



# Unable To Serve:

## Why Military Service is Out of Reach for Most Young People in Pittsburgh

High-quality pre-kindergarten programs can help address a national security issue

A Report by



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**MISSION: READINESS**  
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

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# Unable to Serve:

## Why Military Service is Out of Reach for Most Young People in Pittsburgh

High-quality pre-kindergarten programs can help address a national security issue

### Summary

Military service, which for decades has served as a credible career option for young adults in Pittsburgh, now remains out of reach for the vast majority of young men and women in Pittsburgh. An estimated 80 to 90 percent of young adults in Pittsburgh – approximately 25,000 young men and women age 18 to 24 – are unable to join the military largely because they cannot meet the military’s education or fitness standards or have serious criminal records, according to a new analysis of data by MISSION: READINESS, a national nonprofit group composed of more than 200 retired generals and admirals. Citing concerns about achieving future recruitment goals and maintaining national security, the retired military leaders are calling on state and federal legislators in Pennsylvania to increase investments in high-quality early education programs as a critical step in helping expand future career options for young adults in Pittsburgh and increasing the pool of qualified candidates for military service.

The Department of Defense has estimated that about 75 percent of young adults nationwide are unable to join the military, but a new analysis by MISSION: READINESS indicates that in Pittsburgh the percentage of young adults unable to join the military is higher. Three key reasons stand out. Even though Pittsburgh has been working hard to help its young people succeed, compared to national data, a higher percentage of young people in Pittsburgh have not completed high school, are unprepared to pass the entrance exam even if they have a degree, and more of them have been involved in serious criminal behavior. In addition, a higher percentage of young

adults have weight problems. Nationally, data from the military and from the Centers for Disease Control show that approximately one in four young adults is too overweight or obese to meet the military’s standards. Other disqualifying factors – including asthma and other health problems, drug dependency and poor eyesight – further reduce the pool of qualified candidates. After taking into account the lower graduation and academic proficiency rates and the higher crime and overweight rates for young people in Pittsburgh compared to nationwide, and using the 75 percent nationwide figure from the Department of Defense as a benchmark, MISSION: READINESS estimates that 80 to 90 percent of young adults in Pittsburgh are unable to join the military.

MISSION: READINESS also has concluded that investments in high-quality early learning programs, such as Pennsylvania’s Pre-K

Counts, represent a critical first step in addressing a serious national security issue. Pre-kindergarten can help more kids graduate and fewer become involved in crime, giving them broader job opportunities. Serving more than 350 children in Pittsburgh alone, Pre-K Counts has strong data showing it can help at-risk children succeed in school. For example, research shows that participation in the statewide program led to a decline in the percentage of children with low social skills or self-control from 21 percent to 4 percent. Other research shows that investing in high-quality early education is the most proven intervention to guarantee that more at-risk children can graduate from high school. High-quality early education also cuts crime, saving up to \$16 dollars for every dollar invested. More high-quality pre-kindergarten – not less – is needed to give the city’s young people wider options in life, including the option to join the military if they choose to serve.

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***“In the coming decade, the United States will face a significant workforce shortfall and both the civilian and military sectors may not have the skilled labor required to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy.”***

**– U.S. Army White Paper, 2009**

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### In Brief: Why the Military Is Out of Reach for Most Young People in Pittsburgh

Nationally, 75 percent of young Americans are unable to join the military largely because they are not physically fit, are not sufficiently educated or have a serious criminal record.<sup>1</sup> An estimated 80 to 90 percent of young adults in Pittsburgh – approximately 25,000 young men and women age 18 to 24 – are unable to join the military.<sup>2</sup> Consider the following:

- In Pittsburgh, 55 percent of high school students do not graduate on time, compared to 31 percent nationally.<sup>3</sup>
- A new analysis of military data shows that more than one in five young people in Pennsylvania who *do* graduate and then take the entrance exam for the military do not do well enough to join. Approximately four out of ten young African-Americans and Hispanic graduates in Pennsylvania do not do well enough to join.<sup>4</sup>

- Nationally, five percent of young people cannot join the military solely because of their criminal records.<sup>5</sup> In Pittsburgh, the adult violent crime rate is more than twice the national rate indicating that the percentage of young adults with serious criminal records in Pittsburgh is likely also much higher than the national average.<sup>6</sup>

**Taken together, these data indicate that a higher percentage of young adults in Pittsburgh than nationwide do not meet military standards for education and criminal involvement.**

### Many young people in Pittsburgh lack basic skills

In earlier generations, a young man without much formal education could work in a factory, pay the mortgage on his house and feed his family. He could also serve in the military. Women were often not in the paid workforce at all. Times have changed. To get a good job, or to protect those beside you in combat, young people today need to be able to comprehend complex instructions, write clearly, master computer software and have well-developed communication and social skills. When the mortar shells are coming in is

no time to discover that the woman or man next to you cannot read a map, cannot communicate appropriately with headquarters or does not know how to enter coordinates into a computer. Just as in the civilian workforce, the military increasingly needs better-educated young men and women to run modern weapon systems.

