



Ready, Willing, And Unable To Serve

75 Percent of Young Adults Cannot Join
the Military

Early Education across
America is Needed to
Ensure National Security

A Report by



MISSION: READINESS
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

Report Documentation Page

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MISSION: READINESS
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

A Message from America's Retired Generals, Admirals and Civilian Military Leaders:

Americans have always answered the call to military service. Hundreds of thousands of young men and women throughout America have put their lives on the line in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and served with honor on humanitarian and other missions around the world.

Unfortunately, many young Americans who want to join cannot. Startling statistics released by the Pentagon show that 75 percent of young people ages 17 to 24 are currently unable to enlist in the United States military. Three of the most common barriers for potential recruits are failure to graduate high school, a criminal record, and physical fitness issues, including obesity.

The United States military requires rigorous eligibility standards because it needs competent, healthy and educated individuals to staff the world's most professional and technologically-advanced military. The best aircraft, ships and satellite-guided weaponry alone will not be enough to keep our country strong. To ensure a strong, capable fighting force for the future, America's youth must succeed academically, graduate from high school, be fit, and obey the law. That is why retired senior military leaders are joining together to launch *MISSION: READINESS*.

The most proven investment for kids who need help graduating from high school starts early: high-quality early education. It also helps kids stay away from crime and succeed in life.

Our recommendation to state and federal policymakers is to ensure that America's children have access to high-quality early education. That is the best way to make certain that more young Americans will meet the tough standards of the United States military should they choose to serve. A strong commitment today to high-quality early education will keep America strong and safe tomorrow.

Very Respectfully,

General John M. Shalikashvili, US Army (Ret.)
General Henry "Hugh" Shelton, US Army (Ret.)
General Wesley Clark, US Army (Ret.)
General Richard E. Hawley, US Air Force (Ret.)
General Johnnie E. Wilson, US Army (Ret.)
Admiral Leon A. "Bud" Edney, US Navy (Ret.)
Admiral Edmund P. Giambastiani, Jr., US Navy (Ret.)
Admiral Thomas B. Hayward, US Navy (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Joe N. Ballard, US Army (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Dennis L. Benchoff, US Army (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Robert G. Gard, Jr., US Army (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Jerome B. Hilmes, US Army (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Donald L. Kerrick, US Army (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Ricardo S. Sanchez, US Army (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Ronald L. Watts, US Army (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Joseph H. Wehrle, US Air Force (Ret.)
Lieutenant General Robert J. Winglass, US Marine Corps (Ret.)
Vice Admiral Donald Arthur, US Navy (Ret.)
Vice Admiral Edward H. Martin, US Navy (Ret.)
Vice Admiral James A. Zimble, US Navy (Ret.)
Major General Earl L. Adams, US Army (Ret.)
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Major General Donald R. Infante, US Army (Ret.)
Major General James A. Kelley, US Army (Ret.)
Major General Paul E. Mock, US Army (Ret.)
Major General Paul D. Monroe, Jr., US Army (Ret.)
Major General George W. "Nordie" Norwood, US Air Force (Ret.)
Major General Daniel J. O'Neill, US Army (Ret.)
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Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Alford L. McMichael (Ret.)
Sergeant Major of the Army Reserve Michele S. Jones (Ret.)
Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Vincent W. Patton, III (Ret.)
Sergeant Major of the Army Jack L. Tilley (Ret.)
Former Secretary of the Navy John H. Dalton
Former Under Secretary of the Army Joe R. Reeder



Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve

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

The Pentagon reports that 75 percent of Americans aged 17 to 24 cannot join the United States military – 26 million young Americans. The reasons behind this are serious and, if left unaddressed, will adversely affect the future strength of our military. In the interest of national security, we must understand and deal with these problems now. We cannot rely on a continuation of what may be the worst recession since the Great Depression to ensure that America has enough qualified men and women to defend our country.

Three Crucial Reasons Why Young Americans Cannot Join the Military:

Although there may be multiple reasons why an individual is ineligible to serve in the military, the three biggest problems are that too many young Americans are poorly educated, involved in crime, or physically unfit.

