



# Unable To Serve:

## Why Military Service is Out of Reach for Most Young Philadelphians

High-quality pre-kindergarten programs  
can help address a national security issue

A Report by



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**MISSION: READINESS**  
MILITARY LEADERS FOR KIDS

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## Acknowledgments

MISSION: READINESS is the bipartisan, nonprofit, national security organization of more than 150 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.

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# Unable to Serve:

## Why Military Service is Out of Reach for Most Young Philadelphians

High-quality pre-kindergarten programs can help address a national security issue

### Summary

Military service, which for decades has served as a credible career option for young adults in Philadelphia, now remains out of reach for the vast majority of young Philadelphians. An estimated 80 to 90 percent of young adults in Philadelphia – more than 145,000 young men and women age 18 to 24 – are unable to join the military largely because they cannot meet the military’s education or fitness standards or have serious criminal records, according to a new analysis of data by MISSION: READINESS, a national nonprofit group composed of more than 150 retired generals and admirals. Citing concerns about achieving future recruitment goals and maintaining national security, the retired military leaders are calling on state and federal legislators in Pennsylvania to increase investments in high-quality early education programs as a critical step in helping expand future career options for young adults in Philadelphia and increasing the pool of qualified candidates for military service.

The Department of Defense has estimated that about 75 percent of young adults nationwide are unable to join the military, but a new analysis by MISSION: READINESS indicates that in Philadelphia the percentage of young adults unable to join the military is higher. Three key reasons stand out. Even though Philadelphia has been working hard to help its young people succeed, compared to national data, a higher percentage of youngsters in Philadelphia have not completed high school and more of them have been involved in serious criminal behavior. In addition, a higher percentage of young adults have weight problems. Nationally, the military’s

figures show that one-in-four young adults is too overweight or obese to meet the military’s standards. In Philadelphia, the proportion who are overweight or obese is significantly higher. Other disqualifying factors – including asthma and other health problems, drug dependency and poor eyesight – further reduce the pool of qualified candidates. After taking into account the lower graduation and academic proficiency rates and the higher crime and overweight rates for young

people in Philadelphia compared to nationwide, and using the 75 percent nationwide figure from the Department of Defense as a benchmark, MISSION: READINESS estimates that 80 to 90 percent of young adults in Philadelphia are unable to join the military.

MISSION: READINESS also has concluded that investments in high-

quality early learning programs, such as Pennsylvania’s *Pre-K Counts*, represent a critical first step in addressing a serious national security issue. Pre-kindergarten can help more kids graduate and fewer become involved in crime, giving them broader job opportunities. Serving almost 3,000 children in Philadelphia, *Pre-K Counts* has strong data showing it can help at-risk children succeed in school. For example, research shows that participation in the program led to a decline in the percentage of children with low social skills or self-control from 21 percent to 4 percent. Other research shows that investing in high-quality early education is the most proven way to guarantee that more at-risk children can graduate from high school. High-quality early education also cuts crime, saving up to \$16 dollars for every dollar invested. More high-quality pre-kindergarten – not less – is needed to give the city’s young people wider options in life, including the option to join the military if they choose to serve.

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***“In the coming decade, the United States will face a significant workforce shortfall and both the civilian and military sectors may not have the skilled labor required to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy.”***

– U.S. Army White Paper, 2009

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## In Brief: Why the Military Is Out of Reach for Most Young Philadelphians

Nationally, 75 percent of young Americans are unable to join the military largely because they are not physically fit, are not sufficiently educated or have a serious criminal record.<sup>1</sup> In Philadelphia, an estimated 80 to 90 percent of young adults ages 17 to 24 are unable to join the military.<sup>2</sup> Consider the following:

- More than 40 percent of Philadelphia high school students – more than 20,000 every four years – do not graduate on time, including half of African-American male students and 6 out of 10 Latino male students. Nationwide, about 30 percent do not graduate on time.<sup>3</sup>
- The proportion of eighth graders in Philadelphia who are proficient in reading or math is half the rate for eighth graders nationwide. So even if Philadelphia students do graduate from high school, this data

indicates that many will not be able to pass the military's entrance exam.<sup>4</sup>