Unfortunately, the United States military is discovering what other employers know. As the Army’s report *Strong Students, Strong Futures, Strong Nation* says, “In the coming decade, the United States will face a significant workforce shortfall and both the civilian and military sectors may not have the skilled labor required to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy. The effect on our ability to compete globally will be devastating if we do not act immediately and forcefully to reverse the impact.”<sup>7</sup> While military and civilian jobs are becoming more complex, many young people are not graduating from high school on time.

Nationwide, almost three out of every ten ninth graders are not graduating from high school on time, but in Pittsburgh more than half of their students did not graduate on time in 2007.<sup>8</sup>

In the past, the military has accepted young people without high school degrees if they had a GED and had a significantly higher score than the minimum required for a high school graduate on the military’s Armed Forces Qualification Test





(AFQT) that measures potential recruits' academic knowledge and skills. But historically, half of the non-graduates accepted into the military failed to finish their first term of enlistment.<sup>9</sup> One of the things a high school degree measures, in addition to academic knowledge, is that a young person will finish the job no matter how hard it gets.

*Of young people in Pennsylvania who do graduate and then take the entrance exam for the military, one in five do not do well enough to join.*

– The Education Trust, 2011

### Another barrier to military service: a serious criminal record

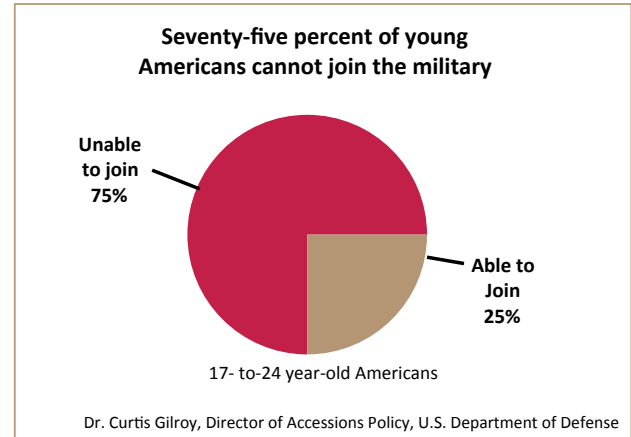
Five percent of young Americans cannot join the military because of at least one prior conviction for a felony or serious misdemeanor.<sup>14</sup> In Pittsburgh, the adult violent crime rate is more than twice the national rate. That is an indication that the percentage of young adults with serious criminal records in Pittsburgh is almost certainly higher than the national average.<sup>15</sup>

### Many young Americans are too overweight to serve

Surveys done for the Army's Accessions Command, which carries the responsibility for recruiting and the initial training of new Army recruits, and for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that about one in four young Americans is too heavy to join the military.<sup>16</sup> The proportion of young adults in all of Allegheny County who are overweight or obese is similar to the proportion who are overweight or obese nationally, indicating that the rate for Pittsburgh is likely similar.<sup>17</sup>

### 75 percent of young adults nationwide cannot join the military

Nationwide, at least 75 percent of young Americans 17 to 24 years old cannot join the military primarily because of poor education, being physically unfit or criminal problems. Other barriers include asthma or other health problems, drug abuse, being too tall or too short and a range of other disqualifiers according to Congressional testimony by Curtis Gilroy, Director of Accessions Policy, Office of the Undersecretary of



Defense for Personnel and Readiness.<sup>18</sup> Often young people have two, three or even more overlapping reasons why they cannot join. Based on the worse rates for graduation, academic proficiency, arrests, and being overweight or obese in Pittsburgh compared to nationwide, it is reasonable to conclude that 80 to 90 percent of young 17- to 24-year-olds in Pittsburgh cannot join the military if they want to serve.

