Center on Children & Families

Demilitarizing What the Pentagon Knows About Developing Young People

A new paradigm for Educating Students Who are Struggling in School and in Life

by Hugh B. Price

The Brookings Institution

CCF Working Paper
With the Governance Studies Program

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In collaboration with
Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution

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Parent Testimonials: Young Lives Turned Around by the Military

Mother of Devin (participant in the National Guard Youth Challe*NG*e Program, a quasi-military residential corps for school dropouts):

> "Our son, Devin . . . was on the path of self-destruction. . . . The constant skipping of school (which reflected on his report card straight D's, F's), lying, being disrespectful to authority, sneaking out of the house at all hours of the night, experimenting with alcohol . . . was getting him nowhere except in a lot of trouble and he knew it."
>
> Devin enrolled in the Challe*NG*e Corps, the National Guard program for dropouts. When he came home to visit . . . "[w]e witnessed a young man with respect, dignity and a positive outlook on life. . . . Devin is now in the top five percentile of his class."[1]

David Pumphrey, parent of Matthew Pumphrey, another Challe*NG*e participant:

> "Each time he called, he constantly talked about goals he has set and honors he plans to earn. That is not the same kid that I dropped off at Thunderbird."[2]

Deborah Hughes of Georgia:

> "I gave [Youth Challe*NG*e program] an angry, confused, unhappy child, and you returned to me a not so confused, a happier, and somewhat not so angry young man. You gave me a young man with a purpose, a goal, and foundation to be a man. Also, just as important, I received back a young man who still managed to keep his uniqueness and his weird sense of humor (which I love)."[3]

Angel of Georgia

> "My son lost interest in school (ADD), because he didn't understand, therefore he was retained to 9th grade for the 3rd time. He was hanging around the wrong crowd, smoking and drinking and had a very bad anger toward me, his mother. Being a single mom I had to work and lost control over him. My son started Youth Challe*NG*e in Ft. Stewart, [Georgia], in Jan '04. When I picked him up on his pass for the weekend, I couldn't believe that I picked up the same child that I had dropped off. He was courteous, seemed so grown up, even told me 'mom I realize I'm becoming a man.' And the biggest difference, he was a gentleman toward me and a very helpful big brother."[4]

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Executive Summary

A decade ago, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future issued a prescient warning in its report, entitled *What Matters Most:*

> "There has been no previous time in history when the success, indeed the survival, of nations and people has been tied so tightly to their ability to learn. Today's society has little room for those who cannot read, write and compute proficiently; find and use resources; frame and solve problems; and continually learn new technologies, skills, and occupations. . . . In contrast to 20 years ago, individuals who do not succeed in school have little chance of finding a job or contributing to society—and societies that do not succeed at education have little chance of success in a global economy."[5]

Demographic trends indicate that the U.S. economy will rely increasingly upon Latinos and African Americans because together they, and especially the former, will comprise a steadily growing proportion of the adult workforce. By 2020, roughly 30 percent of the working-age population in the United States will be Latino and African American. Yet these economically indispensable population groups, along with low-income youngsters, consistently lag farthest behind academically.

As recently as 2005, roughly half of fourth and eighth grade black and Latino students performed Below Basic in reading and math according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Actually, the imperative of boosting achievement transcends ethnicity. White students far outnumber those from other ethnic groups and constitute over one-third of all youngsters scoring in the lowest quintile. Compounding these academic gaps, distressingly large numbers of Latino and African-American youngsters drop out of high school.

Given the enormous stakes for our society and economy, our communities, and the young people themselves, the nation's educators and policymakers should focus with laser-like precision, intensity, and ingenuity on equipping these endangered young people for self-sufficiency and citizenship in the twenty-first century. The enormity, gravity, and stubbornness of this challenge demand out-of-the-box thinking and interventions that are implemented on a scale commensurate with the scope of the underachievement problem. Focusing obsessively on standards and tests, tweaking what already has not worked, or instituting modest reforms with all deliberate speed fail to serve society's best interests because they fall far short of meeting the educational and developmental needs of youngsters who are struggling in school and in life.