- Nationally, five percent of young people cannot join the military solely because of their criminal records.<sup>5</sup> In Philadelphia, the juvenile arrest rate for property and violent crimes is three times the national rate indicating that the percentage of young adults with serious criminal records in Philadelphia is considerably higher than the national average.<sup>6</sup>
- The proportion of high school students in Philadelphia who are overweight or obese is significantly higher than the proportion who are overweight or obese nationally.<sup>7</sup>

**The analysis indicates that a higher percentage of young adults in Philadelphia than nationwide do not meet military standards for education, criminal involvement or physical fitness.**

## Many youth in Philadelphia lack basic skills

In earlier generations, a young man without much formal education could work in a factory, pay the mortgage on his house and feed his family. He could also serve in the military. Women were often not in the paid workforce at all. Times have changed. To get a good job, or to protect those beside you in combat, young people today need to be able to comprehend complex instructions, write clearly, master computer software, and have well-developed communication and social skills. When the mortar shells are coming in is

no time to discover that the woman or man next to you cannot read a map, cannot communicate appropriately with headquarters, or does not know how to enter coordinates into a computer. Just as in the civilian workforce, the military increasingly needs better-educated young men and women to run modern weapon systems.

Unfortunately, the United States military is discovering what other employers know. As the Army's report *Strong Students, Strong Futures, Strong Nation* says, "In the coming decade, the United States will face a significant workforce shortfall and both the civilian and military sectors may not have the skilled labor required to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy. The effect on our ability to compete globally will be devastating if we do not act immediately and forcefully to reverse the impact."<sup>8</sup> While military and civilian jobs are becoming more complex, many young people are not graduating from high school on time.

Nationwide, 31 percent of ninth graders are not graduating from high school on time, but in Philadelphia 43 percent of students did not graduate on time in 2008 – other figures on Philadelphia's graduation rates are even lower.<sup>9</sup> For African-American males, the percent that did not graduate on time in 2008 was 52 percent, and for Latino males it was 61 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Philadelphia has made important progress on graduation rates, reducing the percentage of young people who do not





graduate on time from 52 percent in 2003 to 43 percent in 2008. Philadelphia's Mayor Michael Nutter has set a 2014 goal of 80 percent of high school students getting their diplomas within six years of starting high school.<sup>11</sup>

In the past, the military has accepted young people without high school diplomas if they had a GED and had a significantly higher score than the minimum required for a high school graduate on the military's Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) that measures potential recruits' academic knowledge and skills. But historically, 45 percent of the young people with a GED accepted into the military failed to finish their first term of enlistment.<sup>12</sup> One of the things a high school diploma measures, in addition to academic knowledge, is that a young person will finish the job no matter how hard it gets.

*"Half of non-graduates failed to finish their first term of enlistment."*

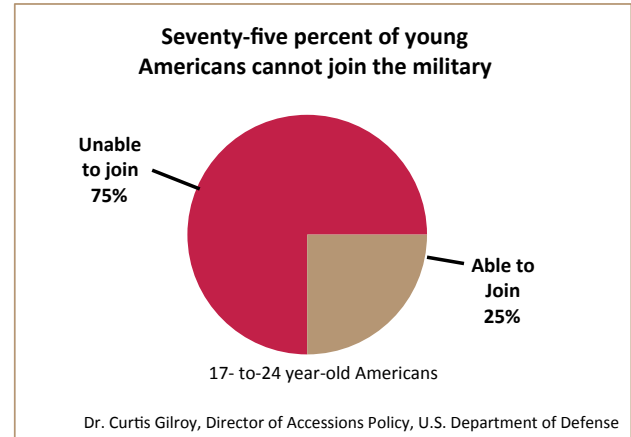
**-Department of Defense, 2004**

### Another barrier to military service: a serious criminal record

Five percent of young Americans cannot join the military because of at least one prior conviction for a felony or serious misdemeanor.<sup>18</sup> The juvenile arrest rate in Philadelphia for property and violent crimes is three times higher than the national rate.<sup>19</sup>

