a threat to national security?



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.

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.[5] 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.[6]

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.[7]

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).
- Participants were 29 percent more likely to have graduated from high school.[8]

State pre-kindergarten programs now have evaluations proving that – if they are of high enough quality – they can deliver solid results:

- By 4th or 5th grade, children who attended New Jersey's preschool program for two years were three-quarters of an academic year ahead in math and two-thirds of an academic year ahead in literacy compared to their peers who did not attend.[9]
- 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.[10]
- In Georgia, Oklahoma, 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.[11]

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.

Children who attended high-quality pre-K in New Jersey were three-quarters of an academic year ahead in math and two-thirds of an academic year ahead in literacy by 4th or 5th grade.

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.
- 81 percent of kindergarteners who participated in public pre-K programs were rated as fully ready for school, up from 55 percent in 2001-2002.[12]

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 through the end of first grade for students who were Black, Hispanic or had disabilities. [13]

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. So what

65%

66%

72%

Sixty-five percent of American children under the age of 6 have all available parents in the workforce. In the metropolitan Washington, DC area, this figure is even higher: 66 percent in Virginia and 72 percent in Maryland (data on the District of Columbia are not available). For low-income mothers, high quality early childhood education offers them the ability to work to support their families. It also provides their daughters and sons a way out of poverty.

KIDS COUNT data center http://bit.ly/1i811yl

Pre-Kindergarten Access Around the Beltway

LOCATION	2013-2014 (CURRENT)	2014-2015 (PROPOSED)
Montgomery County	All eligible children served. (185% of federal poverty level).	State proposal to expand eligibility (from 185% to 300% of federal poverty level).
Prince George's County	All eligible children served. (185% of federal poverty level).	State proposal to expand eligibility (from 185% to 300% of federal poverty).
Washington, DC	Universal pre-kindergarten.	Universal pre-kindergarten.
Alexandria	Almost all state funded slots filled. (371 of 381; 97%).	Increase state-funded slots (to 523).
Arlington County	All state funded slots filled. (537).	**Decrease state-funded slots** (to 486).
Fairfax County	**About half of eligible children served.** (1,407 of 2,587 state-funded slots filled; 54%). 660 children on waiting list.	Increase state-funded slots. (2,622). County budget proposal: **$150,000 increase.**

works to help disadvantaged children succeed can produce substantial savings later. A well-respected, independent cost-benefit analysis of 49 different, rigorous studies of state- and district-funded preschool programs showed that preschool can return, on average, a "profit" (economic benefits minus costs) to society of more than $22,000 for every child served.[14] 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.[15] 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, etc.), making data collection difficult.[16] 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.[17] 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. There are no waiting lists for pre-K in the county, as all income-eligible families who apply must be served.[18]

In 2014, there are state proposals to expand eligibility for pre-K in Maryland.[19] Currently, children up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible; under the proposals, children up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level would qualify for pre-K. The state would provide an additional $4.3 million to support the expansion and an additional 1,600 children would be served statewide.

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

"...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."

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.[20]

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.[21] State funds are allocated to local school districts or social service departments based on free lunch 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 $6,000 and contributes up to $3,000 of that cost to the locality. Localities are required to contribute matching funds, based on their ability to pay, up to $3,000 per child.[22] 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 classroom space have also been cited as reasons for failure to fully participate in VPI.[23] 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).[24]

In 2013-2014, approximately 27 percent of VPI state-funded slots are unused due to a lack of local matching funds or classroom space, leaving more than 6,600 children statewide eligible for VPI who are not served. Approximately $23 million in funding for pre-K was returned to the state by counties and localities.[25]

Fairfax County

Examining data from Fairfax County, 1,407 of the 2,587 state-funded slots are currently filled, meaning that 46 percent of eligible children are unserved. There are 660 children on the waiting list, eligible for VPI, but not being served.[26] Under the proposed state formula allocation, Fairfax County will see an increase of 35 slots, to a total of 2,622, for 2014-2015.[27] The Fairfax County 2015 proposed budget would add $150,000 to the Office for Children's budget for VPI matching funds, to serve children in community-based pre-K settings. [28] The demand for pre-K in Fairfax 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.[29] Fairfax returns money to the state because it fails to match state funding to provide services for nearly half 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 ($6,000) 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.[30]) 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 data from the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation indicates that only 44 VPI programs currently participate.[31] In Fairfax County, just three VPI programs are participating in VSQI.[32]

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 high: 92 percent of 4-year-olds and 69 percent of all 3-year-olds.[33] 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.[34] Public school programs (which serve about half of all pre-kindergartners) are rated higher quality than those in public charter schools.[35]

Prince George's County offers pre-kindergarten to all economically disadvantaged 4-year-olds. There are no waiting lists, as seats must be available for all income-eligible children who apply.[36] 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.[37] The proposed 2015 state budget removes a "hold harmless" provision that prevented a decrease in the number of state-funded slots. If this provision is removed, Arlington will see a reduction in the number of state-funded slots, from 537 to 486, and 51 children will lose their access to pre-K. Most VPI programs in Arlington County do not participate in VSQI, so data on program quality are not readily available.[38]

Alexandria's VPI participation rate is 97 percent, with 371 of the 381 budgeted slots filled.[39] Currently, there are 5 children on the waiting list.[40] Under the current state formula allocation, Alexandria will see an increase of 134 slots, to a total of 523, for 2014-2015.[41] Alexandria will have to allocate additional matching funds to take advantage of this increase in state-funded slots. With regard to program quality, 9 VPI programs in Alexandria are participating in VSQI.[42]

CONCLUSION

The more than 400 retired admirals and generals who are members of MISSION: READINESS 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 future national security demand.

Endnotes

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