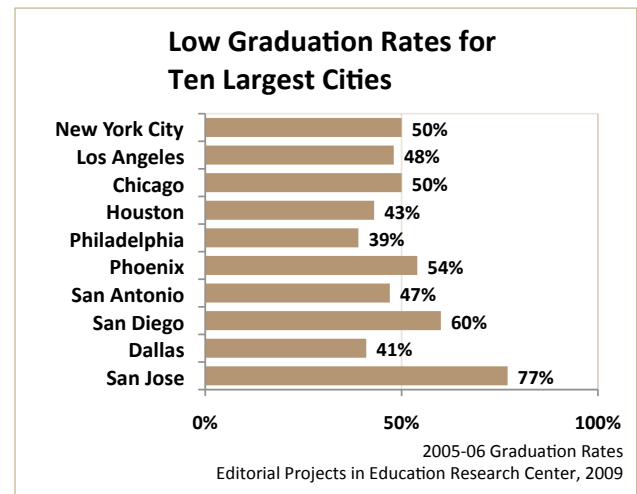
Inadequate education: Approximately **one out of four** young Americans lacks a high school diploma.¹ Students who have received a general equivalency degree (GED) can sometimes receive a waiver if they score well enough on the military's entrance exam. However, most of those who dropped out and obtained a GED instead of a regular degree do not possess sufficient math or reading skills to qualify.

Not only are too many young people failing to graduate, many of those who *do* graduate still lack the academic skills necessary to take their place alongside others in the workforce or in the military.

The "Nation's Report Card," the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reports that in 2007, 69 percent of the nation's eighth graders scored below proficiency level in math, and 70 percent scored below proficiency level in reading.²

Even with a high school degree, many potential recruits still fail the Armed Forces Qualification Test (the AFQT) and cannot join. The test is used by the military to determine math and reading skills. About 30 percent of potential recruits with a high school degree take the test and fail it.³

Criminality: One in 10 young adults cannot join because they have at least one prior conviction for a felony or serious misdemeanor (and for five percent of young adults, trouble with the law is the only thing keeping them out).⁴



To illustrate how serious the crime problem is in America, there were more than 14 million arrests for crimes in the United States in 2007 and nearly 600,000 arrests for violent crimes.⁵ According to the Pew Center on the States, "One in 30 men between the ages of 20 and 34 is behind bars."⁶ Juvenile crime is also a serious problem, with over 2.2 million juvenile arrests in America in 2006.⁷

Physically unfit: 27 percent of young Americans are **too overweight** to join the military.⁸ Many are turned away by recruiters and others never try to join. Of those who attempt to join, however, roughly 15,000 young potential recruits fail their entrance physicals every year because they are too heavy.⁹

"One in 30 men between the ages of 20 and 34 is behind bars."

– Pew Center on the States

The percentage of Americans who are not just overweight but actually obese has risen rapidly. The rate of obesity among American adults has more than doubled over the past four decades, with one in three adults being obese.¹⁰ So, the



number of enlistment-age young adults who cannot join the military because of weight problems – currently 27 percent nationally – is likely to continue to rise in the next few years.

Nearly a third (**32 percent**) of all young people have **health problems – other than their weight** – that will keep them from serving. Many are disqualified from serving for asthma, eyesight or hearing problems, mental health issues, or recent treatment for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

When weight problems are added in with the other health problems, over half of young adults cannot join because of health issues.¹¹ Additional young people are not eligible to join because of drug or alcohol problems.

Even when recruits qualify, health problems can cause significant deployment and expense problems later; for example, 20 percent of the Army’s reservists arrived at mobilization sites with dental conditions that made them non-deployable.¹²

Additional reasons beyond education, crime, and physical fitness: Other young people are not eligible to join because they are too tall, too short, or have other non-medical reasons making them ineligible. For example, single parents with custody of a child cannot join. The cut-off points for different service branches vary on many standards.

Multiple problems: Solving one problem is often not enough to allow someone to join. For example, some of the overweight individuals are also involved in crime or have other medical problems that would disqualify them even if they were to lose enough weight.

