

# Early Care and Education: A National Security Imperative

How high-quality early learning can help more young adults in Ohio qualify for military service

## 71 percent of Ohio's young adults cannot join the military

As military leaders look to the future, they are increasingly concerned that there are not enough qualified candidates to defend our nation. This concern stems from problems including education, obesity, crime and drug abuse that render many young adults ineligible for military service.<sup>1</sup>

If we do not address these issues early on in children's lives, our nation risks a shortage of qualified recruits—a shortage that will leave the country vulnerable for years to come and threaten the strength of the future military.

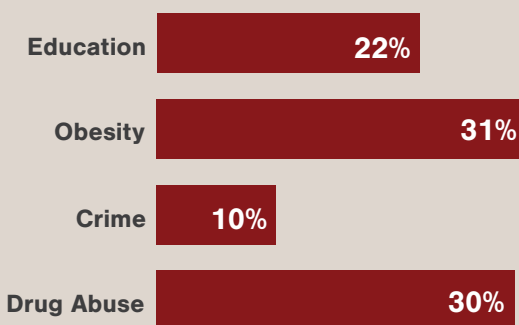
## High-quality early care and education can help children develop healthy habits

While nearly one-third of Ohioans between the ages of 17 and 24 are too overweight to qualify for military service, the problem begins much earlier.<sup>2</sup> Children as young as 2 are experiencing rising obesity rates; among this age group, the obesity rate is 13 percent.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, these rates increase with age: 20 percent of children ages 6 to 11 have obesity, as do 21 percent of 12- to 19-year-olds.<sup>4</sup> These numbers demonstrate the need for obesity prevention beginning early in life, with high-quality early learning.

Research shows that the early years of life are vital for health later in life.<sup>5</sup> Studies have found

## Common Barriers to Military Service

US Population of Young Adults Ages 17-24



'Education' includes nine percent who are officially disqualified and 13 percent who have a very limited chance of acceptance based on poor performance on the military's entrance exam.

Note: Young adults can be counted in more than one category and therefore categories do not sum to 71 percent. Not all disqualifiers are listed.

that nutrition programs in preschool can increase consumption of fruits and vegetables.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a study of the Abecedarian early learning program found that girls who participated were less likely to have obesity as adults, and boys had fewer risk factors for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.<sup>7</sup> Early learning providers can also help children develop healthy habits at a young age by serving nutritious meals and ensuring children get adequate exercise throughout the day.<sup>8</sup>

## Policymakers should continue the movement toward high-quality early learning

Over the past few years, high-quality early learning has gained traction across the U.S. However, 52 percent of the nation's 3- and 4-year-olds still do not attend an early learning program, let alone a high-quality program.<sup>9</sup> In Ohio, the situation is worse, where 54 percent of young children are not enrolled.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, between the 2016-17 and 2017-18 fiscal years, funding for early learning in our state decreased by three percent.<sup>11</sup> Policymakers at the state and national levels should continue to expand high-quality early education to ensure that all children are prepared in mind, body and character to succeed at whatever career they choose, including military service.

**1** Department of Defense. (2017). Qualified Military Available (QMA). Acquired through personal communication with the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in November 2017. Also see Jordan, M. (2014, June). Recruits' ineligibility tests the military. Wall Street Journal. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/recruits-ineligibility-tests-the-military-1403909945>

**2** Ibid.

**3** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Childhood obesity facts. <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/childhood.html>

**4** Ibid.

**5** Harvard University Center on the Developing Child (2022). Key concepts: Brain architecture. [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/key\\_concepts/brain\\_architecture/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/key_concepts/brain_architecture/)

**6** Mikkelsen, M. V., Husby, S., Skov, L., & Perez-Cueto, F. (2014). A systematic review of types of healthy eating interventions in preschools. Nutrition Journal. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24906305/>

**7** Campbell, F., Conti, G., Heckman, J. J., Moon, S. H., Pinto, R., Pungello, E., et al. (2014). Early childhood investments substantially boost adult health. Science, 343(6178), 1478-1485. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24675955/>

**8** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Early care and education (ECE). <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/strategies/childcareece.html>

**9** KIDS COUNT Data Center. (2020). Young children not in school in the United States. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9010-young-children-not-in-school?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/1757/any/17975,17976>

**10** KIDS COUNT Data Center (2020). Ohio young children not in school. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9010-young-children-not-in-school?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/37/false/1757/any/17975,17976>

**11** Education Commission of the States. (2019). Trends in pre-K education funding in 2017-18. <https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Trends-in-Pre-K-Education-Funding-in-2017-18.pdf>

### Mission: Readiness

Retired admirals and generals strengthening national security by ensuring kids stay in school, stay fit, and stay out of trouble.

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