According to Dr. Gilroy's written testimony before Congress in 2009 and an Armed Forces Press Service article in March of 2010, just 15 percent of young Americans are both fully qualified and not in college (though the military points out that

### Dropping Out of School Limits Opportunities in the Military

The Navy and the Army report that five percent of their new recruits did not have a high school degree in 2009, and in the Air Force and Marines one percent did not have a degree.<sup>10</sup> In 2010, even fewer young people without high school degrees are being allowed into the military.<sup>11</sup>

Graduating on time, however, does not necessarily indicate a person has enough education to serve in today's military. Many graduates do not do well enough on the AFQT to join the military. A new analysis of military data shows that more than one in five young people in Pennsylvania who *do* graduate and then take the entrance exam for the military do not do well enough to join the Army. Approximately four out of ten young African-Americans and Hispanic graduates in Pennsylvania do not do well enough to join.<sup>12</sup> Though AFQT data are not available for Pittsburgh, 2009 data from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests (PSAA) on mathematics and reading proficiency show that 48 percent of Pittsburgh 11<sup>th</sup> graders scored at or below basic levels in reading and 57 percent scored at or below basic levels in mathematics – substantially below the statewide average.<sup>13</sup>



some young people enlist when they either graduate or leave college).<sup>19</sup>

The recent recession (and large enlistment bonuses) have made it easier for the 15,000 military recruiters around the country to meet their goals of enlisting an estimated 168,000 recruits a year. But Clifford Stanley, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, warned Congress about the need to avoid a “boom or bust” recruiting cycle.<sup>20</sup> And retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Norman R. Seip has warned that “a failing economy is no formula for filling the ranks of a strong military, and these longer-term eligibility problems are not going away.”

### Early education works to increase graduation rates and reduce crime

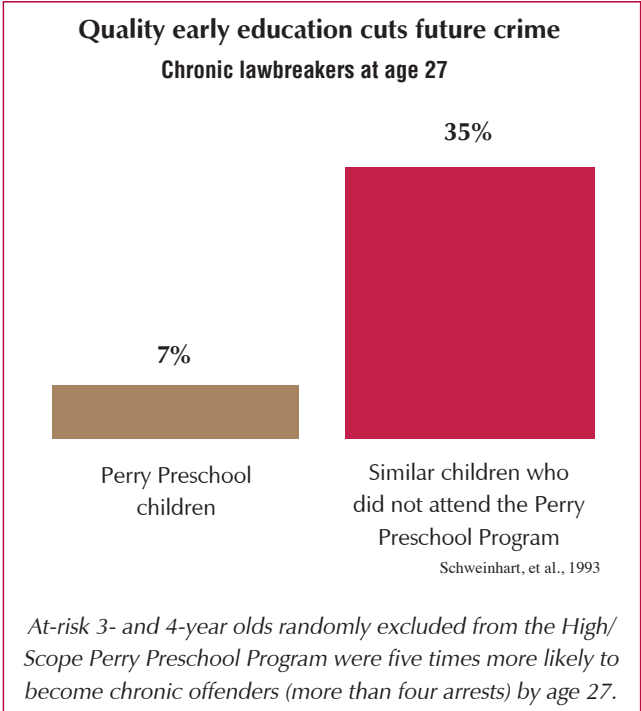
Investments in high-quality early education can provide greater opportunities for children and help expand the pool of qualified candidates for military service. Long-term studies of three different early education programs provide solid evidence that high-quality early-education programs can enable many disadvantaged children to succeed in life. Each study followed into adulthood at-risk children who attended such programs, as well as similar children in control groups who did not participate in the programs.

**The Perry Preschool Program:** In Ypsilanti, Michigan, 3- and 4-year-olds from low-income families who participated in a high-quality preschool program were followed into adulthood. Those who participated in the program were 44 percent more likely to have graduated from high school than the non-participants, and non-participants were five times more likely to be chronic lawbreakers by age 27 than those who attended Perry.<sup>21</sup>

*“Quality early education increases graduation rates by as much as 44 percent.”*

– Schweinhart, 2005

**Child-Parent Centers:** Chicago’s publicly funded Child-Parent Centers (CPC) have served over 100,000 3- and 4-year-olds since 1967. For 20 years, researchers tracked nearly 1,000 of those children and over 500 similar children not in the program. The children who participated in the program were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than those who did not, and the children left out were 70 percent more



likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than those who attended CPC.<sup>22</sup>