Not a problem in 2009 but... *The Washington Post* recently reported that, “For the first time in more than 35 years, the U.S. military has met all of its annual recruiting goals.” During economic downturns, higher numbers of well-qualified candidates seek to enlist and the military can temporarily rely less on waivers for those with academic deficits or criminal records.¹³ But a weak economy is no formula for a strong military. Once the economy begins to grow again, the challenge of finding enough high-quality recruits will return. Unless we help more young people get on the right track today, our future military readiness will be put at risk.

In summary: when all the requirements are considered, only about two out of 10 young people are fully eligible to join the Army without any waivers, according to the Army’s Accessions Command.¹⁴ The number of others who are eligible with waivers depends on the service branch and where they draw the lines on waivers for educational deficits, legal offenses or health problems. In his March 2009 testimony, Curtis Gilroy, the Pentagon’s accessions policy director, testified that currently 75 percent of young Americans have problems that will keep them from joining the military.¹⁵

“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. Unfortunately, the number of young Americans who have high-school degrees, are in good physical shape, and are without criminal records is declining. 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.”

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

Quality early education increases graduation rates and cuts crime

Future Mission: Readiness reports will discuss health issues; this report is focused on what can be done to decrease drop-out rates and cut crime. Over 40 years of research on early education programs has found they successfully address both problems.

Research shows early education builds a foundation for future learning

Ninety percent of a person’s adult brain weight is achieved by age five.¹⁶ According to the Institute of Medicine book *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, brain scans and neuroscience have now shown

conclusively that the best time to influence a child’s trajectory in life is during the child’s earliest years when the architecture of the brain is literally under construction. Changes in neurons, connections and structures in the brain continue throughout life, but the most important changes come during the 0-5 years:

What happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot, not because this period of development provides an indelible blueprint for adult well-being, but because it sets either a sturdy or fragile stage for what follows.¹⁷

And “school readiness skills” are more than just learning the ABC’s or knowing how to count. Young children also need to learn to share, wait their turn, follow directions, and



build relationships. This is when children begin to develop a conscience – differentiating right from wrong – and when they start learning to stick with a task until it is completed. Nobel-prize-winning economist James Heckman studies economic productivity and argues that these early social skills are crucial for future success in school and later in life. As Heckman explains, success builds on success. Unfortunately, failure also begets failure.¹⁸

“I first learned about early education from my wife’s personal experience. An early education teacher for 20 years, she would share her classroom experiences during our “How was your day today?” dinner conversations. It was clear to her that you could easily identify students who benefited from pre-kindergarten programs. They had better social skills and better cognitive skills and were more adaptive to the learning process. I was convinced.”

– Major General Frank R. Faykes
US Army (Ret.)

The solid research behind early education

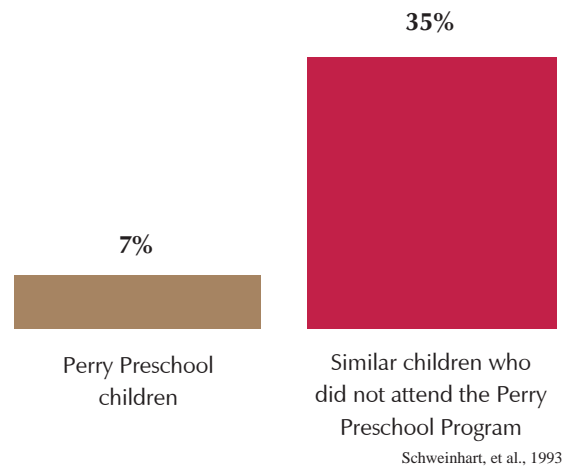
Those who have served in leadership positions in the United States military recognize that it is imperative that the military be able to field not just highly-competent individuals who can operate high-tech machinery and computer systems. The military also needs individuals who will have the ability to work in teams and the excellent judgment needed to successfully carry out their duties while deployed on active duty in high-stress situations. That cannot be acquired just in basic training.

Carefully designed studies have followed the children in those high-quality early learning programs for decades. The resulting research shows that children in the programs had higher rates of high school graduation and lower rates of arrest than the study participants who did not receive the preschool programs.¹⁹

In fact, of the many school reforms that can impact children’s chances of graduating, early education has the most solid proof that it can raise graduation rates.²⁰

QUALITY EARLY ED CUTS FUTURE CRIME

Chronic lawbreakers at age 27



At-risk 3- and 4-year olds randomly excluded from the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program were five times more likely to become chronic offenders (more than four arrests) by age 27.