The effusive comments featured earlier by parents of teenagers who joined the National Guard Youth Challe*NG*e Program attest to the capacity of this quasi-military program, established in 1993, to turn around the lives of thousands of school dropouts. These disconnected young people, along with those who have lost interest in school even though technically they remain enrolled, represent a vast untapped reservoir of human capital that, if left uneducated and underdeveloped, will become an enormous drain on society for generations to come.

This working paper examines the approaches, wisdom, and experience generated by the Challe*NG*e program as well as the vast storehouse of knowledge and research, models and systems possessed by the military services that are potentially applicable to educating and developing youngsters who are at greatest risk of academic failure, economic marginality, and outright poverty.

The modest purpose of this paper is to ascertain whether these approaches show sufficient promise that they might work for these young people, not whether there is solid proof that they actually do work, The evidence gathered during our reconnaissance, which runs the gamut from sketchy statistics and partial studies to anecdotes and journalistic observations, is not yet robust enough to qualify as conclusive proof.

Why focus on the military? The United States military enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its ability to reach, teach, and develop young people who are rudderless, and for setting the pace among American institutions in advancing minorities. Young people receive military-style education and training in an array of settings, most typically in a branch of the military. Various branches also partner with public schools to operate programs that emulate the military atmosphere and methods.

These military and quasi-military programs exhibit many attributes that appear to contribute to the young people's success and therefore might be appropriate to incorporate in a new approach to educating youngsters who are performing way below par, disengaged from school, or dropping out. Patterning the education of civilian youngsters after the military does raise legitimate anxieties and worrisome issues. The key is to embrace and customize those attributes that strengthen the education and development of adolescents, while eschewing the characteristics and methods that do not belong in a civilian enterprise.

School districts may continue to adopt those attributes that help them educate youngsters who heretofore have been difficult to reach and teach. This ad hoc approach to taking promising practices to scale characterizes the way progress often occurs in schools these days.

The preferable scenario in my view is to devise a strategy for testing several ideas that emerge from this analysis and then taking them to scale if they produce compelling results. The five concepts worth piloting are: (1) fast-track immersion programs to help low achievers catch up quickly; (2) quasi-military public high schools that adhere to a standardized format across and within school districts; (3) quasi-military public boarding schools for youngsters who need sustained and near total insulation from destructive family or community influences; (4) residential programs for incarcerated juvenile offenders who earnestly want a second chance; and (5) purposeful and faithful introduction of these promising attributes into regular schools.

The feasibility and effectiveness of these quasi-military program concepts should be tested via demonstration projects that are subjected to rigorous evaluation. If any of these produce strongly positive results, then they should be taken to scale.

The most logical and straightforward way to do so is for governors to give the National Guard units in their states this assignment. To insulate this vitally important domestic role from any national defense obligations imposed by the President or the Pentagon, these new education initiatives undertaken by the National Guard in their respective states should be financed by state and local appropriations, possibly augmented by grants from federal domestic agencies, but definitely not through the U.S. Department of Defense.

Millions of adolescents are marginalized academically and destined for oblivion in the twenty-first century economy. They barely, if at all, will be able to uphold their obligations as citizens and providers. The U.S. military figured out how to nurture and unleash the potential of young people like these generations ago. By demilitarizing and deploying what the Pentagon knows about educating and developing aimless young people, these troubled and troublesome young Americans can be transformed into a valued social and economic asset to our nation.

Prologue

Thirty years ago, the Taconic Foundation awarded a grant to an urban affairs consulting firm where I was a partner to examine the nagging issue of why so many black teenagers, particularly males, languished outside the labor market and, more importantly, to try to come up with creative policy recommendations and program interventions to address the problem. I served as project leader for the exercise.

