



Representative Harold J. Brubaker
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5 April 2011

Representative Brubaker:

As the retired generals and admirals who lead MISSION: READINESS we want to thank you for your service as a North Carolina legislator and acknowledge the very challenging job you have crafting a balanced budget in the midst of our worst economic crisis in many years.

As you prepare to make your difficult budget decisions, we hope you can heed our simple message: to ensure that the military has competent men and women ready to serve our country, it is imperative that we invest in early childhood education for all young children, especially for those who otherwise might not develop to their full potential. Cuts to programs like Smart Start and More at Four would be a step backward in North Carolina's progress on school readiness. Please avoid cuts to early education; we believe this is a matter of urgent national security as we outline below.

MISSION: READINESS is the non-profit, national security organization led by over 200 generals, admirals, and other senior retired military leaders from all over the country. We are writing as proud North Carolinians and serve on the Executive Advisory Council of MISSION: READINESS.

The U.S. armed services are proud to be meeting recruitment goals. However, many of us who have served in leadership positions in the military are concerned by recent statistics. According to our organization's recent report, Department of Defense data indicate that 75 percent of young Americans are currently unable to serve in the U.S. military because they are in poor physical condition, are not well-educated or have a criminal background. High-quality early childhood education is proven to address two out of three of these serious problems: it can significantly raise future graduation rates and cut future crime rates.

Here in North Carolina, an estimated 775,000 17-to-24 year olds could not join the military if they walked into a recruiter's office today. However, that may actually be a low estimate because, compared to the national average, North Carolina has more young people who are overweight, (34% vs. 32%), and more young people without on-time high school degrees, (31% vs. 26%).

For retired military leaders, this raises serious warning flags. Our military has had the highest standards because we need competent, healthy and educated people to form the backbone of the world's most professional, highly advanced military.

We know from decades of research that investing in the earliest years of a child's life is a proven strategy to ensure that more young people achieve academic success and become productive adults.

Researchers studied at-risk children enrolled in a high-quality Michigan preschool program together with similar children who did not attend until the children reached age 40. They found that the at-risk children who attended were 44 percent more likely to graduate from high school and 1/3 less likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 40.

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Children who miss out on high-quality early learning are also significantly more likely to be held back in school or placed in special education. And as young adults, the same children who do not receive high-quality early education are also significantly more likely to collect welfare and become teen parents.

North Carolina has made considerable progress in getting young learners a better start. The state is known throughout the country as pioneer in early childhood education. Smart Start and More at Four are national models. Their significance was validated once again just last month when Duke University released a study that found North Carolina third-graders have higher standardized reading and math scores and lower special education placement rates in counties that received more funding for Smart Start and More at Four when those children were younger. What's more, they found that Smart Start raises the academic achievement of all children in a community, whether they were in child care or not.

Smart Start has improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of children. As result of its work, more children attend high quality care or pre-kindergarten programs, more children have teachers with higher levels of education, more working families are receiving help to afford high quality care, more children with disabilities are being identified at a younger age and are referred to early intervention services, and more parents are engaged in positive parenting practices—all essential to help ensure that children grow into successful adults able to serve their country if they so choose.

North Carolina's More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program serves almost 31,000 at-risk four year olds, and has met all ten of the quality benchmarks set by the respected National Institute for Early Education Research. An evaluation of More at Four confirmed that, for the poor children it serves, it is improving their math and reading scores through third grade.



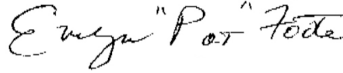
However, there continues to be growing demand for early childhood services in North Carolina. In the past decade, the number of children birth to five has grown from 648,796 to 793,284. The percent of NC children living in poverty in past decade has jumped from 19 to 26 percent.

We strongly urge you to protect funding for important early childhood programs, including Smart Start and More at Four, as funding cuts to these programs can have National Security implications in the future.

As military officers and concerned citizens, we believe that unless we take action and implement the most effective strategies to help our children succeed, our national security could be at risk. Please continue to support effective early education programs that prepare disadvantaged children for success in school. Smart Start and More at Four are solid investments that should be maintained even in tough times and further strengthened when our fiscal circumstances improve.

As members of MISSION: READINESS, we commend you for your past support of Smart Start, More at Four and other early education initiatives. That is the best way to make certain that more young North Carolinians will meet the tough standards of the United States military and the North Carolina National Guard should they choose to serve. A strong commitment today to high-quality early education will keep America strong and safe tomorrow.

Respectfully submitted,

		
Rear Admiral Walter H. Cantrell, USN (Ret.) Asheville, NC	Brigadier General Clara Adams-Ender, USA (Retired) Wake County, NC native	Brigadier General Pat E. Foote, USA (Ret.) Durham, NC native