Evidence supporting pre-kindergarten for at-risk children comes from a randomized-controlled study following children in the **High/Scope Perry Preschool Project** in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Beginning in 1962, preschool teachers worked intensively with low-income children ages 3 and 4. The children attended preschool during the week and teachers came to their homes once a week to coach their parents on appropriate parenting skills. Researchers followed the children up to age 40, comparing their life experiences with the children who did not participate in the early education program. The contrast was stark.

Almost half of the preschool children were performing at grade level by the age of 14, compared with just 15 percent of the children in the control group; and 44 percent more of the children in the Perry program went on to graduate from high school.²¹

By age 27, at-risk three- and four-year-olds left out of the Perry Preschool program were five times more likely to be chronic offenders than similar children who attended the program. Significant and meaningful differences in life outcomes continued through age 40.²²

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

– Schweinhart, 2005

The **Child-Parent Center (CPC)** pre-kindergarten program has served over 100,000 at-risk, inner-city children in Chicago. By the age of 18, children left out of the program were 70 percent more likely than program participants to have been arrested for a violent crime. An outstanding charge or conviction for a violent crime usually prevents a young person from enlisting in the military.²³ The children left out of the program were also almost twice as likely to be placed in foster care as those in the program.²⁴ By age 20, participants in CPC were 29 percent more likely to have graduated from high school.²⁵

Child-Parent Centers: At-risk children left out of quality early education were 70 percent more likely to commit violent crimes.

– Reynolds, 2001

Beginning as early as possible is critical

The **Abecedarian** home visitation and preschool program randomly assigned children from impoverished families living in a small Southern town to either a full-day, enriched preschool program at a child center, or to no intervention. The children began in the program as infants (usually at 4 months) and continued receiving high-quality early education up to age five.

The children *not* in Abecedarian had lower IQ's at age 12, were 91 percent more likely to be held back in school, and dropped out of high school 48 percent more often. The children served by Abecedarian were nearly three times more likely to be attending a 4-year college at age 21.²⁶

The **Syracuse University Family Development Program** provided weekly home visitations and high-quality early learning programs to low-income, single-parent families beginning prenatally and lasting through age five. Ten years after the initial study ended, children who were not included in the program were 10 times more likely to have committed a crime than comparable children enrolled in the program (16.7 percent versus 1.5 percent). Furthermore, children not in the program committed more serious crimes, including sexual abuse, robbery, and assault.²⁷

These snapshots over time of the children's development show that early childhood education and parent coaching can have significant long-term impacts on a person's success or failure in school and beyond. Research shows that these interventions beginning before birth up to age five have far-reaching consequences later in life, and all of society benefits.

A strong investment with impressive returns

Not only does early education 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, crime, welfare, and other costs account for staggering expenses for the nation's taxpayers.

The United States military itself understands the inherent value of early education. The Army, Navy and Air Force have been providing high-quality early care and education to the children of personnel at bases around the globe for more than a decade, and the military's Child Development Centers have been recognized for their path-breaking role in this area.²⁸

Individual children who grow up to drop out of school, abuse drugs and become career criminals cost society, on average, over 2.5 million dollars each.²⁹ There are over seven million Americans on probation, incarcerated, or on parole.³⁰ So, when a researcher, David Anderson, added up all the quantifiable private and public costs for an article in the University of Chicago's *Journal of Law and Economics*, it was not all that surprising that criminal behavior alone was found to cost Americans \$1.7 trillion a year.³¹

Because the various costs to society incurred by some of the at-risk kids can be so high, research shows that the benefits of investing in high-quality early childhood education for at-risk kids far outweigh the costs. According to cost-benefit studies done of the programs:

Net Savings from Early Education Investments

High/Scope Perry Preschool	\$244,811 ³²
Chicago Child-Parent Centers	\$70,977 ³³

Unfortunately, America is still spending heavily on recurrent social problems and not enough on preventing them in the first place. For example, in order to take in fewer young people who have a criminal record, are overweight, or have no high



school degree, the Army has been spending about \$22,000 per recruit in enlistment bonuses.³⁴ As another example, while the Chicago Child-Parent Centers have shown that high-quality early education and parent coaching can cut foster care placements almost in half, state and federal governments together are paying over \$20 billion a year to identify and care for the victims of abuse or neglect in America.³⁵

