



# **Ready, Willing, And Unable To Serve:**

**75 Percent of Young Adults Cannot  
Join the Military;**

**Early Ed in Pennsylvania is Needed  
to Ensure National Security**

**A Report by**



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**MISSION: READINESS**  
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

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Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve:  
75 Percent of Young Adults Cannot Join the Military;  
Early Ed in Pennsylvania is Needed to Ensure National Security

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## MISSION: READINESS

MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

*A Message from a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Pennsylvania's Retired Generals Leading MISSION: READINESS:*

Pennsylvanians have always answered the call to military service. Pennsylvania has one of the largest National Guards in the United States. Thousands of young men and women from Pennsylvania have put their lives on the line in Afghanistan, Iraq and around the world.

Unfortunately, many young people who want to join the military cannot. In fact, the Pentagon is reporting that 75 percent of all young adults ages 17 - 24 in America are unable to join the military. Too many young men and women lack a high school diploma, are in poor physical shape, or have a criminal record.

The United States military must continue to insist on rigorous eligibility standards because it needs competent, healthy and educated individuals to staff the world's most professional and technologically advanced military. If we want to ensure that we have a strong, capable fighting force for the future, we need America's youth to succeed academically, graduate from high school, be fit, and obey the law.

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

Researchers studied children who attended a high-quality Michigan preschool as well as similar children who did not attend. They followed those children for decades. Compared with those who did not attend, the at-risk children enrolled in the program were 44 percent more likely to have graduated from high school, and those left out were five times more likely to be a chronic offenders by age 27. Research on other programs confirms the benefits of high-quality early education.

Pennsylvania has been working hard to provide high-quality early education opportunities for more of its children. However, 65 percent of Pennsylvania's at-risk children are still not served due to inadequate funding.

The best aircraft, ships and satellite-guided weaponry alone will not be enough to keep our country strong. America's armed forces also need highly capable, law-abiding, and physically fit recruits. That is why retired military leaders are joining together to launch MISSION: READINESS.

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

Very Respectfully,

Henry "Hugh" Shelton  
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Former Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

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## Acknowledgements

MISSION: READINESS – MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS is a bipartisan, nonprofit, national security organization led by more than 60 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. MISSION: READINESS is supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals, and corporations. MISSION: READINESS accepts no funds from federal, state, or local governments.

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# Ready, Willing and Unable to Serve

## 75 percent of young adults cannot join the military; Early Ed in Pennsylvania is needed to ensure national security

The Pentagon reports that 75 percent of Americans 17 to 24-years-old are ineligible to serve in our military. The reasons behind this are serious and - if left unaddressed - could adversely affect the strength of our military. In the interests of national security, we must understand and deal with these problems.

### Three crucial reasons why young Americans cannot join:

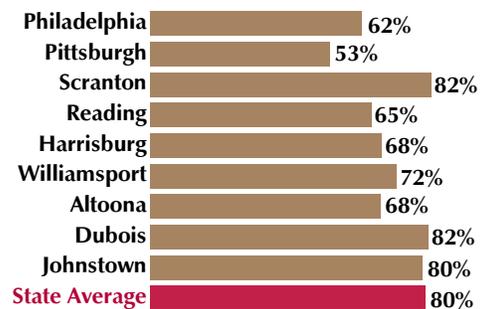
Although there are often two, three or even more reasons why an individual is ineligible to serve in the military, three of the most significant reasons are inadequate education, a criminal background, or excess weight.

**Inadequate Education:** Approximately **one out of four** young Americans lacks a high school diploma. 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 received a GED instead of a regular degree do not possess sufficient math or reading skills to qualify.

Though Pennsylvania is doing better than many states, the state’s high school dropout problem is alarming: 20 percent of ninth graders fail to graduate from high school within four years, according to one frequently cited analysis. In Philadelphia, impressive progress has been made in recent years, but still 38 percent of ninth graders are not graduating on time. In Pittsburgh, almost half of the city’s students are not graduating on time.<sup>1</sup>

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.

