



MISSION: READINESS

MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

Young Pennsylvanians: Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve

75 percent of America's young adults cannot join the military;
Early education across Pennsylvania is needed to ensure national security

Hundreds of thousands of young men and women throughout America have stepped forward and put their lives on the line in both Afghanistan and Iraq. As the Generals and Admirals who have been responsible for leading our country's military around the world, we are deeply concerned by Department of Defense data that 75 percent of today's young people ages 17 to 24 are unable to enlist in our military, including an estimated 1 million young adults in Pennsylvania. Three of the most common barriers for why Pennsylvanians cannot join are failure to graduate from high school, a criminal record, and physical fitness issues, including obesity. The long-term trends are ominous because:

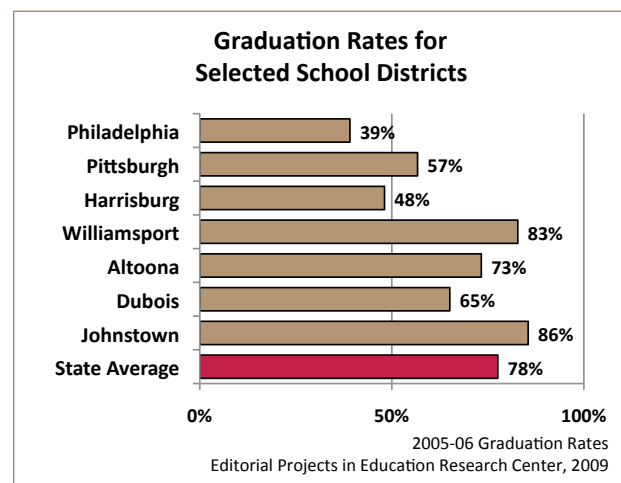
- Approximately **one out of four** young Americans **lacks a high school diploma** and only 78 percent of ninth graders in Pennsylvania graduate on time with a high school diploma. Many Pennsylvanians who have a diploma – and most dropouts with a GED – have insufficient math or reading skills to qualify;
- **One in 10** young Americans cannot join because they have at least one prior **conviction for a felony or serious misdemeanor**. In Pennsylvania, **one in 28** adults are either currently on probation, in jail, or on parole;
- At least **27 percent** of young Americans are **too overweight** to join the military. In Pennsylvania, the problem is especially acute, with **30 percent of children age 10 to 17 overweight or obese**.

Other young adults in Pennsylvania have additional health or other problems preventing them from joining. Many young Pennsylvanians have two, three, or more overlapping reasons why they are among the 75 percent of young Americans unable to serve.

As retired Generals and Admirals, we have joined together to launch MISSION: READINESS, an organization dedicated to making sure our youngest Americans get the right start so they will have every opportunity to succeed in life – whatever career path they may choose. The best aircraft, ships and satellite-guided weaponry alone will not be enough to keep our country strong. We will need young Americans who can succeed academically, graduate from high school, be fit, and obey the law.

The most proven investment to help kids graduate from high school starts early: high-quality early education for at-risk kids. Early education also helps kids stay away from crime and succeed in life:

- Children receiving the Perry Preschool high-quality early education program graduated from high school 44 percent more often;
- Those not receiving another early education program, the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime;
- These two proven early education programs have produced savings in special education, child welfare, crime and other costs averaging \$70,000 to over \$200,000 per child.



“Our men and women in uniform are the best in the world. But the sophistication of our military is increasing every year so we will soon need even better-qualified recruits. ... To keep our country strong and safe, we need to ensure all young Americans get the right start in life – we need more investments in high-quality early education.”

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,
General Hugh Shelton (Ret. U.S. Army)

MISSION: READINESS – MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS is the bipartisan, nonprofit, national security organization of over 110 retired generals and admirals. The military leaders of **MISSION: READINESS** call on all policymakers to ensure America’s security and prosperity by supporting interventions proven to help America’s youth succeed academically, stay physically fit, and abide by the law.

Acknowledgements **MISSION: READINESS** is supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations. **MISSION: READINESS** accepts no funds from federal, state, or local governments. Supporters include: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Birth To Five Policy Alliance, The Grable Foundation, and The Pew Charitable Trusts and Pre-K Now, a campaign of the Pew Center of the States. Pre-K Now collaborates with organizations and policy-makers to lead a movement toward high-quality, voluntary pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders of this report.

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*This brief is based on a full report of the same title which is available on our website at www.missionreadiness.org
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