MISSION: READINESS

Early Learning: A National Security Imperative

How high-quality pre-K can help more young adults qualify for military service

71 percent of today's young adults cannot join the military

As military leaders look ahead to the coming years, they are increasingly concerned that there are not enough qualified candidates to defend our nation. This concern stems from problems including education, obesity, crime and drug abuse that render 71 percent of today's young adults ineligible for military service.[1]

If we do not address such problems early on in children's lives, the nation risks a shortage of qualified recruits—one that will leave the country vulnerable for years to come and threaten the strength of the future military.

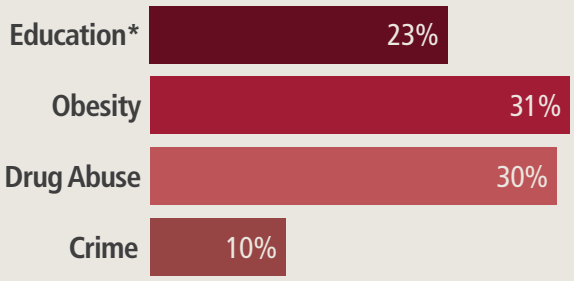
High-quality pre-K can help children succeed

Mounting research shows that the early years of life are incredibly important for later learning, behaviors and health.[2] Studies show that high-quality pre-K helps children:

- **Do well in school:** High-quality pre-K can improve children's early math and literacy skills, putting them three to nine months ahead of their classmates in elementary school.[3] Some high-quality programs even boost high school graduation rates by 30 to 50 percent.[4]
- **Achieve a healthy weight:** Pre-K programs that emphasize healthy eating, physical activity and parent engagement can help lower child obesity rates by five to 24 percent.[5]
- **Stay on the right side of the law:** Studies of two high-quality pre-K programs found that participating children were less likely to have criminal records as adults.[6]

Common Barriers to Military Service

Percent of US Young Adults (Ages 17-24) Who Would Not Qualify for Military Service, by Category



*Education pertains to 17- to 20-year-olds who applied for service.

Note: Young adults can be counted in more than one category and therefore categories do not sum to 71 percent. Not all disqualifiers are listed.

Source: Education Trust; Department of Defense (DoD) 2013 Qualified Military Available (QMA)

These benefits play into one another. For example, better education can help improve health and vice versa. As such, high-quality pre-K is an important step toward establishing a culture of health across America.

Policymakers should continue the movement toward high-quality pre-K

Over the past few years, high-quality pre-K has gained traction across the U.S. In the 2015-16 state budget year, 32 states—22 with Republican governors and 10 with Democratic governors—increased funding for pre-K.[7]

However, 54 percent of the nation's three- and four-year-olds still do not attend pre-K, let alone a high-quality program.[8] Policymakers at the state and national levels should continue to expand high-quality early education to ensure that all children are prepared in mind, body and character to succeed at whatever career they choose, including military service.

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1 According to the 2013 Qualified Military Available (QMA), based on personal communication with the Accession Policy and Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies teams at the Department of Defense in July 2014.

2 Harvard University Center on the Developing Child (n.d.) "Key Concepts: Brain Architecture." Retrieved from http://developingchild.harvard.edu/key_concepts/brain_architecture/

3 Ladd, H. F., et al. (2012). Early childhood initiatives and third grade outcomes in North Carolina. http://research.sanford.duke.edu/papers/SAN12-01.pdf; Barnett, W. S., et al (2013). Abbott Preschool Program longitudinal effects study: Fifth grade follow-up. National Institute for Early Education Research. http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/APPLES%205th%20Grade.pdf

4 Reynolds, A. J., et al. (2001). Long-term effects of an early childhood intervention on educational achievement and juvenile arrest A 15-year follow-up of low-income children in public schools. JAMA, 285, 2339-2346; Michigan Great Start Readiness Program evaluation 2012: High school graduation and grade retention findings. Retrieved from http://bridgemi.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/GSRP-evaluation-may-21-12.pdf; Schweinhart, L.J., et al. (2005). Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press

5 NYC DHMH, 2012: http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cdp/cdp_pan_staff-home.shtml; CDC, 2011: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6049a1.htm; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2012: www.rwjf.org/healthpolicy; Robbins, J.M. et al., 2012: http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2012/12_0118.htm; Kolbo, J.R., et al. (2012): http://www.southernobesitysummit.org/uploads/1/4/5/7/14570646/jerome_kolbo.pdf

6 Reynolds, A. J., 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.

7 Education Commission of the States (2016). http://www.ecs.org/ec-content/uploads/01252016_Prek-K_Funding_report-4.pdf

8 KIDS COUNT Data Center analysis of U.S. Census data, 2011-13 three-year American Community Survey. Retrieved from datacenter.kidscount.org