



Defense Primer: Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC)

Overview and Mission

The Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) is a voluntary high school program of instruction administered by the Department of Defense (DOD) through the military departments. The purpose of JROTC, according to 10 U.S.C. §2031, is “to instill in students in United States secondary educational institutions the values of citizenship, service to the United States, and personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment.” JROTC was established as an Army program by the National Defense Act of 1916 (P.L. 64-85) and in 1964 expanded to the Navy and Air Force. Congress authorized Coast Guard JROTC units at two schools: the Maritime and Science Technology Academy in Miami, FL, in 1989 (P.L. 101-225), and Camden County High School, NC, in 2005 (P.L. 109-241).

In FY2020, there were more than 3,400 JROTC units operating in every state and in DOD schools overseas (see **Table 1**). The FY2020 NDAA (P.L. 116-92) allows for 8th grade students to participate in JROTC if physically co-located with 9-12th grade students. The law also requires host schools to allow homeschooled students to participate in JROTC.

Table 1. Estimated Size of JROTC Program, FY2020

Service	Number of units	Number of students
Army	1,709	305,000
Navy	583	88,000
Marine Corps	255	34,090
Air Force	885	125,900
Total	3,432	552,990

Source: FY2021 budget justification documents (J-books) for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps. Figures do not include National Defense Cadet Corps (NDCC) units.

JROTC Instructors

Most JROTC instructors are retired or reserve officers and enlisted noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who serve as employees of the school district. Service-level policies require JROTC schools to have a minimum of one officer (*Senior Military Instructor*) and one NCO (*Junior Military Instructor*) on staff. Requirements to qualify as a JROTC instructor (e.g., education, certification) are specified in law (10 U.S.C. §2033). Instructors are also required to abide by standards set by their parent service, as well as the policies set by their host institution.

Retired servicemembers who are eligible for retired pay may continue to receive such pay while employed as an

instructor. By law (10 U.S.C. §2031), military departments may subsidize instructor positions by reimbursing the host institution for a portion of the salary. DOD financial regulations refer to the salary that a school must pay the instructor as the *Minimum Instructor Pay (MIP)*. The MIP is the difference between (1) the active duty pay and allowances the instructor would receive if recalled to active duty and (2) the instructor’s retired pay entitlement. For example, if annual military retired pay is \$24,000 and total active duty pay and allowances is \$52,000 the institution would pay the instructor the difference of \$28,000. The military may reimburse the institution \$14,000 (one-half of \$28,000). Additional sample salary calculations can be found in DOD Instruction 1205.13.

Curriculum

JROTC courses are taught over a three- or four-year period with academic coursework on topics such as leadership and ethics, civics, history, and health and wellness. The FY2020 NDAA authorizes instruction in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. JROTC also includes service-specific courses such as Aerospace Science or Seamanship and Navigation. In addition, units offer extracurricular activities such as color guard/drill team, marksmanship, and field trips to military installations.

Establishing a JROTC Program

Educational institutions interested in hosting a unit must apply to the respective military department. By law, participating host schools are required to maintain participation levels of 10% of the student body, or 100 students, whichever is less. The military departments establish criteria for unit placement. For example, the Army maintains an *Order of Merit List*, based on a point system that awards credit to institutions for categories such as *Title I* status under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P.L. 89-10, as amended), local indicators of need (e.g., high unemployment or illiteracy), student enrollment, school financial solvency, and fair and equitable distribution of JROTC programs among states.

Schools may also apply to host or convert an existing JROTC unit to a National Defense Cadet Corps (NDCC) per 10 U.S.C. §2035. NDCC statutory and regulatory requirements are similar to host a JROTC unit. However, instructor salaries and other costs for NDCCs are the responsibility of the host institution and not subsidized by the government.

Federal Funding

Beyond instructor salaries mentioned earlier, the military departments also fund uniforms, cadet travel, training aids, text books, educational materials, and other unit operating

expenses. Host institutions provide classroom space, facilities, and administrative support for the unit. Congress annually appropriates JROTC funds as part of DOD's Operation and Maintenance (O&M) and Military Personnel (MILPERS) budget. JROTC funding for all of the Services in FY2020 was approximately \$389 million, with the Army program accounting for more than half of the total (see Table 2).