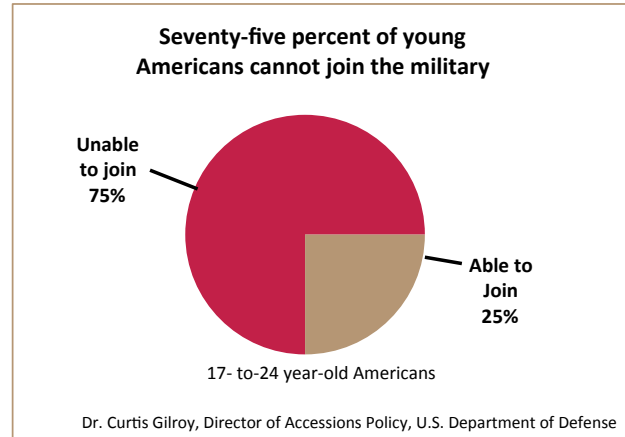
Individual children who grow up to drop out of school, abuse drugs and become career criminals cost society, on average, over 2.5 million dollars each.

Next steps for America

Nationwide, the proportion of four-year-olds served by state pre-k programs has risen from 14 percent in 2002, to 24 percent in 2008 – a 71 percent increase over six years.³⁶ While this is substantial progress, most states fall well short of serving most of their pre-k-age children. More than half of all states are reaching only 30 percent or less of their four-year-old children through state and federal programs, and ten states serve 20 percent or less of the four-year-olds in their state. Some states, such as Oklahoma, have undertaken serious efforts to offer families in their state pre-kindergarten. Oklahoma currently serves 71 percent of all of the state’s four-year-olds in their voluntary, high-quality pre-kindergarten program. Combined with Head Start and programs for children with special education needs, 88 percent of Oklahoma’s families with four-year-old children are taking advantage of voluntary state or federal pre-kindergarten programs.³⁷

Nationally, funding for Head Start, the nation’s premier pre-kindergarten program for at-risk kids, is sufficient to serve less than half of all eligible children, and Early Head Start serves less than five percent of infants and toddlers from low-income families who are eligible.³⁸

Given this current lack of access, clearly a top national and state priority must be to increase the number children served by early education. However, as crucial as it is to increase access, it is equally important to deliver high-quality programs. The research is clear that only high-quality programs deliver strong results. Military commanders all know that quantity is no substitute for quality. A strong military unit needs both.



Conclusion: Early education is an investment in national security

The best aircraft, ships, and satellite-guided weapon systems are only as effective as the personnel the military can recruit to operate them. Just as with our evolving economy, tomorrow’s military will need young people who are better prepared than earlier generations for tomorrow’s challenges. But the trends are not encouraging. Too many young people are dropping out of school, getting involved in crime, and are physically unfit.

“Our national security in the year 2030 is absolutely dependent upon what is going on in pre-kindergarten today.”

**– Rear Admiral James Barnett,
US Navy (Ret.)**

This cannot continue. Our military readiness, and thus our national security, will depend on the ability of the upcoming generation to serve. We need to take action now to reverse our current course.

If members of Congress, governors, and state legislators act now to ramp up both the quantity and quality of early education programs, they can count on strong support from the retired generals and admirals of MISSION: READINESS. America’s military leaders fully understand what is at stake. America can, and must, do a better job of preparing our children for a successful life with many options in adulthood, including a career in the military if they choose to serve. Increased investments in high-quality early education are essential for our national security.



