



MISSION: READINESS

Young Virginians: Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve

75 percent of America's young adults cannot join the military;
Early education across Virginia 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 670,000 young adults in Virginia. Three of the most common barriers for why Virginians 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:

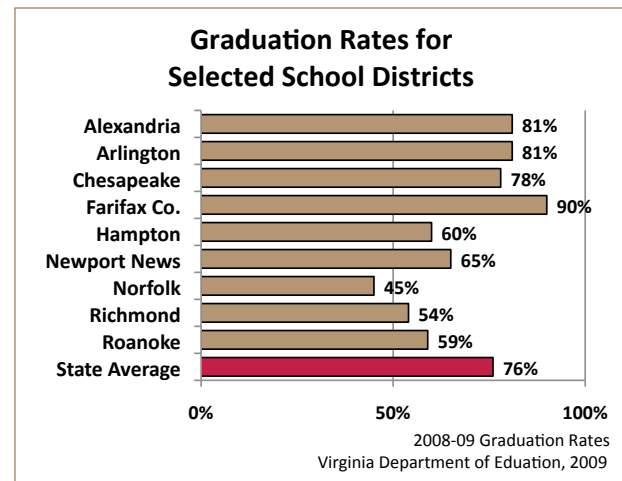
- Approximately **one out of four** young Americans **lacks a high school diploma** and only 83 percent of ninth graders in Virginia graduate on time with a high school diploma. Many Virginians who have a diploma – and most dropouts with a GED – have insufficient math or reading skills to qualify;
- **One in 10** young Americans cannot join because they have at least one prior **conviction for a felony or serious misdemeanor**. In Virginia, **one in 46** adults are either currently on probation, in jail, or on parole;
- Surveys show **about a quarter** of young Americans are **too overweight** to join the military. In Virginia, the problem is especially acute, with **31 percent of children age 10 to 17 overweight or obese**.

Other young adults in Virginia have additional health or other problems preventing them from joining. Many young Virginians 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.”

General Henry “Hugh” Shelton, US Army (Ret.),
Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

75 percent of young Americans cannot join the military

Who is ineligible?

According to the Pentagon, seventy-five percent of young Americans cannot join the military.

In some cases, there may be only one problem keeping a potential recruit out. However, many potential recruits have overlapping reasons such as a serious criminal record, a problem with their weight, and occasional asthma.

The three most common causes behind this problem:

School failure: Approximately **three out of ten lack a high school diploma** and are disqualified by their education level. While students with GED's can receive a waiver if they score high enough on the academic sections of the military entrance exams, most have not acquired the necessary math or reading skills they would need to qualify.

Criminality: One in ten cannot join because they **have one or more prior convictions** for a felony or serious misdemeanor, or have a serious criminal record and at least one other disqualification.

Weight problems: Surveys show that approximately one quarter of young Americans are too overweight to join the military.

Additional reasons beyond the top three: Many young people are disqualified from service for various medical problems, such as asthma, mental health problems, hearing problems, or recent treatment for Attention Deficit Disorders. Others have dependent children or other non-medical reasons making them ineligible.

To sum up: two out of ten young people are fully eligible, some others can join with a minor medical waiver or another exception to the recruitment standards, but - for one or more reasons - seventy-five percent of young Americans cannot currently join the military.

Strategies to strengthen America's young people:

Increasing graduation rates: High-quality early education is the most proven way to increase graduation rates. The Perry preschool program raised graduation rates by 44 percent. Other high-quality pre-kindergarten programs also deliver solid results, such as the Chicago Child-Parent Centers that raised graduation rates by 12 percent.

Crime prevention: High-quality early education and care programs cut crime. For example, the Perry Preschool program found that, by age 40, individuals in the program were half as likely to have been arrested for a violent crime. A program where nurses coached low-income young mothers in effective parenting skills before and after they gave birth cut crimes by the children over the next 19 years in half.

Developing more fit Americans: In the past three decades, obesity rates have quadrupled for children ages 6 to 11. This is a societal problem requiring society-wide solutions. The National Institutes of Health are supporting community-wide programs that can help reverse this growing epidemic.

We must invest wisely now

America produces the best ships, planes, and tanks, but we must also produce enough educated, fit, and law-abiding young Americans to serve in our military. If we provide America's youth with strong academic and social skills training now, they will be ready for tomorrow's career options, including a career in the military if they choose to pursue one.

America needs to ensure the future strength of our economy and our military. The retired military leaders of Mission: Readiness urge lawmakers to invest now in research-based programs that will give our children the right start in life.

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MissionReadiness.org



MISSION: READINESS is the bipartisan, nonprofit, national security organization of over 175 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.

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"The U.S. Army today faces an imminent and menacing threat to our national security. We are engaged in a struggle that will determine our future. The threat? The lack of fully qualified young people to serve in the military. Faced with these declining numbers, we have two choices: Lower the military admission standards or raise the health and education standards for our young people."

**General William Wallace
US Army (Ret.)
Former Commanding General,
US Army Training and Doctrine**



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