Table 2. DOD Funding for JROTC, FY2020
(Enacted base funding, in thousands of dollars)

Service	O&M	MILPERS	Total
Army	\$176,691	\$29,746	\$206,437
Navy	\$55,164	\$15,259	\$70,423
Marine Corps	\$25,183	\$3,936	\$29,119
Air Force	\$65,092	\$18,345	\$83,437
Total	\$322,130	\$67,286	\$389,416

Source: FY2021 budget justification documents (J-books) for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

Considerations for Congress

In Congress's role in funding and overseeing JROTC, there are several potential areas for consideration.

What are some of the program benefits?

While research on comparable student populations has been limited, several studies have found positive correlations between JROTC participation and student outcomes, including school attendance and graduation rates, improved test performance, higher self-esteem for female students, and lower rates of disciplinary action.

JROTC funding may also benefit schools through support for teaching and extracurricular activities. However, some critics have questioned whether cost-sharing requirements create a burden for poorer school districts.

How many units should DOD support?

The number of JROTC units that the services can support depends on annual budget levels and funding priorities. Statutory limits on the number of JROTC programs were gradually increased over time and, in 2001, Congress repealed all limits (P.L. 107-107 §537). Subsequent legislation in 2006 (P.L. 109-364 §541) and 2008 (P.L. 110-181 §548) directed the secretaries of the military departments to expand the program to additional schools with a target of 3,700 units by September 30, 2020.

Is the distribution of units equitable?

A continued concern for Congress has been the equitable distribution of JROTC units across various demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic indicators. Language in the Senate report to accompany the FY2015 DOD Appropriations Bill (S.Rept. 113-211) expressed concern about JROTC participation at the individual and school levels, and asked for the department to report on "any plans to ensure adequate representation of all regions in the United States to ensure the capabilities of the Armed Forces

to recruit from a diverse background to sustain the all-volunteer force."

A 2016 report from the RAND Corporation found that JROTC is generally underrepresented in rural and remote areas. In addition, JROTC units in public schools are not evenly distributed geographically and tend to be overrepresented in the South Atlantic states relative to the national average. Public high schools with larger-than-average minority populations and in schools serving economically disadvantaged populations are also overrepresented as JROTC host schools.

Higher representation in economically disadvantaged and larger/more urban schools has largely been a function of service-level policy decisions that award preference for Title I schools and other structural program requirements (e.g., minimum student participation, availability of instructors). While advocates for JROTC point to positive outcomes for high-risk youth, some critics of JROTC have argued that it unfairly targets low-income and minority communities for military recruiting.

How does participation affect recruiting?

Participation in JROTC does not incur any military obligation and military recruitment is not a stated objective in statute or policy. Nevertheless, the military services intend to provide favorable exposure to military careers and the program has potential to increase the propensity for military service. Some researchers have found a positive correlation between JROTC and enlistment while others have found that the impact of JROTC participation on military enlistment is negligible when accounting for self-selection into JROTC.

JROTC participants who pursue enlistment or appointment as an officer may receive some benefits at the time of entry into the service. For example, per DOD policy (DODI 1205.13), a student successfully completing at least two academic years of the JROTC program is entitled to advanced promotion to the grade of no less than E-2 upon initial enlistment in an Active or Reserve component. The military departments may award the grade of E-3 for successful completion of three academic years. In addition, the secretaries of the military departments may nominate up to 20 honor graduates from JROTC units designated by the secretaries as *honor schools* for appointment to one of the three military service academies (10 U.S.C. §8454 for Naval Academy, §7442 for U.S. Military Academy, and §9442 for Air Force Academy).

Other considerations

Some additional questions that Congress may consider when thinking about future investments in JROTC programs include:

- To what extent does JROTC curriculum help meet program and national goals? Should additional courses be required or incentivized?
- Should the program be structured or funded differently to encourage participation or remove entry barriers for certain types of schools or sub-populations?

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