### Many young Americans are too overweight to serve

The Army's Accessions Command, which carries the responsibility for recruiting and the initial training of new Army recruits, estimates that over 27 percent of all Americans 17 to 24 years of age do not meet the military's weight-to-height standards for joining the military if they want to do so – 15 percent have that as their sole reason they cannot join.<sup>20</sup> When the Centers for



Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) collected national and local data, they found that the proportion of Philadelphia high school students who are overweight or obese was 32 percent higher than the proportion of high school students nationwide who were overweight or obese.<sup>21</sup>

### 75 percent of young adults nationwide cannot join the military

Nationwide, at least 75 percent of young Americans 17 to 24 years old cannot join the military primarily because of poor education, being physically unfit or criminal problems; other barriers include asthma or other health problems, drug abuse, being too tall or too short and a range of other disqualifiers

according to Congressional testimony by Curtis Gilroy, Director of Accession Policy, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.<sup>22</sup> Often young people have two, three or even more overlapping reasons why they cannot join. Based on the worse rates for graduation, academic proficiency, arrests, and being overweight or obese in Philadelphia compared to nationwide, it is reasonable to conclude that 80 to 90 percent of young 17- to 24-year-olds in Philadelphia cannot join the military if they want to serve.

According to Dr. Gilroy's written testimony before Congress in 2009 and an

### Dropping Out of School Limits Opportunities in the Military

The Navy and the Army report that five percent of their new recruits did not have a high school diploma in 2009, and in the Air Force and Marines one percent did not have a diploma.<sup>13</sup> In 2010, even fewer young people without high school diplomas are being allowed into the military.<sup>14</sup>

Graduating on time, however, does not necessarily indicate a person has enough education to serve in today's military. Many graduates do not do well enough on the AFQT to join the military. And in Philadelphia, the proportion of eighth graders tested on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) who are proficient or advanced in reading (15 percent) or math (16 percent) is half the national average.<sup>15</sup> Philadelphia is making solid progress in improving the average scores on state and national exams for its youngest students and is beginning to close the performance gap for African-American and Latino students.<sup>16</sup> Yet the overall scores on the NAEP indicate that the number of young graduates from Philadelphia who can do well enough on the AFQT to enlist is almost certainly lower than the national average.<sup>17</sup>

Armed Forces Press Service article in March of 2010, just 15 percent of young Americans are both fully qualified and not in college (though the military points out that some young people enlist when they either graduate or leave college).<sup>23</sup>

The recent recession (and large enlistment bonuses) have made it easier for the 15,000 military recruiters around the country to meet their goals of enlisting an estimated 168,000 recruits a year. But Clifford Stanley, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, warned Congress about the need to avoid a “boom or bust” recruiting cycle.<sup>24</sup> And retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Norman R. Seip has warned that “a failing economy is no formula for filling the ranks of a strong military, and these longer-term eligibility problems are not going away.”

## Early education works to increase graduation rates and reduce crime

Investments in high-quality early education can provide greater opportunities for children and help expand the pool of qualified candidates for military service. Long-term studies of three different early education programs provide solid evidence that high-quality early-education programs can enable many disadvantaged children to succeed in life. Each study followed into adulthood at-risk children who attended such programs, as well as similar children in control groups who did not participate in the programs.