### LOW GRADUATION RATES FOR SELECT CITIES AND RURAL AREAS



2004-05 Graduation Rates  
Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2008

The “Nation’s Report Card,” the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reports that in 2007 only 36 percent of eighth graders in Pennsylvania scored at least “proficient” in reading. Only 38 percent were “proficient” in mathematics.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

**Criminality:** **One in ten** American youth cannot join because they have at least one prior conviction for a felony or serious misdemeanor (and for five percent of American youth, trouble with the law is the only thing keeping them out).<sup>4</sup>

To illustrate how serious the crime problem is in Pennsylvania, there were nearly half a million



arrests for crimes in the state in 2007 and nearly 25,000 arrests for violent crimes. Most of those crimes were committed by young men in their late teens and early twenties. At the end of 2007, one in every 28 Pennsylvania adults was in some stage of incarceration, parole, or probation.<sup>5</sup>

**Weight problems: 27 percent** of young Americans are too overweight to join the military.<sup>6</sup>

Just as in the rest of the country, the percentage of Pennsylvanians who are not just overweight but actually obese has risen rapidly. (A person is obese if they have a Body Mass Index, BMI, of 30 or above; for example, someone five feet nine inches tall would be obese if they weigh 203 pounds or more). In 1987, less than 15 percent of people in Pennsylvania were obese; by 2007, it had almost doubled with over 27 percent of the population obese.

**Additional reasons beyond those three:** Many young

people are disqualified from serving for various health problems, such as asthma, eyesight or hearing problems, mental health issues, or recent treatment for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders.

Nearly a third (32 percent) of all young people have health problems - other than their weight - that will keep them from serving. When weight problems are added in with the other health problems, over half

of young adults cannot join because of health issues.<sup>7</sup>

Others are not eligible because they have drug or alcohol problems, 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 lose enough weight.

**Fewer waivers in 2009 but...** During America's current economic downturn, the military is better able to find well-qualified recruits and is temporarily relying less on waivers for those with academic deficits or criminal records.<sup>8</sup> 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 ten young people are fully eligible to join the Army without

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*"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**

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any waivers, according to the Army’s Accessions Command.<sup>9</sup> 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 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.**<sup>10</sup>

### Quality early education increases graduation rates and cuts crime

Future MISSION: READINESS reports will discuss health issues, but this report is focused on what can be done to increase graduation rates and cut crime. Over forty years of research on early education programs has found they successfully address both problems.

### Research shows early education builds a foundation for future learning

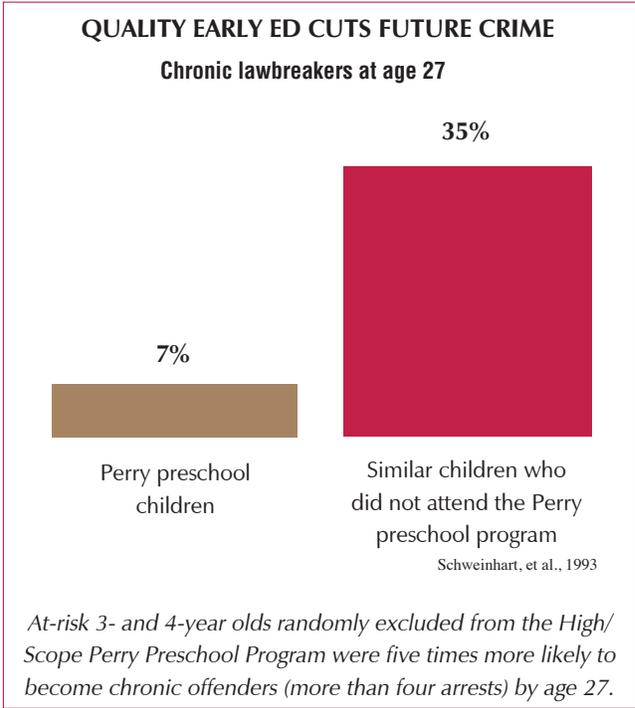
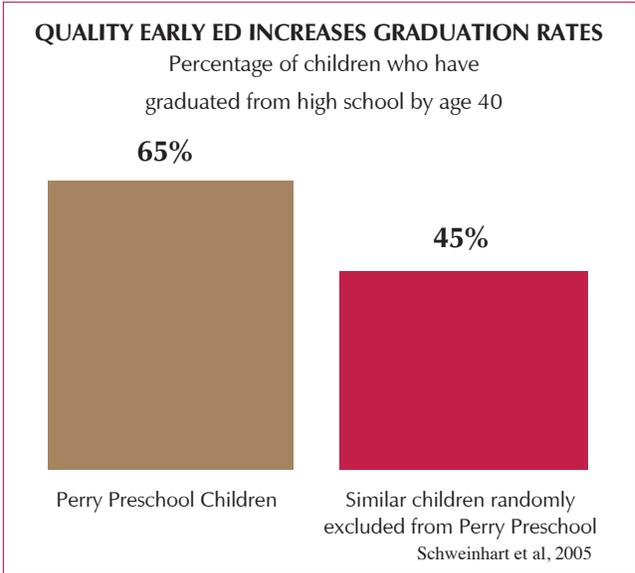
The first years of life build the foundation for what comes later. The “school readiness skills” are more than just learning the ABC’s or learning how to count. Young children also need to learn to share, wait their turn, follow directions, and build relationships. This is when children begin to develop a conscience – differentiating right from wrong - and when they start learning to stick with a task until it is completed.