During the course of our work, I recalled my own experience growing up in Washington, D.C. in the 1950s. When I was a teenager, many of my classmates simply weren't into school. Some of the boys were what we quaintly called thugs and "roughnecks" who barely escaped reform school. Others probably possessed an array of non-academic "intelligences" that Howard Gardner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education has identified and that made school boring.

As soon as they could, these aimless teenaged boys dropped out of school and out of sight. I recall encountering a number of these fellows several years later. Somehow they had managed to enlist in the military—or else they'd been drafted. Either way, they strutted about proudly in their uniforms, full of purpose.

The transformation intrigued and mystified me, especially since I never served in the armed forces. When my colleagues at the firm and I debated these presumed benefits of military service for rudderless boys, we started imagining a contemporary equivalent of the Army experience and came up with the concept of a quasi-military domestic youth corps for dropouts. Basically, the idea was that youngsters would enroll voluntarily and be assigned to military bases where they would receive intensive academic training, perform community service, and develop self-discipline.

Regrettably, the timing for our idea could not have been worse. With the nation emerging in the mid-1970s from the politically fractious Vietnam War, policymakers, government officials and foundations simply were in no mood to embrace a military-like or military-light solution for this domestic problem, no matter how troublesome or intractable.

Fast forward, two careers and ten years later, to the Rockefeller Foundation, which I joined as vice president in the fall of 1988. I decided to resurrect the quasi-military corps idea, update it, and try again to make it real. I obtained introductions to William Taylor of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a defense policy think tank, and to General Herbert Temple, head of the National Guard at the Pentagon.

Both of them liked the idea right away and we started focusing on how to make the youth corps a reality. I then got the Rockefeller Foundation to provide a grant to CSIS to create a study group, comprised of leading military and non-military types, who would vet the quasi-military corps concept and then, if all went well, issue a favorable report endorsing it. We both felt that an endorsement by a highly respected defense policy think tank was crucial to the credibility of the idea inside the Pentagon and congressional circles. The study group, known as the CSIS National Community Service for Out-of-School Youth Project, was co-chaired by Senator John McCain and Representative Dave McCurdy.

General Temple and his Chief of Public Information, Dan Donohue, were even more enthusiastic and determined to create such a corps. They focused intently on designing it and on persuading Congress to appropriate funds for pilot sites. The report prepared by CSIS helped smooth the way for the idea in the upper echelons of the Pentagon and the political establishment.

In 1993 the National Guard Youth Challe*NG*e Corps opened for business in ten states. The design that Dan Donohue and his team devised called for participants, all of whom must be school dropouts, to spend twenty-two weeks on a military base. They were immersed in exactly the kind of a rigorous, highly structured regimen expected of a military operation. The curriculum, drawn from years of Pentagon research and experience, aimed to improve their life-coping skills and employment potential. Today the Challe*NG*e program operates in thirty-four sites in twenty-seven states, Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.

Challe*NG*e owes its existence to a combination of intuition and experience, research and experimentation, determination and execution. As a result, it has quite effectively filled a void in the continuum of services available to young people who have needs that traditional institutions, such as public schools, community-based organizations, even families and churches, seem unable or disinclined to fill.

This paper seeks to build on the approaches, wisdom, and experience generated by the Challe*NG*e program, and on the vast storehouse of knowledge, research, models, and systems possessed by the military services that are potentially applicable to educating and developing these youngsters. I do not presume to offer conclusive proof that military-like approaches will work with these youngsters. Instead, my rather modest purpose is to ascertain whether these approaches show promise that they might work for these young people. This paper draws on sketchy evidence, insightful journalistic accounts, and compelling firsthand anecdotes—and on hunches and instincts—gleaned from a preliminary reconnaissance that cumulatively paint a picture of interventions that appear to hold considerable promise.

The point of the paper is to pose questions and posit ideas about unconventional ways of educating youngsters who are struggling and of organizing schools that might be equipped—conceptually, academically, and operationally—to give them a better shot at success in life. Far from etched in stone, the ideas advanced here are offered to spur a vigorous search for innovative new strategies to rescue youngsters who have virtually disappeared from society's radar screen.