*“Quality early education increases graduation rates by as much as 44 percent.”*

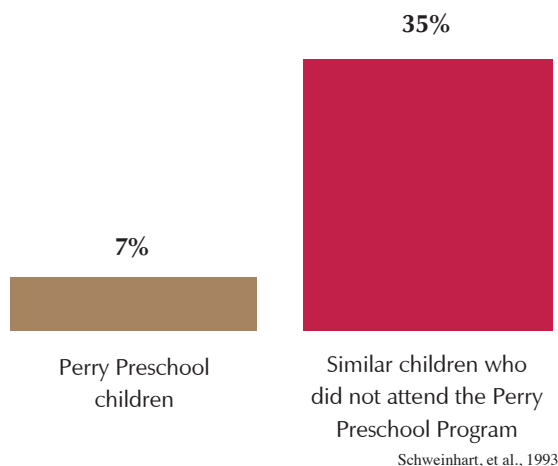
– Schweinhart, 2005

**The Perry Preschool Program:** In Ypsilanti, Michigan, three- and four-year-olds from low-income families who participated in a high-quality preschool program were followed into adulthood. Those who participated in the program were 44 percent more likely to have graduated from high school than the non-participants, and non-participants were five times more likely to be chronic lawbreakers by age 27 than those who attended Perry.<sup>25</sup>

**Child-Parent Centers:** Chicago’s publicly-funded Child-Parent Centers (CPC) have served over 100,000 three- and four-year-olds since 1967. For 20 years, researchers tracked nearly 1,000 of those children and over 500 similar children not in the program. The children who participated in the program were 12 percent more likely to graduate from high school than those

### QUALITY EARLY ED CUTS FUTURE CRIME

#### Chronic lawbreakers at age 27



*At-risk 3- and 4-year olds randomly excluded from the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program were five times more likely to become chronic offenders (more than four arrests) by age 27.*

who did not, and the children left out were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18 than those who attended CPC.<sup>26</sup>

**Abecedarian:** Rural children in North Carolina received an intensive preschool experience along with parent coaching. The children in Abecedarian were 31 percent more likely to graduate from high school and twice as likely to attend college as the children left out of the program.<sup>27</sup>

**Pennsylvania’s own Pre-K Counts:** A new evaluation of the Pennsylvania Pre-K Counts (PKC) program shows strong results, especially with children who were already developmentally delayed or delayed in acquiring social skills. In Philadelphia, 2,776 children are enrolled in Pre-K Counts programs.

The evaluation of the program noted that high-risk children start pre-kindergarten with learning skills more appropriate for a 3- and a half-year-old than a 5-year-old. The evaluation of the programs in 21 school districts showed that:

- At the beginning of PKC, 21 percent of children showed developmental delays, but by the end of the program the percentage with delays was down to 8 percent.

*Child-Parent Centers: At-risk children left out of quality pre-kindergarten were 70 percent more likely to commit violent crimes.*

– Reynolds, 2001



### How Military Service Can Make a Difference

Dr. Eugene Richardson, Jr. was one of the Tuskegee airmen whose path breaking service during World War II helped lead the way to the integration of the military and other gains in civil rights following the war. Richardson flew P-40 and P-47 aircrafts, though the war ended before he was deployed to Europe. After the war he used the G.I. Bill to help pay for a college education, eventually earning a Ph.D. in Education. Dr. Richardson worked for thirty-five years in the Philadelphia school system as both a teacher and principal. He remains active as a speaker committed to seeing that all children have the opportunity to pursue their dreams.



- At the beginning of PKC, 21 percent of 3-year-old participants were deficient in social skills and self-control, but by the end of the program that figure was down to 4 percent – a reduction of over 80 percent.<sup>28</sup>

### A strong investment with impressive returns

Not only does early education reduce the need for special education and 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, repeated grades in school, crime, welfare, and other costs result in staggering expenses for America's taxpayers.

A child who drops out of school, abuses drugs and becomes a career criminal costs society, on average, over \$2.5 million.<sup>29</sup> A researcher added up all the quantifiable private and public costs of crime and found that criminal behavior alone was found to cost Americans \$1.7 trillion a year.<sup>30</sup>

Because the costs to society incurred by such a child can be so high, research shows that the benefits of investing in high-quality pre-kindergarten for at-risk kids far outweigh the costs. According to cost-benefit studies done of two of the programs:

#### Net Savings from Early Education Investments

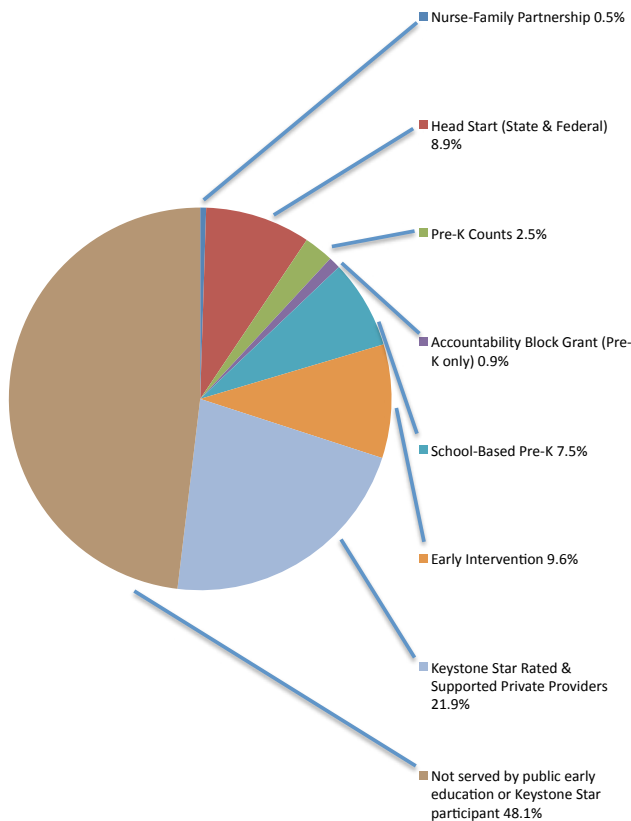
High/Scope Perry Preschool	\$244,811 <sup>31</sup>
Chicago Child-Parent Centers	\$70,977 <sup>32</sup>

The Perry Preschool program produced such strong savings that it saved \$16 for every dollar invested.<sup>33</sup>

### Philadelphia needs to serve more kids and with high quality programs

Pennsylvania as a whole has made impressive strides in increasing the number of children served by early care and

Half of Philadelphia's children – 0 to 5 – are served by either public programs or the private providers participating in the state's Keystone Star rating and support program



2007-08, Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning

*“Early childhood education can give children the proper start for a lifetime of learning so they can graduate from high school fully equipped to take advantage of any career opportunity, which all old soldiers like me hope will include military service in defense of this great nation.”*

**- Lieutenant General Dennis L. Benchoff,  
Former Chief of Staff, Army Recruiting Command,  
US Army (Ret.)**

education. Nearly half (47 percent) of young children under five in Philadelphia are being served by quality publicly-funded early childhood education programs, including the Nurse-Family Partnership, state and federally-funded Head Start, Pre-K Counts, Accountability Block Grant (pre-k only), School Based Pre-K, and Early Intervention or by the Keystone Star Providers program that helps private providers improve the quality of their services so they can earn higher quality rankings.

While the Philadelphia School District has doubled the number of children enrolled in pre-kindergarten in the last seven years, there were 1,900 children on the waiting list and 900 on the waiting list for Head Start in the fall of 2009.<sup>34</sup>