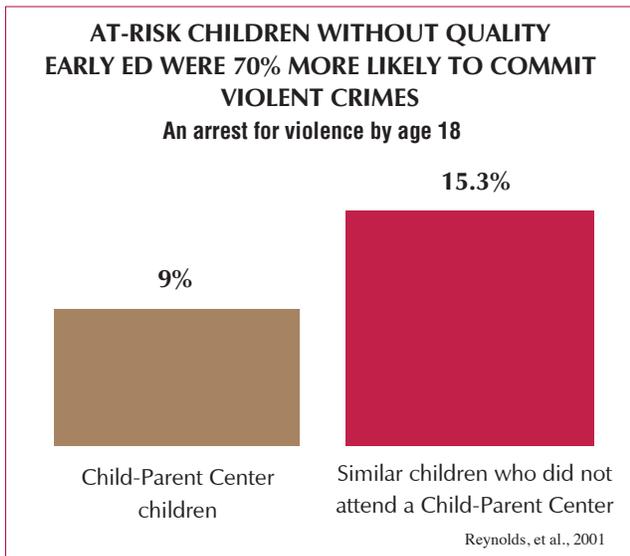
The Nobel-prize-winning economist James Heckman argues that these early social skills provide the foundation for future success in school and later in life. As Heckman explains, success builds on success. Unfortunately, failure also begets failure.

### 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 weaponry 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. That cannot be acquired just in basic training.





Two carefully-designed studies have followed children in high-quality early learning programs for decades. The resulting research has shown 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.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, of all attempted school reforms that can impact children's chances of graduating, early education has the most solid proof that it can raise graduation rates.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence supporting early education for at-risk children came from a randomized controlled study following children in the **High/Scope Perry Preschool Project** in Ypsilanti, Michigan. From 1962-67, 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 had graduated from high school.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup>

The **Child-Parent Center** preschool 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.<sup>15</sup>

By age 24, participants in that program were 12 percent more likely to have graduated from high school, and were 11 percent more likely to have either attended college or to have been working steadily than those left out of the preschool program.<sup>16</sup>

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*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.<sup>17</sup>*

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These snapshots over time of the children's development show that early childhood education can have significant long-term impacts on a person's success or failure in school and beyond. Research



shows that interventions at age 4 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 millions of dollars in expenses to Pennsylvania’s taxpayers.

Because the costs incurred by a few 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 minus costs from investing in early education	
High/Scope Perry Preschool	\$244,811 <sup>18</sup>
Chicago Child-Parent Centers	\$70,977 <sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania is still spending heavily on recurrent social problems and not enough to prevent them in the first place.

### Next steps for Pennsylvania

Until 2004, Pennsylvania was one of only nine states with essentially no state-funded early education program. By 2008 it had state-funded programs serving 11 percent of four-year olds, and just over five percent of three-year-olds in the state.<sup>20</sup> However, Pennsylvania serves a far lower percentage of its four-year-olds than its next-door neighbors New York and West Virginia: New York serves 39 percent of its four-year-olds and West Virginia serves 43 percent.<sup>21</sup>

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*“To keep America strong, Pennsylvania should be moving quickly to ensure that all unserved at-risk kids get access to high-quality early education.”*

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If those served by Head Start, the federally-funded pre-kindergarten program, are also counted, more than 60,000 at-risk Pennsylvania children from low-income families are being served. That still leaves 65 percent of at-risk three- and four-year-olds who are not served according to figures from the Pennsylvania Partnership for Children.<sup>22</sup> The United States Congress and the Pennsylvania Legislature should be moving as quickly as possible to ensure that all at-risk kids have access to these programs to ensure our national security.

As important as it is to increase access, it is also crucial 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.

The largest state-funded program, Pre-K Counts, has made very impressive progress in improving quality along with access. It recently increased its quality standards, requiring, for example, that its teachers have a Bachelor’s degree and training in Early Childhood Education, and it now meets or exceeds nearly every quality benchmark established by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER).<sup>23</sup> Pre-K Counts will continue to seek out opportunities to increase quality, including ongoing efforts to improve voluntary parent-coaching.

