



# A Matter of National Security: How K-12 Education Impacts America's Military

In December 2016, SCORE convened military and education leaders to discuss strategies to increase Tennessee students' opportunity to serve their country. This brief summarizes the key takeaways from those conversations.

## Why is K-12 Public School Education a National Security Issue?

American students are growing up in a world of connected economies, governments, and people. Over the course of a single generation, advances in technology have spurred a revolution in how countries communicate and conduct business and foreign relations. Globalization has reset expectations of what it takes for a student to succeed in the workforce and what a country must do to remain competitive on the world stage.

Widening economic inequality at home and growing competitiveness abroad underscore the critical role of American K-12 public schools to protect the promise of opportunity for all through a rigorous education.<sup>1</sup> According to a recent National Council on Foreign Relations task force report, America's K-12 schools too often fail to teach students the academic skills and knowledge they need to compete and succeed.<sup>2</sup> This failure has significant strategic consequences on America's ability to be an economic and military power.

### Tennessee: The Volunteer State

- 18,730 military reserve personnel
- 1,050 military civilian personnel
- The National Guard (including Air and Army) has a presence in 82 percent of Tennessee's counties and employs over 14,000 people – including civilians and traditional reservists.
- Tennessee is the 12th largest state for military children, with 39,000.
- Eighty percent of children in military families attend local public schools.

On international measures of academic performance in reading, writing, math, and science, American students on average fall far behind their peers in Scandinavia, a host of other European countries, and eastern Asia.<sup>3</sup> Despite a system of colleges and universities that are the most advanced in the world, American businesses struggle to find qualified workers to fill jobs involving writing, science, technology, engineering, and math. Similarly, the United States military strains to find adequate numbers of students academically and physically fit to serve. Without enough well-educated citizens to fill the ranks of the armed forces, Foreign Service, and the intelligence community, the United States will face an increasingly uncertain future.

These trends have far-reaching implications for America's national security. As we move further into 21st century, America's path depends on the quality of our K-12 public schools system.

Source: Defense Manpower Data Center. (2016). Active Duty Master Personnel File, Reserve Components Common Personnel Data System.

## Ensuring Opportunity for All to Serve

America's military ensures our national defense against active or potential threats abroad and delivers aid in international and domestic contexts where the need is greatest. With ever-changing threats and disasters around the world, the United States military must respond with people who have the knowledge and skills to do the job at hand. Meeting shifting personnel needs requires an effective system of recruitment, training, and retention.

However, military leaders face increasing difficulties finding recruits both academically and physically fit to serve. Seventy-four percent of individuals ages 17-24 are unable to serve because of academic ineligibility, criminal record, or physical fitness.<sup>4</sup> Among military-ineligible graduates, twice as many black applicants fail to meet military academic standards of entry into the armed forces as white applicants, underscoring current inequality of opportunity in education.<sup>5</sup>

In December 2016, SCORE convened military and education leaders to discuss these challenges, and what it will take to provide opportunity for all Tennessee students to have the ability to serve. Among these leaders were Senator Dolores Gresham, chairman of the Tennessee Senate Education Committee and retired US Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel; Major General Terry Haston, Tennessee's Adjutant General; and Mike Krause, Executive Director of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Krause is a US Army veteran who completed three combat tours with the 101st Airborne. These leaders discussed three focus areas:

**1. Rigorous standards and aligned assessments.** As high standards of performance are the foundation for excellence in the military, rigorous academic standards are the backbone of Tennessee's K-12 public schooling. Academic standards provide guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do. Tennessee's academic standards reflect the real-world skills and knowledge students need to be successful after high school, and Tennessee's aligned statewide assessment measures student progress every year to show teachers and parents where a student might need improvement.

***“Improving education...may be our greatest national security challenge”***

Condoleezza Rice,  
Former Secretary of State

**2. High-quality teaching and leadership.** Research has shown that the difference between highly effective and ineffective teaching can be the difference of up to a year's worth of academic growth for a student.<sup>6</sup> Effective early-career teaching can narrow achievement gaps for students from historically underserved backgrounds, who are

more likely to have a less-experienced teacher.<sup>7</sup> In addition, effective teachers are especially important for military children who move more frequently for their civilian counterparts – sometimes even mid-school year. For these reasons, high-quality training and assessment is a priority for Tennessee educator preparation programs.

**3. Innovative approaches to college and career readiness.** While Tennessee students' academic performance is improving, military and education leaders emphasize the need for innovative approaches to change the current state of postsecondary and career readiness. Although Tennessee's high school graduation rate has climbed to a new high, less than 60 percent of Tennessee's graduates go on to enroll in a postsecondary institution. Whether that next step is enrollment in a postsecondary institution, attainment of a credential, entry into a military career, or entry into the civilian workforce, both education and military leaders agree that innovative approaches to ensuring preparedness for college and career will be crucial to securing America's future.

## Tennesseans' Eligibility to Serve

- 74% of individuals ages 17-24 are ineligible for military service because of academic ineligibility, criminal record, or physical fitness.
- From 2004-2009, out of 8,671 applicants to the U.S. Army, 25.1% were academically ineligible.
  - 41.9% of black applicants
  - 28.4% of Hispanic applicants
  - 18.9% of white applicants

Source: The Education Trust. (2010). Shut out of the military.

***“A smarter, better workforce is not a nice-to-have, it is a must-have”***

Captain Scott Fugate,  
USN (Ret.), on why education is  
key for a prepared military

---

## Your Role in Securing America's Future

SCORE is committed to ensuring a high-quality education for all children in Tennessee, and we want you to join us in our work. You can help in four ways:

- **Sign-up** to receive updates at [www.tnscore.org](http://www.tnscore.org).
- **Follow** us on Twitter (@SCORE4Schools) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/score4schools/>).
- **Join** military, community, and education leaders in supporting AIM High TN, an initiative focused on supporting the academic achievement of military children in Tennessee. Visit <http://www.aimhightn.com> to learn more.
- **Invite** us to speak to your business or community organization about this critical topic by emailing our team at [info@tnscore.org](mailto:info@tnscore.org).

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> National Council on Foreign Relations. (2012). *US Education Reform and National Security. Independent Task Force Report No. 68*. Retrieved December 28, 2016 from <http://www.cfr.org/united-states/us-education-reform-national-security/p27618>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Council for Strong America Citizen-Readiness Index: Tennessee. Retrieved January 5, 2017 from <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/351-citizen-readiness-index-tennessee>

<sup>5</sup> The Education Trust. (2010). Shut out of the Military: High School Education Doesn't Mean You're Ready for Today's Army. Retrieved January 5, 2017 from [http://1k9gl1yevnfp2lpq1dhrqe17.wpengin.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ASVAB\\_4.pdf](http://1k9gl1yevnfp2lpq1dhrqe17.wpengin.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ASVAB_4.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2010). *Learning about Teaching: Initial Findings from the Measures of Effective Teaching Project*. Retrieved January 4, 2017 from <https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/Documents/preliminary-findings-research-paper.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> SCORE. (2016). Prepared for Day One: Improving the Effectiveness of Early-Career Teaching. Available online at <https://www.joomag.com/magazine/prepared-for-day-one/0061262001476730043?short>.