Education - The Ticking Time Bomb

Craig Barrett, the CEO of Intel, once proclaimed that "the biggest ticking time bomb in the United States is the sorry state of our K-12 education system."[6] He invoked that dire metaphor to awaken Americans to the fact that the educational quality of the nation's workforce will determine our competitiveness.

Mr. Barrett echoed the trenchant warning issued over a decade ago by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. As the Commission observed in its report, entitled *What Matters Most:*

> "There has been no previous time in history when the success, indeed the survival, of nations and people has been tied so tightly to their ability to learn. Today's society has little room for those who cannot read, write, and compute proficiently; find and use resources; frame and solve problems; and continually learn new technologies, skills, and occupations. . . . In contrast to 20 years ago, individuals who do not succeed in school have little chance of finding a job or contributing to society—and societies that do not succeed at education have little chance of success in a global economy."[7]

The academic skills needed for success in the workplace are converging with those required for success in the first year of college, according to a study conducted by ACT, the nonprofit testing outfit.[8] The moral of these findings is simple, according to Arthur Rothkopf, Senior Vice President of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce: "If you want

a real job, even a blue-collar job, you're probably going to need some postsecondary education, but at the very least you've got to get those skills in high school."[9]

Demographic trends indicate that the U.S. economy will rely increasingly upon Latinos and African Americans because together they, and especially the former, will comprise a steadily growing proportion of the adult workforce. By 2020, roughly 30 percent of the working-age population will be African American and Latino, nearly double the percentage in 1980.[10] Yet these economically indispensable population groups, along with low-income youngsters, consistently lag farthest behind academically.

1. Basic Skills Gap

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) serves in effect as the nation's report card. The exam, which samples student achievement across states instead of testing every pupil, posits three levels of academic competence:

- Basic: "denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade."
- Proficient: "represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed."
- Advanced: "signifies superior performance."[11]

In actuality, there is an unofficial fourth level of achievement on NAEP. That is Below Basic, where a dismayingly high proportion of American youngsters have languished for years. As measured by NAEP, American students, including minorities, have made some headway academically. This is especially the case in math, but markedly less so in reading. As depicted in Table 1, an alarmingly high proportion of students—particularly low-income as well as Latino, African-American and American Indian youngsters—continued to perform Below Basic as recently as 2005:

Table 1: NAEP Results for Fourth and Eighth Graders in Mathematics and Reading 1992-2005:

Percent Scoring Below Basic

	1992	2000	2002	2005
Hispanic				
4th grade reading	61	63	n.a.	54
8th grade reading	51	n.a.	n.a.	44
4th grade math	66	58	n.a.	32
8th grade math	65	59	n.a.	48
African American				
4th grade reading	68	65	n.a.	58
8th grade reading	55	45	n.a.	48
4th grade math	78	64	n.a.	40
8th grade math	80	69	n.a.	58

	1992	2000	2002	2005
American Indian				
4th grade reading	n.a.	n.a.	49	52
8th grade reading	n.a.	n.a.	39	41
4th grade math	n.a.	n.a.	36*	32
8th grade math	n.a.	n.a.	48*	47
Eligible for free/reduced-price lunch				
4th grade reading	n.a.	62	n.a.	54
8th grade reading	n.a.	n.a.	40	43
4th grade math	n.a.	57	n.a.	33
8th grade math	n.a.	n.a.	59	49
White				
4th grade reading	29	30	n.a.	24
8th grade reading	23	n.a.	16	18
4th grade math	31	22	n.a.	10
8th grade math	32	24	n.a.	20
Asian-Pacific Islander				
4th grade reading	40	30	n.a.	27
8th grade reading	24	n.a.	24	20
4th grade math	27	n.a.	13*	10
8th grade math	24	25	n.a.	19

**Note: These numbers are from 2003.*
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "2005 Assessment Results: National Trends" (http://nces.ed.gov/ [May 2007]).