Appendix

Nationally, 75% of young people cannot join the military		States worse than the national average on:		
States	75% of 17-24 year-olds (a)	Overweight or Obese Juveniles (b)	Young people who did not graduate high school (c)	Adults on probation, incarcerated, or on parole (d)
United States	26,022,688			
Alabama	394,240	X	X	
Alaska	64,938	X	X	
Arizona	526,399		X	
Arkansas	231,008	X		X
California	3,370,138		X	
Colorado	407,687			X
Connecticut	284,309			
Delaware	73,864	X	X	X
District of Columbia	66,085	X	X	X
Florida	1,405,581	X	X	
Georgia	804,432	X	X	X
Hawaii	109,167			
Idaho	129,081			X
Illinois	1,146,888	X		
Indiana	529,827		X	X
Iowa	267,945			
Kansas	256,328			
Kentucky	333,529	X		
Louisiana	412,130	X	X	X
Maine	98,540			
Maryland	475,265			X
Massachusetts	582,311			X
Michigan	852,183			X
Minnesota	443,624			X
Mississippi	267,566	X	X	
Missouri	490,125			
Montana	83,280			
Nebraska	163,232			
Nevada	185,725	X	X	
New Hampshire	104,165			
New Jersey	672,771			
New Mexico	177,608	X	X	
New York	1,748,230	X	X	
North Carolina	772,531	X	X	
North Dakota	72,259			
Ohio	945,976	X		X
Oklahoma	323,492			
Oregon	295,723			
Pennsylvania	1,052,849			X
Rhode Island	100,132			X
South Carolina	383,160	X	X	
South Dakota	72,469			
Tennessee	481,510	X	X	
Texas	2,146,654	X	X	X
Utah	288,222			
Vermont	53,938			
Virginia	672,031			
Washington	533,776			X
West Virginia	138,161	X		
Wisconsin	484,398			
Wyoming	47,206			

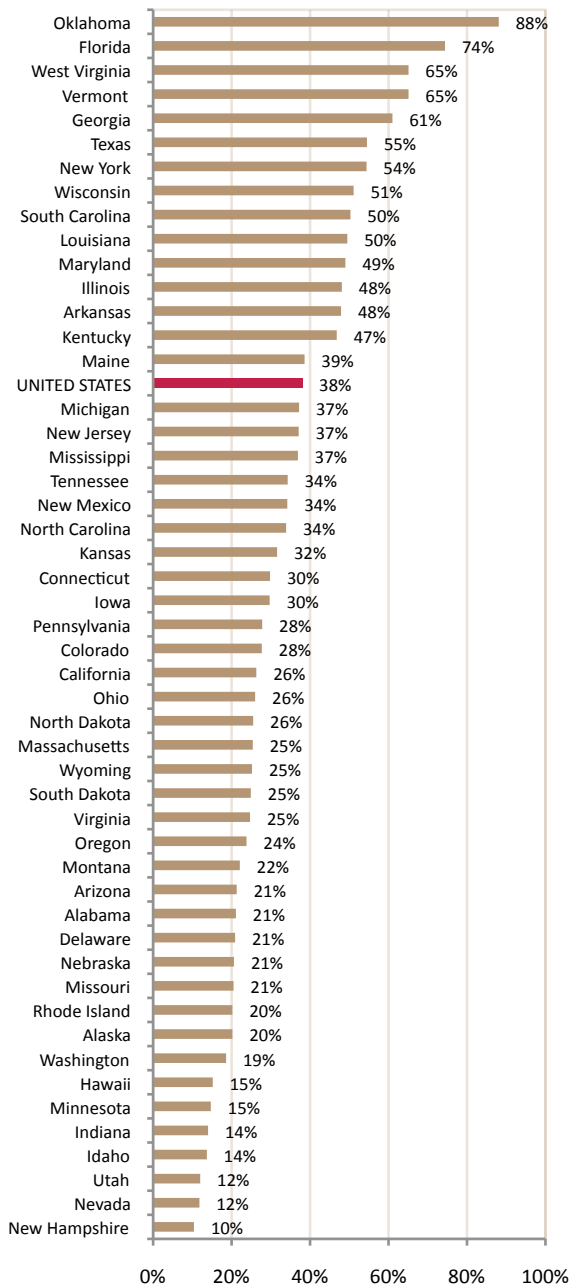
Some states with more undereducated, physically unfit, or criminally-involved young adults than the national average will have more than 75 percent of their young people who cannot join the military. Other states will have fewer.

