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Download date	2024-10-11 20:17:51
Link to Item	https://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/handle/10827/57432

SC K-12 MILITARY READINESS TASK FORCE

A special subcommittee established by the SC Education Oversight Committee

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
TO BE PRESENTED TO THE EOC

JUNE 10, 2024

SC K-12 Military Readiness Task Force
A special subcommittee of the SC Education Oversight Committee
Findings and Recommendations

Background

Pursuant to the SC Code of Laws, the SC Education Oversight Committee (EOC) makes decisions about the accountability system for SC public schools, determining the methodology and criteria by which schools are held accountable. Through the inclusion of an accountability system that meets both state and federal laws and guidelines, the goal is to drive continuous improvement in schools, leading to successful outcomes for SC young people.

SECTION 59-18-900(4) *The Oversight Committee, working with the State Board of Education, shall establish student performance indicators which will be those considered to be useful for inclusion as a component of a school's overall performance and appropriate for the grade levels within the school.*

(C) In setting the criteria for the academic performance ratings and the performance indicators, the Education Oversight Committee shall report the performance by subgroups of students in the school and schools similar in student characteristics. Criteria must use established guidelines for statistical analysis and build on current data-reporting practices.

(D) The comprehensive report card must include a comprehensive set of performance indicators with information on comparisons, trends, needs, and performance over time which is helpful to parents and the public in evaluating the school. In addition, the comprehensive report card must include indicators that meet federal law requirements. Special efforts are to be made to ensure that the information contained in the report card is

provided in an easily understood manner and a reader-friendly format. This information should also provide a context for the performance of the school. Where appropriate, the data should yield disaggregated results to schools and districts in planning for improvement. The report card should include information in such areas as programs and curriculum, school leadership, community and parent support, faculty qualifications, evaluations of the school by parents, teachers, and students. In addition, the report card must contain other criteria including, but not limited to, information on promotion and retention ratios, disciplinary climate, dropout ratios, dropout reduction data, dropout retention data, access to technology, student and teacher ratios, and attendance data.

Inclusion of military readiness is currently reflected in one part of the accountability system; a minimum scale score of 31 on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) is included as one of five approved measures of career readiness in the accountability system that impacts SC high schools.

In South Carolina, a student is considered college or career-ready for school accountability if they meet one of the 11 options for college or career readiness. High schools are held accountable for students four years after they enter school as a ninth grader. The College and Career Readiness indicator counts 19 points out of a total of 100 available points. Also, a measure of college or career-readiness is not a requirement for graduation.

Within the same statute, the EOC is also directed to produce an annual report on the performance of military-connected students in the state. Overall, the EOC consistently reports that military connected students typically perform better than their non-military connected peers in most instances. Even so, there is a need for schools and educators to recognize the unique challenges faced by military-connected students and provide them with appropriate support to

succeed academically. Schools can benefit from adopting policies that prioritize the needs of military-connected students and provide them with resources to address them.

It should also be noted that, as is reported annually, data collection and accurate reporting of military-connected students is an ongoing challenge for some SC school districts.

(H) The Education Oversight Committee, working with the State Board of Education, is directed to establish a comprehensive annual report concerning the performance of military-connected children who attend primary, elementary, middle, and high schools in this State. The comprehensive annual report must be in a reader-friendly format, using graphics whenever possible, published on the state, district, and school websites, and, upon request, printed by the school districts. The annual comprehensive report must address at least attendance, academic performance in reading, math, and science, and graduation rates of military-connected children.

The establishment of an EOC working group to consider making recommendations regarding military readiness was prompted by a joint meeting of the EOC and SC State Board of Education held on November 8, 2023 in Columbia. At that meeting, the State Board of Education adopted the following vision statement previously adopted by the SC Dept. of Education: by 2030, at least 75% of students will be at or above grade level. By 2030, all SC students will be college, career, or military ready.

The EOC delayed a vote on the vision statement to further consider the inclusion of “military ready” in the statement. On December 11, 2023, the EOC adopted the following language:

The EOC affirms the State Board of Education and SC State Dept. of Education-adopted vision statement which states that by 2030, at least 75% of students will be at or above grade level. This statement revises the current goal in the SC ESSA Plan that states that by 2035, 70% of students in grades 3-8 will be on grade level.

Furthermore, the EOC maintains the commitment made seven years ago to the Profile of the SC Graduate, foundational language that guides decisions that lead students in K-12 to ultimate success in college and careers. One notable career is the military, an economic engine in SC that generates one in every nine jobs in the state.

In January 2024, the EOC will create a working group of Military Recruiters, School Liaison Officers, School Liaison Program Managers, SC Purple Star School District Point of Contacts and Department of Education staff to define and measure the academic and physical characteristic of a “military-ready” student. The working group will make recommendations to the EOC no later than June 30, 2024. The Fort Jackson Post Command Team has offered to coordinate a briefing and tour of the Future Army Soldier Preparatory Course for EOC members to be conducted in early 2024.