The imperative of boosting youngsters from Below Basic to Basic and beyond transcends ethnicity, even though the proportions of low-achieving youngsters are most pronounced among African-American, Latino and American Indian students. White students far outnumber those from other ethnic groups and they constitute 37.6 percent of all youngsters scoring in the lowest quintile according to NAEP.[12]

2. Preparation Gap

Not surprisingly, the sizeable skills gap reflected by NAEP, coupled with the disturbing dropout rate discussed below, create what I call a preparation gap for low achievers. By this I mean the gap between what youngsters know and are able to do versus what they need to know and be able to do in order to progress successfully through school, function effectively in post-secondary education, land a job with good pay and benefits, and thus enjoy a middle-class lifestyle.

According to Charles Kolb, CEO of the Committee for Economic Development, only 20 percent of black students and 16 percent of Latino students graduate from high school adequately prepared for college.[13] The picture is even bleaker in Washington, D.C., where a study commissioned by city and school officials reported recently that only nine percent of ninth graders in the public schools will complete college within five years after graduating from high school.[14] The report further asserts that nine out of ten freshmen in the D.C. schools will be confined to low-paying jobs because they never began college or else failed to complete it.

3. The Dropout/Disengagement Crisis

Compounding these academic gaps, distressingly large numbers of Latino and African-American youngsters drop out of high school. According to "Diplomas Count," a special supplement issued by *Education Week*, merely half of African-American students and roughly 55 percent of Latino students graduate from high school compared with more than three-quarters of non-Hispanic whites and Asians.[15]

Some scholars, like Lawrence Mishel of the Economic Policy Institute, contend that dropout rates this large are exaggerated.[16] Based on his analysis, Mishel argues that 73 percent of black students graduate on time. Whether the dropout rate in reality is 25 percent, twice that, or somewhere in between, the loss of human capital costs the dropouts, their eventual families, and the nation's economy dearly.

The dropout phenomenon is concentrated ethnically, socio-economically, and geographically—and getting worse. According to Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters of Johns Hopkins, nearly half of the nation's African-American and Latino students attend high schools with high poverty rates and low graduation rates. Roughly 15 percent of U.S. high schools produce close to half of the nation's dropouts. Balfanz and Legters brand these 2,000 dysfunctional high schools "dropout factories."[17]

Interestingly enough, in some focus groups conducted with dropouts, they were far more likely to say they left school because they were unmotivated, not challenged enough, or overwhelmed by troubles outside of school, rather than because they were failing academically.[18]

The most commonly cited changes that the youngsters say would have boosted their inclination to stay in school included: teachers who expected more of them; smaller classes with more individualized instruction; schools that helped them more when they struggled; better teachers and classes that were more engaging; opportunities for real-world learning; increased supervision at school; and closer parental monitoring of whether they were attending school every day.

While the youngsters' claim that academic failure played little if any part in their decision to drop out should be greeted with skepticism, their observations about the desirable attributes of school are illuminating and instructive. It is also worth noting that, unbeknownst to them, their recommendations mirror some salient characteristics of military training.

Less documented and publicized, but no less ominous, is the phenomenon of student disengagement. I refer here to youngsters who lose interest in school and virtually give up trying to learn and achieve, even though technically they may remain enrolled. These youngsters stand on the precipice of dropping out.

In their work with dropout factories, Balfanz and Legters have found that many of these students enter high school poorly prepared for academic success and rarely (or barely) make it out of the ninth grade. Typically they disengage from school, attend infrequently, flunk too many courses to be promoted to the tenth grade, try again with no better results, and ultimately drop out. In the cities Balfanz and Legters studied, 20 to 40 percent of students repeat the ninth grade, but only 10 to 15 percent of repeaters go on to graduate.[19]

In the view of Eddy Bayardelle, head of the Merrill Lynch Foundation and a former teacher and principal in the New York City school system, schools are filled with youngsters who have tuned out of school.[20] He contends that school systems do not know what to do with them, traditional schools do not reach them, and the youngsters do not particularly care that they don't. They simply aren't "into" the education that's being offered.