For state-specific data see the following pages, or the sources below:

- a) United States Census: <http://www.census.gov/popest/states/asrh/SC-EST2008-01.html>
- b) Trust for America's Health: <http://healthyamericans.org/states/states.php?measure=overweight> (no data is available for 17-24 year olds.)
- c) Department of Education: See table 3 page 9, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010313.pdf>
- d) Pew Center on the States: See the table on the last page, http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/PSPP_1in31_report_FINAL_WEB_3-26-09.pdf
(Statewide data is unavailable for juveniles, but since most adults in the adult system are young adults, this gives some relative sense of how crime may impact recruitment.)

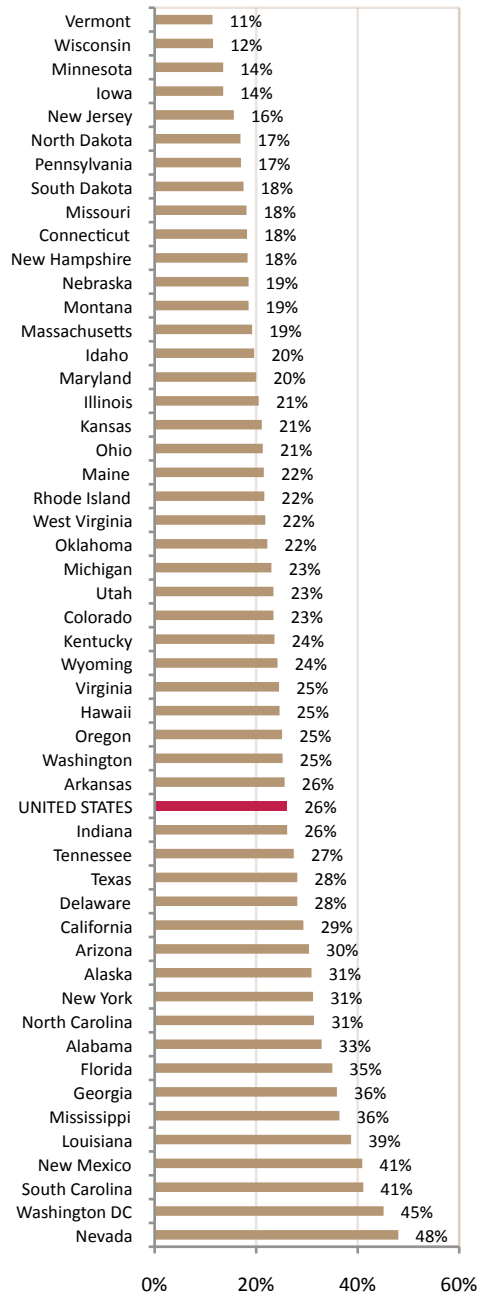


Percent of 4-year-olds in state- or federally-funded pre-kindergarten in 2008 (by state)³⁹



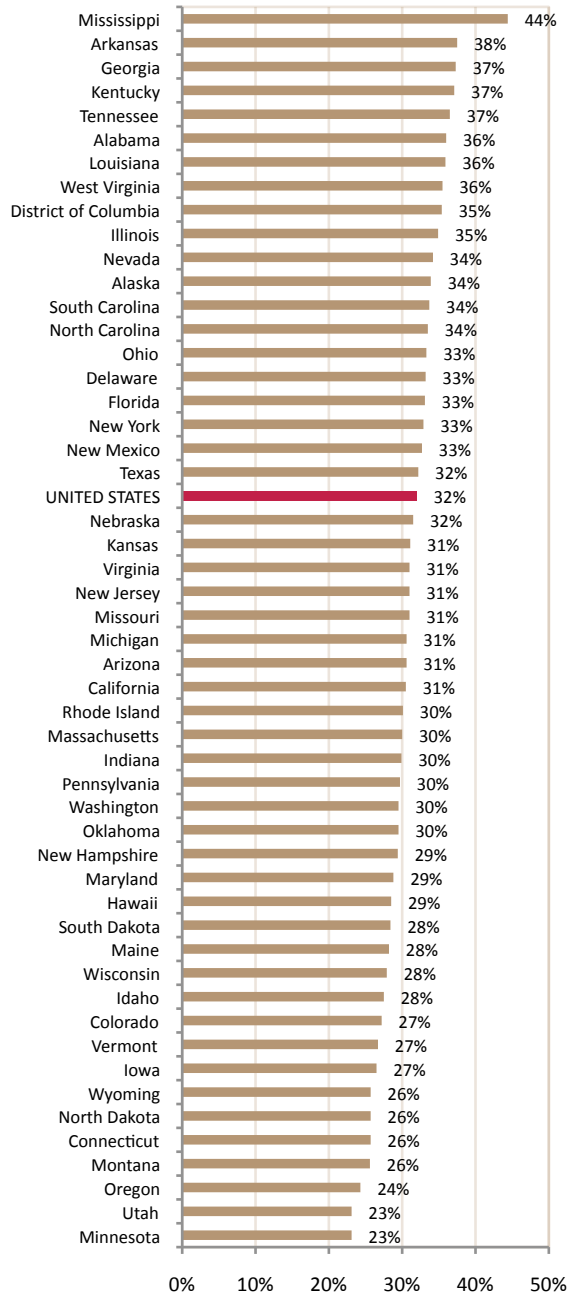
National Institute for Early Education Research (2009)