On February 6, 2024, the first meeting of the SC Military Readiness Task Force was held. Follow-up research and subsequent meetings were held with State Superintendent of Education Ellen Weaver, Brigadier General Christopher Amrhein, Commander of the Air Force Recruiting Service and his team, as well as policy staff at the Education Commission of the States (ECS).

The second meeting of the task force was held on Tuesday, May 21 in Columbia. At this meeting, task force members reviewed draft findings and recommendations. The following findings and recommendations emerged as a result of discussions and consensus among task force members.

Key Findings

- A lack of a basic understanding of civics, misunderstanding of military service (service in general) and opportunities, poor health/low fitness levels, low academic achievement are cited as major reasons why recruiters and other military personnel are seeing a decrease in enlistment; these trends are not specific to SC and are being observed nationally.
- It is difficult for military readiness to be defined because of the different requirements for each branch of service, as well as fluctuations in standards that are impacted by recruitment needs. Given the differing standards for each military branch, it was suggested that a generalized military standard be considered.
- Military readiness should not be considered “lower tier” than college ready or career ready. Some branches of the military automatically enter students into credit bearing college level coursework as part of their military training and work to find a “best fit” given a young person’s individual talents and skill sets.
- SC currently uses the lowest published qualifying score (31)¹ that any military branch uses for career-ready designation, although task force members noted that ASVAB scores are not consistently exclusionary. Students may graduate from high school without earning an approved measure of college or career-readiness. Currently, the ASVAB, a battery of tests, is the primary metric for evaluating military readiness and determining qualification for military service. According to research from the Education Commission of the States (ECS) submitted to the EOC in March 2024, 34 states include some portion of the ASVAB in their state accountability system and require a measure of college or career readiness for a student to successfully graduate from high school.
 - The ASVAB includes 10 tests, many technical in nature. Scores from four of the tests—Word Knowledge (WK), Paragraph Comprehension (PC), Arithmetic Reasoning (AR), and Mathematics Knowledge (MK)—are combined to compute a score on what is referred to as the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). Scores on the AFQT are used to

¹ [ASVAB Test Explained | Military.com](https://www.military.com/education/college-career-readiness/asvab-test-explained)

determine eligibility for enlistment in the Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marine Corps while scores on all the ASVAB tests are used to determine eligibility for specific jobs in the military.

- Alabama and Texas continue to try and include military enlistment as a criteria for student success in their state accountability systems. Lack of quality, defensible data continues to be an impediment to successful inclusion.
- Although there is a one credit physical education requirement for SC students to graduate, there is not currently a quantifiable, widely used way to measure physical fitness and general health among K-12 students. This presents a concern since lack of overall health is cited as a deterrent to military enlistment. According to one task force member, one-fourth of candidates are disqualified due to physical readiness issues.
 - The Presidential Fitness Test, first introduced in 1966, is now known as the Presidential Youth Fitness Program. It is voluntary and not required to be implemented in schools.
 - According to ECS research, Alabama and Connecticut have developed state assessments of physical fitness and require they be administered to students in different grade levels.
- Meeting military readiness markers, enlistment, or receiving designations such as Purple Star should be incentivized for students and schools.
- Task force members and others expressed the importance of students being exposed to careers in the military while in school and ensuring that students, families, and educators know that being military ready isn't moving backward, but that it can provide opportunity and advancement for young people.
 - The importance of service to one's country and one's community was also cited as being lost in the minds of many young people. The de-emphasis of social studies and civics has potentially been a contributing factor.

Recommendations

1. Begin including military enlistment and/or entrance into an Officer Commissioning Program (i.e., NROTC, Naval Academy, Air Force Academy, etc.) as part of the Five-Year Student Success measure of high school accountability provided the data are provided from an authorized source and not self-reported by high schools or school districts. Task force members expressed optimism that these data would be available and accessible for this purpose.
2. In the upcoming cyclical review of the accountability system, scheduled for 2025, consider the requirement of including a college or career ready measure as a requirement for graduation.
3. Continue to incorporate military readiness as a career readiness measure. It is not advisable for military readiness to be a separate category for school accountability or within the establishment of a unified vision statement.
4. Support the removal of the state budget proviso that suspends the testing of social studies in grades 3-8 to promote the teaching of social studies and civics education.
5. Work with the SC State Department of Education, SC Department of Veterans Affairs, and others to strengthen the measures by which schools and school districts are recognized as Purple Star Schools Districts and provide financial or other incentives when applicable.
6. Include military designations and awards like Purple Star prominently on a school and/or district's Report Card.
7. Continue to work with the SC Dept of Education and others to assist recruiters and other military personnel reasonable and equal access to students and families in order to provide accurate information about military service and career options within the service branches.
8. Work with the State Dept. of Education and other state agencies to create a State award or certificate to be given to students who have chosen military service as a career path during the awards programs at their individual schools.
9. As part of the 2025 Cyclical Review of the Accountability System, consider the creation or procurement of a required assessment of physical health and fitness for students. This recommendation was seen as a way to amplify

the growing obesity epidemic among children, compounded by decreased time outside and increased screen time.