Based on his experience with these academically disengaged young people, Bayardelle advocates an entirely new approach to learning. Ideally these youngsters need to be enveloped in an all-encompassing environment, akin to the military, that helps insulate them from negative forces in school, at home, in the community, and among peers. They also need curriculum and instruction that connects them to the real world that they see and touch. Otherwise they do not see the point of getting an education. Also, these children have energy to burn. Bayardelle argues that to reach these adolescents, schools need to consume some of that energy via physical education, hands-on learning, and the arts. No one expects adults to sit still for six hours or more per day, he notes, yet that's what we expect of youngsters, which makes no sense.

Urgently Needed: A New Paradigm for Educating Low Achievers

A generation ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which had been appointed by U.S. Secretary of Education Terrell H. Bell, issued the landmark report entitled *A Nation at Risk*. The 1983 report lambasted American public education, declaring most memorably that: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."[21]

This broadside triggered a wave of efforts to reform public schools that persists to this day. The approach that gained the greatest political traction in the ensuing years is so-called standards-based reform. The latest and most prominent iteration of standards-based reform is No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal law enacted in 2001 that mandated new testing and accountability measures for public schools.

In addition to NCLB, a potpourri of other, mostly unsynchronized federal, state, and local initiatives have focused in recent years on imposing tougher high school graduation standards, revising state school aid formulas, downsizing schools and reducing class sizes, creating specialized schools within schools, reforming curricula, expanding quality preschool programs, launching charter schools and other variations of autonomous schools, upgrading the caliber of teachers, and asserting mayoral control over school systems.

What has a generation of school reform wrought with regard to school effectiveness and student achievement, especially when it comes to chronic low achievers? By shining a spotlight on school performance—and shortcomings—No Child Left Behind has provoked heightened local media coverage of how individual schools are doing and stoked parental awareness of how their children are faring. The federal law sheds welcome light on how well various categories of students, especially chronic underachievers, are performing in each school.

The picture vis-à-vis student performance is murky, however. As reported by *Education Week* in "Quality Counts at 10: A Decade of Standards-Based Education," the results are both heartening and sobering. Since 1992, fourth graders nationally have surged nearly two grade levels in math as measured by NAEP. The math gains registered by Latino and African-American pupils are even more encouraging, up more than two grade levels. Urban school systems that belong to the Council of the Great City Schools show some progress on both reading and math tests administered by their states.[22]

These welcome results notwithstanding, the overall situation in closing stubborn achievement gaps certainly does not merit a grade of satisfactory progress. It is too little and it is taking far too long. As evidenced by the NAEP data cited earlier, disturbingly high proportions of American schoolchildren continue to perform below grade level. The persistence of these yawning achievement gaps is just as distressing as their size, and certainly no less daunting.

Given the enormous stakes for our society and economy, our communities, and the young people themselves, the nation's educators and policymakers should focus with laser-like precision, intensity, and ingenuity on equipping these endangered young people for self-sufficiency and citizenship in the twenty-first century. The enormity, gravity, and stubbornness of this challenge demand out-of-the-box thinking and interventions implemented at a scale that is commensurate with the scope of the underachievement problem. Focusing obsessively on standards and tests, tweaking what already has not worked, or instituting modest reforms with all deliberate speed all fail to serve society's best interests because they fall far short of meeting the educational and developmental needs of youngsters who are struggling in school and in life.

The foregoing depiction of the yawning achievement and preparation gaps, coupled with the diagnosis of why traditional schooling fails to work with disengaged students and dropouts, suggest it is high time for a new paradigm and big-picture strategy for educating young people at acute risk of school failure.