Initial data is promising from a comprehensive, on-going data collection and evaluation process for Pre-K Counts. It shows rapid increases in language,



math, and social skills for children in the program. For example, the kindergarten teachers in Erie and Corry School Districts report that 86 percent of the children who participated in Pre-K Counts were doing better in math, literacy and social skills than their kindergarten peers who did not attend that program. Children's needs for special education are also less if they attend the program. For example, in the Pottstown School District, only two percent of the kindergarten children who attended Pre-K Counts needed a special education plan compared to 14 percent of the all Pottstown kids entering Kindergarten.<sup>24</sup>

### **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.

This cannot continue. Our military readiness and thus our national security depends on the ability of the up-coming generation to serve. We need to take action now to reverse our current course.

If Pennsylvania's policy makers ramp up both the quantity and quality of the state's early education programs, they can count on strong support from the retired generals and admirals of MISSION: READINESS.

We fully understand what is at stake. Pennsylvania 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. Continued investments in early education are essential for our national security.

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## **Endnotes**

- 1 In Pittsburgh, 48 percent are not graduating on time. EPE Research Center. (2009). *Graduation rate maps*. Bethesda, MD: Education Week. Retrieved on May 26, 2009 from <http://www.edweek.org/apps/maps/>
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- 3 Jack Dilbeck, Research Analyst, United States Army Accessions Command, Fort Knox, KY. Personal Communication on May 14, 2009.
- 4 Jack Dilbeck, Research Analyst, United States Army Accessions Command, Fort Knox, KY. Personal Communication on May 14, 2009.
- 5 Pew Center on the States. (2009). *1 in 31: The long reach of American corrections – Pennsylvania*. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved on May 26, 2009 from [http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewcenteronthestatesorg/Fact\\_Sheets/PSPP\\_1in31\\_factsheet\\_PA.pdf](http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewcenteronthestatesorg/Fact_Sheets/PSPP_1in31_factsheet_PA.pdf)
- 6 Jack Dilbeck, Research Analyst, United States Army Accessions Command, Fort Knox, KY. Personal Communication on May 14, 2009. Asch, B.J., Buck, C., Klerman, J.A., Kleykamp, M., & Loughran, D.S. (2009). *Military enlistment of Hispanic youth: Obstacles and opportunities*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved on May 27, 2009 from [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG773.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG773.pdf) RAND reports that each service has different weight standards. For example, the Air Force would not accept a six-foot tall male weighing over 205 pounds. The Marines would admit heavier individuals, but a six-foot tall male would have to slim down to 213 pounds in order to actually ship out.
- 7 Jack Dilbeck, Research Analyst, United States Army Accessions Command, Fort Knox, KY. Personal Communication on May 14, 2009. Twenty-seven percent of young Americans are too heavy to join the military. Nineteen percent have weight as the only issue keeping them out.

The others also have other health problems or other problems, as well as being overweight.

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- 10 Gilroy, C. (March 3, 2009). *Prepared statement of Dr. Curtis Gilroy, director for accessions policy, office of the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness before the House Armed Services Subcommittee “Recruiting, retention, and end strength overview*. Retrieved on May 27, 2009 from [http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/MP030309/Gilroy\\_Testimony030309.pdf](http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/MP030309/Gilroy_Testimony030309.pdf)
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- 12 Despite all the efforts to increase graduation rates underway, in a meta-analysis of research on those programs, only five programs had the quality of research design and then the subsequent results to be sure they delivered increases in graduation rates; and two of those five programs that worked were early education programs. (The others were a comprehensive high school reform effort, raising teacher salaries by 10 percent, and greatly reducing class sizes.) Levin, H., Belfield, C., Muennig, P., & Rouse, C. (2007). *The costs and benefits of an excellent education for all of America’s children*. New York: Columbia University, Teacher’s College. Retrieved on May 26, 2009 from [http://www.cbcsce.org/media/download\\_gallery/Leeds\\_Report\\_Final\\_Jan2007.pdf](http://www.cbcsce.org/media/download_gallery/Leeds_Report_Final_Jan2007.pdf)
- 13 Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., & Weikart, D. P. (1993). *Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 27*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press; Schweinhart, L.J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W.S., Belfield, C.R., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: the High Scope/Perry Preschool Study through age 40*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.
- 14 Schweinhart, L. J., Barnes, H. V., & Weikart, D. P. (1993). *Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 27*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press; Schweinhart, L.J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W.S., Belfield, C.R., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: the High Scope/Perry Preschool Study through age 40*. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.
- 15 In the past, the military would sometimes allow waivers for some felonies, but they are currently not accepting anyone with felonies into the Army. Vogel, S. (May 11, 2009). Military recruiting faces a tight budget. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved on May 27, 2009 from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/10/AR2009051002172.html>
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