**Pennsylvania’s own Pre-K Counts:** A new evaluation of the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts (PKC) program shows strong results, especially with children who were already developmentally delayed or delayed in acquiring social skills. In Pittsburgh, 355 children are enrolled in Pre-K Counts programs.<sup>23</sup>

The evaluation of the program noted that high-risk children start kindergarten with learning skills 1.5 years behind their more advantaged peers. The evaluation of the programs in 21 school districts showed that:

- At the beginning of PKC, 21 percent of children showed developmental delays, but by the end of the program the percentage with delays was down to 8 percent.
- At the beginning of PKC, 21 percent of 3-year-old participants were deficient in social skills and self-control, but by the end of the program that figure was down to 4 percent – a reduction of over 80 percent.<sup>24</sup>

*Child-Parent Centers: At-risk children left out of quality pre-kindergarten were 70 percent more likely to commit violent crimes than participants by age 18.*

– Reynolds, 2001



### Early Education in the Military



The United States military itself understands the inherent value of early education. The military has been providing high-quality early care and education to the children of personnel at bases around the globe for two decades – in fact, the U.S. military provides the largest employer-sponsored child care program in the world. The military’s Child Development Centers have been recognized for their path-breaking role in this area.<sup>25</sup>

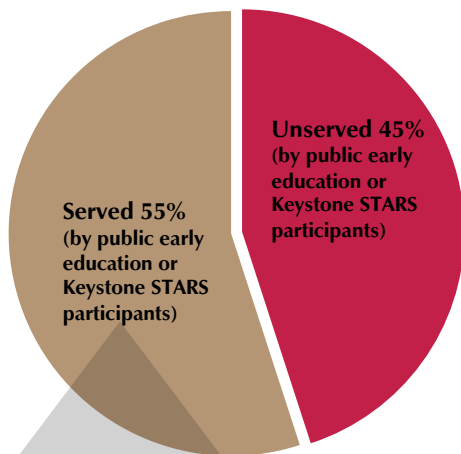
photo credit: Corporal Monica Erickson

### A strong investment with impressive returns

Not only does research show that early education can reduce the need for special education and advance the educational success of students, it also produces solid savings to taxpayers.

Disadvantaged children who repeatedly fail in school do not simply disappear. Too often these children grow up to have very troubled lives, and their struggles can be extremely costly to society. Special education, repeated grades in school, crime, welfare and other costs result in staggering expenses for America’s taxpayers.

**More than half of Pittsburgh's children - 0 to 5 - are served by either public programs or the private providers participating in the state's Keystone STARS rating and support program**



*“A child who drops out of school, abuses drugs and becomes a career criminal costs society, on average, over \$2.5 million.”*

**-Cohen & Piquero, 2008**

A child who drops out of school, abuses drugs and becomes a career criminal costs society, on average, over \$2.5 million.<sup>26</sup> A researcher added up all the quantifiable private and public costs of crime and found that criminal behavior alone was found to cost Americans \$1.7 trillion a year.<sup>27</sup>

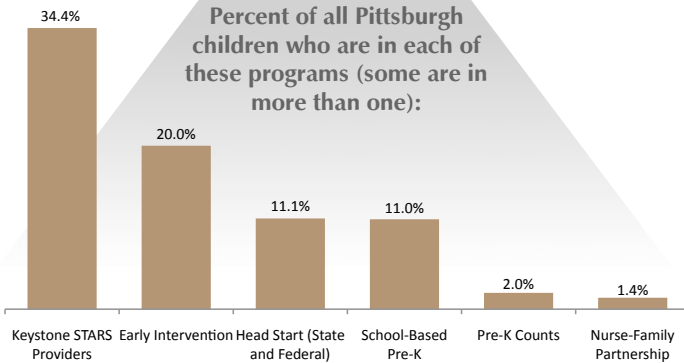
Because the costs to society incurred by such a child can be so high, research shows that the benefits of investing in high-quality pre-kindergarten for at-risk kids far outweigh the costs. According to cost-benefit studies done of two of the programs:

#### Net Societal Savings from Early Education Investments

High/Scope Perry Preschool	\$244,812 <sup>28</sup>
Chicago Child-Parent Centers	\$92,220 <sup>29</sup>

The Perry Preschool program produced such strong savings that it saved \$16 for every dollar invested.<sup>30</sup>

Percent of all Pittsburgh children who are in each of these programs (some are in more than one):







*“Early childhood education can... give children the proper start for a lifetime of learning so they can graduate from high school fully equipped to take advantage of any career opportunity, which all old soldiers like me hope will include military service in defense of this great nation.”*