Percent of students who fail to graduate on time (by state)



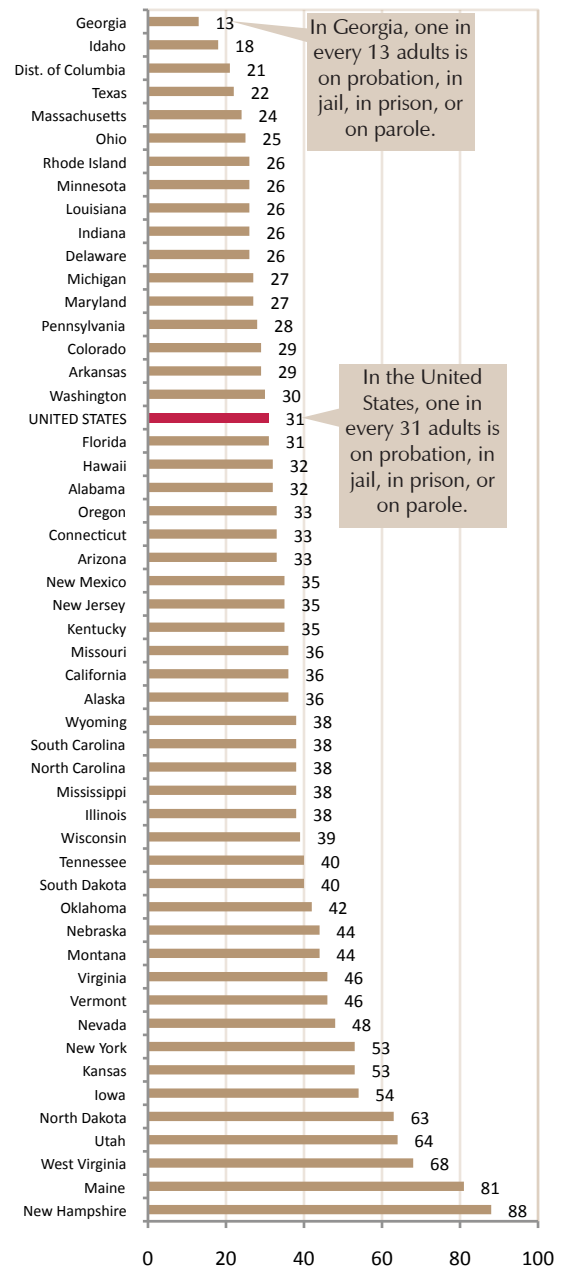
U.S. Department of Education (2009)

Percentage of 10-17 year-olds who were overweight or obese in 2007 (by state)⁴⁰



Trust for America's Health (2009)

Adults on probation, in jail, in prison, or on parole (by state)⁴¹



Federal Bureau of Investigation and Pew Center on the States, 2007 data



Endnotes

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- 40** Data is not available for 17- to 24-year-olds, but this shows which states have more overweight youth.
- 41** Ten percent of young Americans cannot join the military because of convictions. Most offenders under correctional control are young adults. Arrest data is not fully available for all states. But corrections data gives some sense of the burden of crime and punishment in different states.





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