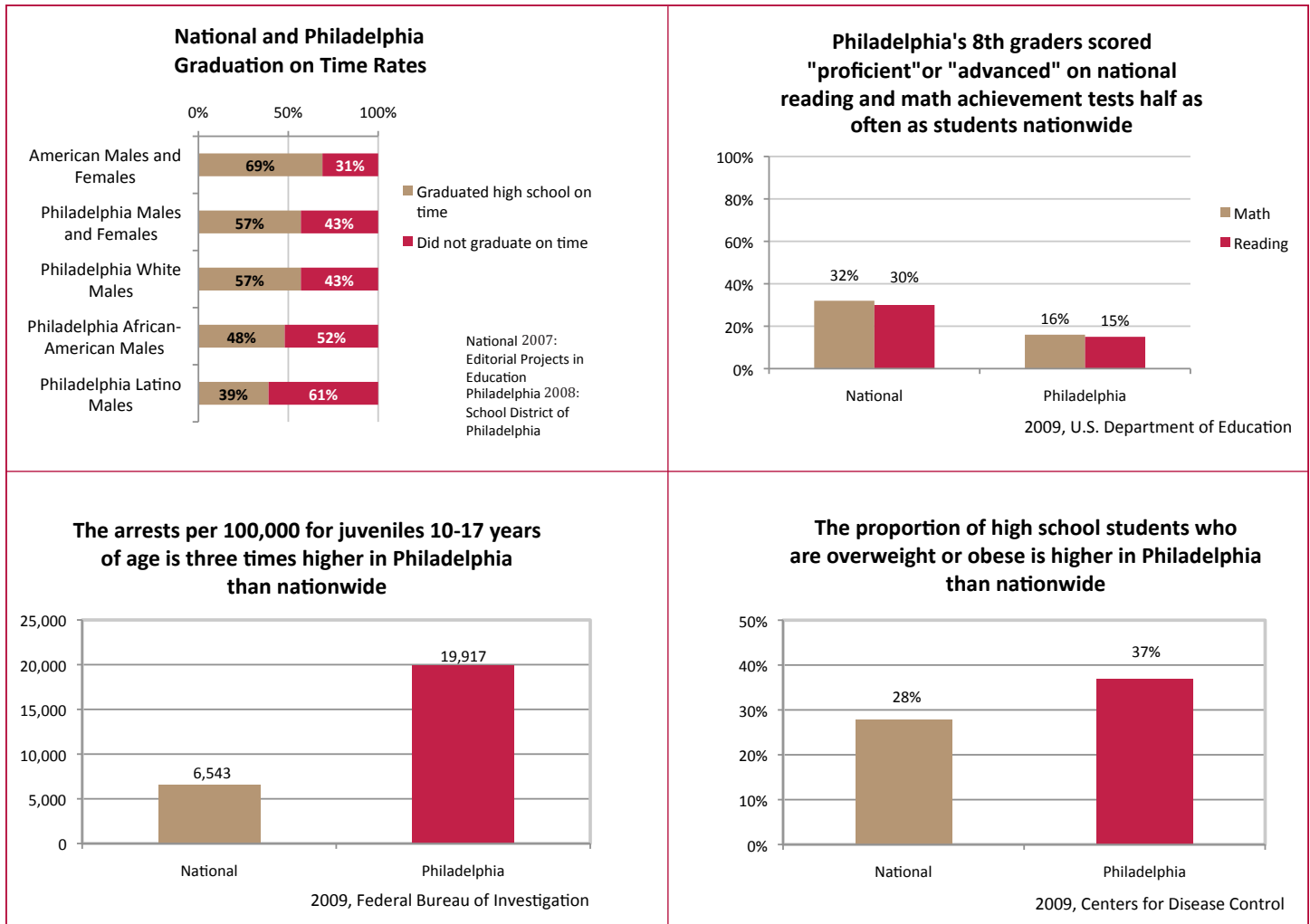
In order to help more Philadelphia children succeed, more children must receive these early education services and the programs must continue to strive to provide the highest-quality programs in order for the children served to achieve better graduation rates and lower crime rates.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

These are tough financial times for the federal government and especially for the state. But this is no time to sound retreat in our efforts to make sure all our children have the right start in life. At the state level we need to continue to find the funds to maintain the great strides we have made. At the federal level, Congress has an important opportunity now, through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, to evolve the old K-12 system into a new paradigm of Pre-K through 12, and to make sure those pre-kindergarten programs are high-quality. Funding for high-quality early care and education is crucial for Philadelphia’s children, crucial for their communities, and crucial for the fiscal health of our state and national budgets. Finally, it is also necessary for our national security. We need to find the money to invest wisely now in what works.



## Appendix



## Endnotes

1 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 June 1, 2010 from [http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/MP030309/Gilroy\\_Testimony030309.pdf](http://armedservices.house.gov/pdfs/MP030309/Gilroy_Testimony030309.pdf)

2 This is an obviously rough projection based on the data showing that more Philadelphia youth than youth nationally do not graduate, are poorly-educated, are involved in crime, and are overweight or obese – see the data below and in the regular text for more details.

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