**- Lieutenant General Dennis L. Benchoff,  
Former Chief of Staff, Army Recruiting Command,  
US Army (Ret.)**

## **Pittsburgh needs to serve more kids and with high quality programs**

Pennsylvania as a whole has made impressive strides in increasing the number of children served by early care and education. Currently, more than half (55 percent) of young children under five in Pittsburgh are being served by quality publicly funded early childhood education programs, including the Nurse-Family Partnership, state and federally funded Head Start, Pre-K Counts, School Based Pre-K, and Early Intervention or by the Keystone Star Providers program that helps private providers improve the quality of their services so they can earn higher quality ratings.<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, the future of Pittsburgh Public Schools’ quality pre-kindergarten program is uncertain. Proposed elimination of the state Accountability Block Grant Program would result in a loss of over \$5 million of the District’s funding for quality pre-kindergarten – eliminating about 500 at-risk children from the program in the upcoming 2011-12 school year.<sup>32</sup>

In order to help more Pittsburgh children succeed, more children – not less – must receive these early education services and the programs must continue to strive to provide the highest-quality programs in order for the children served to achieve better graduation rates and lower crime rates.

## **Conclusion**

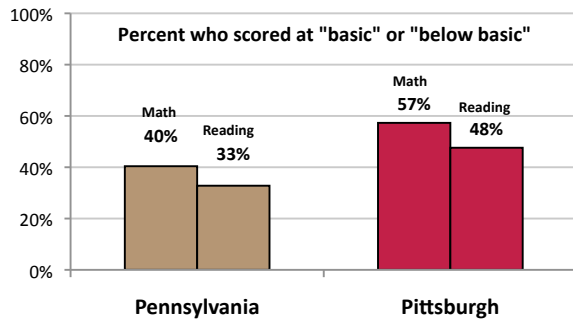
These are tough financial times for the federal government and especially for the state. But this is no time to sound retreat in our efforts to make sure all our children have the right start in life. At the state level policy makers need to continue to find the funds to maintain the great strides they have made. At the federal level, Congress has an important opportunity now, through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, to evolve the old K-12 system into a new paradigm of Pre-K through 12, and to make sure those pre-kindergarten programs are high-quality. The Administration’s proposed Early Learning Challenge Fund in particular is a well-informed effort to encourage states to more aggressively pursue high-quality early learning as an essential part of overall education reform.

Funding for high-quality early care and education is crucial for Pittsburgh’s children, crucial for their communities, and crucial for the fiscal health of our state and national budgets. Finally, it is also necessary for our national security. We need to find the money to invest wisely now in what works.



## Appendix

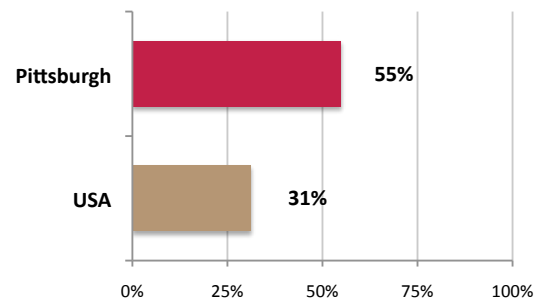
**Pittsburgh's 11th graders more often scored at "basic" or "below basic" on the state's reading and math achievement tests than students statewide**



Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011  
Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2010

**High school students in Pittsburgh are 77 percent more likely not to graduate from high school after 4 years compared to students throughout the nation**

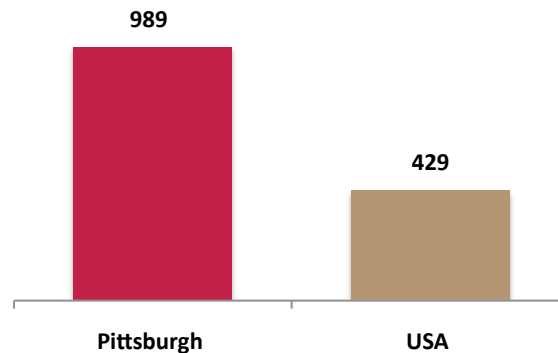
Proportion of students that do not graduate on-time



Education Week, 2010

**Pittsburgh's violent crime rate for adults is more than 2 times as high as the national average**

Violent crime rates per 100,000 individuals



*Note: Juvenile crime rates are not available for Pittsburgh but are likely to be similar in proportion to adult rates.*

Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010



## Endnotes

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