SC K-12 Military Readiness Task Force Members

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EOC Staff Support

Ms. Tenell Felder; Ms. Hope Johnson-Jones, Dr. Matthew Lavery, and Ms. Dana Yow

This response was prepared for Dana Yow, South Carolina Education Oversight Committee

Your Question:

You asked for information on high school graduation requirements that address military readiness, including the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) and physical education. You also expressed interest in state fitness assessments.

Our Response:

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) Requirements

Many states require assessments as part of their high school graduation requirements. According to Education Commission of the States' [50-state comparison on high school graduation requirements](#), at least 34 states require students to complete specific assessments for graduation. Of those 34 states, at least four allow students to take the ASVAB and some require specific scores on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) portion of the ASVAB.

Colorado, as part of their high school graduation guidelines, provides a [menu of college and career-ready demonstration](#) options for school districts to choose from. A score of 31 on the AFQT portion of the ASVAB is among the options.

Among **Indiana** graduation requirements is a requirement that students demonstrate college or career readiness through a pathway established by the state board of education. The ASVAB is one of the assessments included in state [code](#) as an allowable pathway requirement.

While **Mississippi** [administrative code](#) does not require the ASVAB, it is among several options students can use as a substitute for required end-of-course assessments. Students who choose this option must score 36 on the AFQT **and** either earn a Career Planning and Assessment System score that meets Federal Perkins requirements **or** earn an industry approved certification.

The ASVAB is one of eight [graduation pathways](#) in **Washington**. For this pathway, students must score at least the minimum established by the military for eligibility to serve in a branch of the armed services. Schools are encouraged to schedule an armed services vocational aptitude battery career exploration program interpretation seminar after the test so students can participate in high school and beyond planning and learn about available military and nonmilitary occupations for which they have an aptitude.

Physical Education Requirements

Education Commission of the States [found](#) that physical education and health courses are required for graduation in at least 41 states and the District of Columbia. Some states allow students to substitute another course or activity to earn physical education credits. The following state examples illustrate a variety of approaches:

Alabama [requires](#) one physical education credit for high school graduation. Students may substitute physical-activity based subjects (e.g. marching band, athletics) and other subject areas under “exceptional circumstances” under the following conditions:

- A detailed plan must be developed (except for JROTC) that reflects collaboration with the physical education teacher at the school and submitted to the State Superintendent of Education to ensure that students will master the required content standards and benchmarks as outlined in the Alabama Course of Study: Physical Education.
- The [Alabama Physical Fitness Assessment](#) must be administered to grade 2-12 students, including students who receive exemptions from the State Superintendent of Education.
- Any other conditions prescribed by local boards of education are met.

Connecticut [requires](#) one credit in physical education and wellness for graduation. In addition, students in grades 4, 6, and 8 are required to participate in the [Connecticut Physical Fitness Assessment](#), which evaluates aerobic endurance; flexibility; upper body strength and endurance; and abdominal strength and endurance.

Tennessee [requires](#) 0.5 credit in physical education. In addition, the state requires 0.5 credit in personal finance, which may be substituted with three years of JROTC if the the JROTC instructor attends personal finance training conducted by the Department of Education. Students in grades 4, 6, 8, and one year in high school take the [FitnessGram PACER test](#), which measures aerobic capacity.

Utah [requires](#) 1.5 physical education credits for graduation, including 0.5 in participation skills, 0.5 in fitness for life, and 0.5 in individualized lifetime activities. A student may earn 0.5 credits per sport for team sport/athletic participation up to a maximum of one credit with district approval to replace participation skills and individualized lifetime activities requirements. Utah Core Standards for physical education [include](#) standards for fitness assessment.

Military Readiness in State Accountability Systems

Education Commission of the States’ [50-state comparison on state school accountability systems](#) identifies several states that include military readiness as part of their school quality and student success (SQSS) indicator in their state ESSA plans. For example:

- **Alabama** [includes](#) being accepted for enlistment into any branch of the military as a measure of college and career readiness.
- **Montana** [allows](#) students to demonstrate college and career readiness with a “military ready” indicator.
- **Tennessee’s** Ready Graduate indicator [includes](#) a military readiness option. Students demonstrate military readiness by completing early postsecondary opportunities and scoring at or above the state’s designated score on the ASVAB AFQT.
- **Texas** [includes](#), in both its student achievement and SQSS indicators, measures of college, career, and military readiness. Military readiness is demonstrated by enlistment in the armed forces or Texas National Guard.
- **Wyoming** [provides](#) three options for demonstrating college and career readiness, one of which is completion of a college preparatory curriculum **or** a CTE pathway **and** a military-readiness score on the ASVAB.

Additional Resource

[National Association of State Boards of Education School Health Policy Database](#) – this resource includes information on states’ school health policies in a variety of categories including physical education and activity.