Far be it from me to claim there is only one way to reach these young people. However, experience with the Chal*leNG*e program convinces me that the military method of training holds considerable promise. Thus I will bypass other well-regarded school-based and alternative approaches, and will devote the balance of this paper to lessons that might be gleaned from the military.

Why the Military?

The U.S. military enjoys a well-deserved reputation for its ability to reach, teach, and develop young people who are rudderless, and for setting the pace among American institutions in advancing minorities. The military's strengths include proven competence in such areas as training, team building, organizing small units, conducting large-scale operations, quick mobilization, managing diversity, and converting sometimes aimless recruits into focused and productive individuals.[23] The military clearly knows how to plan, mobilize, and operate training programs on a huge scale. This expertise is especially enticing given the persistent inability of the decentralized public education system to boost the academic performance of chronic low achievers. Former Senator Sam Nunn once observed that:

> "The American taxpayers have invested in and have built a great stockpile of innovative ideas, knowledge, trained, talented people, and equipment in the military over the years. These resources, if properly matched to local needs, and coordinated with civilian efforts, can make a useful contribution to addressing the problems we face in blighted urban areas, in neglected rural regions, in schools, and elsewhere."[24]

As Dirk Johnson wrote in *Newsweek*, "For many children growing up without a cohesive family, the military model seems to offer a bedrock of stability—a world of clear-cut rules and unmistakable authority figures."[25] Elizabeth Heneghan Ondaatje of RAND goes further:

> "The Army's primary contribution to youth development consists of educating and training its own enlistees, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Army's success in this regard is well documented and well recognized."[26]

Charles Moskos, the military sociologist, argues that the Army in particular has achieved credibility among young minorities and their parents, in large part because it is the rare institution that is not dominated at top levels by whites. "The Army is the only place in American society where whites are routinely bossed around by blacks."[27] Professor Moskos and John Sibley Butler, co-authors of *All That We Can Be: Black Leadership and Racial Integration the Army Way*, contend that black achievement in the armed forces is more pronounced than anywhere else

in American society. As of 1998, African Americans made up 29 percent of all enlisted personnel, 37 percent of senior non-commissioned officers, and 12 percent of all officers.[28] The reason for the Army's success, they argue, is that instead of lowering standards to accommodate African-American recruits, it invests heavily in ensuring that they have the opportunity to meet the standards.

According to Moskos and Butler, the Army operates one of the largest continuing education programs in the world. Of the 50,000 soldiers in the program known as Functional Academic Skills Training (FAST), 60 percent were black, representing a high percentage of black non-commissioned officers. "A level playing field is not enough," they add. "The Army's success in producing black leaders occurs because it recognizes that compensatory action may be needed to help members of disadvantaged groups meet the standards of competition."[29]

Some research suggests that military service may enhance employability. For example, a 1990 survey of 600 employers conducted by the Army Research Institute found that "employers believed Army veterans have more of the characteristics they desire than job applicants in general."[30] As Beth Asch of RAND wrote of this study:

> "Among the characteristics considered the most important by employers for success in entry-level positions were dependability, listening to instructions, caring for company property, seeking clarification, efficiency, enthusiasm, respecting others, punctuality, showing good judgment, working as a team member, sticking with a task, and self-discipline."[31]

The Military Way

Young people receive military-style education and training in an array of settings, most typically after enlisting in a branch of the military. Various branches partner with local school districts to operate programs in public schools that emulate the military atmosphere and methods to some extent. This section of the paper focuses on basic training as well as initiatives in public schools and other settings where the express purpose is to shape up young people who are struggling academically or behaviorally, as opposed, for example, to schools that serve the children of military personnel.

