High-quality preschool will address the problems that disqualify 69% of Washington’s young adults from military service.
Acknowledgements

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, pastors, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be citizen-ready.

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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As military leaders look ahead to the coming years, they are increasingly concerned that there are not enough qualified candidates to defend our nation. This concern stems from problems related to education, health, and behavior that render 71 percent of young adults nationwide and 69 percent in Washington ineligible for military service.¹

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

High-quality early education can help ensure that more children are prepared in mind, body and character to succeed in life. This report discusses three ways policymakers can bolster Washington’s preschool program, the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), and strengthen future military readiness: 1) invest in quality, 2) serve more children, and 3) create more learning spaces.

“Education is a barrier to military service for young adults in Washington

Department of Defense data show that 69 percent of Washington’s young adults ages 17 to 24 are unable to join the military.²

Major General Tim Lowenberg, U.S. Air Force (Retired)
individuals. Twenty-two percent of students in Washington do not graduate from high school on time, and the military very rarely accepts applicants without a high school diploma.³ Even among high school graduates in Washington, 16 percent who try to join the Army score too low on the military’s entrance exam to qualify.⁴

**Health and behavior problems also restrict military eligibility**

Thirty percent of young adults nationwide would not qualify for service for a health-related reason, and 40 percent would be disqualified due to a record of crime or drug abuse.⁵

**High-quality preschool improves educational outcomes**

Educational deficits show up early. In Washington, only 44 percent of students are entering kindergarten ready to learn.⁶ The Director of Washington’s Department of

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**ECEAP Improves School Readiness in Math and Reading**

Percentage of ECEAP students who score at or above age level increases dramatically over the course of the school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Early math skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FALL 2014</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPRING 2015</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2x higher*  *3x higher*

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“An investment in Washington’s youngest learners is an investment in our future military readiness.”

Rear Admiral Eleanor Valentin, U.S. Navy (Retired)

Early Learning has set an ambitious goal to raise that figure to 90 percent within the next five years.⁷

Washington’s Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) is improving school readiness among participating low-income three- and four-year-olds. After one year in ECEAP (from fall 2014 to spring 2015), twice as many children achieved a kindergarten-ready score in literacy and three times as many achieved one in early math.⁸ According to an analysis by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, gains from ECEAP persist through elementary school.⁹

Other high-quality state early education programs demonstrate similar results. Children in New Jersey’s preschool program were three-fourths of a year ahead in math and two-thirds of a year ahead in literacy in the fourth and fifth grades.¹⁰ Similarly, children in North Carolina’s quality early learning programs made gains equivalent to five months of learning in reading and three to five months in math by the third grade.¹¹
High-quality preschool can also impact long-term educational outcomes. For example, children who participated in Michigan’s Perry Preschool Project were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school.\textsuperscript{12}

**Early education impacts health and behavioral outcomes**

Early education programs also improve military eligibility by helping children learn positive behaviors and healthy habits that carry into adulthood. For example, two studies of high-quality preschool programs found reductions in crime in adulthood.\textsuperscript{13} Another rigorous study found that children who participated in high-quality early learning were more likely to exercise regularly and had a lower risk for heart disease, stroke and diabetes as young adults.\textsuperscript{14}

**Quality Matters in Early Education**

Programs must be high-quality to achieve lasting results. The “Essential Elements of High-Quality Early Learning” developed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation\textsuperscript{15} outlines a number of components of quality early education programs, including:

**Curriculum:** Quality pre-K involves play with a purpose, developmentally-appropriate standards, and an evidence-based curriculum.\textsuperscript{16} Washington’s ECEAP program requires early learning providers to utilize a high-quality curriculum. The most commonly used curriculum among ECEAP providers, The Creative Curriculum, emphasizes purposeful play and quality teacher-child interactions.\textsuperscript{17}

**An adequately prepared and compensated workforce:** To deliver an evidence-based curriculum, teachers should have relevant preparation and accreditation in early childhood development, ongoing professional development opportunities, and adequate compensation. Right now, the average salary for a lead ECEAP teacher is $31,000.\textsuperscript{18} The Essential Elements study recommends that teachers have a bachelor’s degree, if accompanied by supports and adequate salaries. Currently, ECEAP requires an Associate’s degree for lead teachers and Child Development Associate (CDA) certification for assistant teachers.

**Parent engagement in early education**

Children live in the context of their families. Many successful early care and education programs actively work with parents.

For example, the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) make use of Parent Resource Rooms, full-time parent-engagement staff, and home visits. ECEAP emphasizes parent engagement in three ways: by “partnering with parents to support their child’s education; working on job, education, and financial goals; [and] empowering parents to have a voice and develop advocacy skills.”\textsuperscript{22}
Time spent in class: Full-day and full-week programs have been shown to be more effective than part-time programs. Washington’s ECEAP programs typically meet for three hours a day, 3-4 days per week, falling short of the full-school-day, full-school-week quality benchmark.

Data and accountability: High-quality preschool programs collect data to see how they are performing at every level: district, program, teacher and student. These data are used to improve program performance, to ensure that children are well-prepared for school.

Policy Recommendations
The passage of the Early Start Act in 2015 guarantees slots for all ECEAP-eligible children by the 2020-2021 school year—an addition of roughly 8,000 children.

To scale up the program effectively and ensure that more children are prepared for success in school, work, and life, including a career in the military if they choose, Washington policymakers should focus on three priorities:

1. **Invest in quality:** Quality costs money. A higher reimbursement rate per child is necessary to ensure early learning providers can afford to provide high-quality care. The current reimbursement rate does not reflect the true cost of the services. This means that in many cases providers must find additional sources of funding to provide ECEAP services, posing a challenge to communities that lack private resources. Without action, providers may reduce slots or experience high rates of teacher turnover or other consequences that reduce quality.

2. **Serve more children.** More funded slots are needed. Every year, thousands of children are left on the waitlist. The Department of Early Learning estimates that 7,400 children currently eligible for ECEAP are unable to receive services due to lack of slots. In order to meet the state mandate to serve all eligible children in the 2020-2021 school year, expanding the slots available is crucial.

3. **Create more learning spaces.** In order to serve more children, more physical space is needed. Providers need assistance—such as in the form of grant programs and technical assistance—with acquiring, renovating, and building new spaces where learning can take place. Higher reimbursement rates can also be used to acquire new space.

Conclusion
High-quality early education builds a solid foundation for the next generation to develop in mind, body and character so they can succeed at whatever career path they choose. Our future national security depends on Washington investing in our youngest citizens.
Endnotes

1 Department of Defense, “2013 Qualified Military Available (QMA).” Acquired through personal communication with the Accession Policy and Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies teams at the Department of Defense in July 2014.

2 Ibid


5 These factors overlap with one another (the same person may have more than one) and therefore they do not sum to 100%. Department of Defense, “2013 Qualified Military Available (QMA).” Acquired through personal communication with the Accession Policy and Joint Advertising, Market Research and Studies teams at the Department of Defense in July 2014.


16 Ibid.


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