1. Basic Training

Basic training, which lasts between six and eight weeks, introduces enlistees to the rigors and expectations of military service. The goal of basic training is "to produce soldiers who are motivated, disciplined, physically conditioned, trained in common soldier tasks . . . and capable of taking their place in the field."[32]

General Colin Powell, the former U.S. Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, once gave me a brief primer on the purpose of basic training.[33] As he explained to me, basic training is about many things. One goal is tending to the recruits' health and improving their physical fitness in order to get their bodies ready for whatever military mission awaits them. Basic training also aims to erase any effects of bad upbringing and parenting. It seeks to remove negative habits by making it clear there are immediate consequences for inappropriate behavior. The message transmitted throughout basic training is simple. If you want to be here, you must perform. If you don't want to be here, then go home, as do 25 to 30 percent of recruits.

Drill instructors do lots of shouting and screaming at slackers to make them look foolish. The point, General Powell explained, is to teach recruits that they're part of a team and that everybody pays if even one individual fails to perform. The team only succeeds if all members of the team do what they are supposed to do. Close order drill creates group consciousness and behavior. Eventually those who initially don't do well begin to get the hang of it and feel proud that they have. This instills an ethos of discipline, accountability, and achievement very early on.

Basic training breeds a sense of collectivism. Instructors utilize the buddy system and embed deeply in recruits' minds and behavior the indispensable military values of taking care of one's self while also being responsible for and to someone else. Discipline, accountability, and faithfulness to the task at hand breed pride in the organization as well as pride in being part of the organization.[34]

2. Pre-Military Development Program

One feature of military training and education that garners little attention in civilian circles is its capacity for fast-track learning. The former dropouts in the Challe*NG*e program on average gain a grade and a half in reading and nearly two grades in math in just five months.

Moskos and Butler tout another approach to fast-track learning that was linked to the military. During the 1980s and early 1990s, about a third of all black youths and a quarter of whites in the U.S. were ineligible to serve, mainly because of their low scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the military's entrance exam.[35] In Mississippi, a school teacher named Jane Borne, who was the first white educator at an all-black elementary school in North Gulfport, was distressed to learn that half of the young men and women from Mississippi who wanted to enlist in the military could not do so because of deficiencies in reading and math.

Ms. Borne teamed up with a colleague named Gail Clark Cotton to create an innovative program whose purpose was to give young people who had failed the ASVAB a second chance. With funding from the state and the U.S. Departments of Labor and Defense, their Pre-Military Development Program (PMDP) was launched in April 1990 on the campus of Gulf Coast Community College in Perkinston.

Over the program's two-year life, it served 296 students, in groups of about 30 at a time. All had failed the ASVAB, but each was recommended for PMDP by recruiting sergeants who thought the applicant had a chance of passing the test the second time around. The enrollees by and large came from disadvantaged groups. Seventy-one percent were black and mainly from rural areas. About 20 percent were female. Few of the students maintained contact with their fathers. Would-be recruits who were deemed unlikely ever to pass the ASVAB were screened out.[36]

Enrollees had just one goal in mind—passing the exam with a high enough score to be accepted by the military.[37] Participation in this immersion program did not run for a prescribed length of time. Students tended to take from three weeks to five months to pass the course, with the average stay lasting six weeks. They were not charged tuition and they lived, also free of charge, in dormitories on the Gulf Coast campus.

The program relied heavily on a self-paced computer teaching method known as the CYBER-Based Instructional System (CYBIS). Lessons were repeated in different forms until students understood the material. Each student had to cover 100 hours of CYBIS in order to strengthen their weak skills in mathematics and English. The core of the PMDP pedagogy consisted of reading, writing, and mathematics. The schedule was heavily regimented, with each day beginning with breakfast at 7:00 a.m. and ending with lights out at 11:00 p.m. During the day, three and a half hours were devoted to CYBIS or classes, two hours to life-coping skills, two hours to self-paced study using a computer, and two and a half hours to physical training.[38]

The immersion program produced striking results. Eighty-eight percent of the students made gains of two to three grade levels in reading comprehension and mathematics, all on average in a mere six weeks. Since the program lacked complete information on all of the participants, the eventual fate of 30 percent of them was unknown. Of those students whose progress was tracked, at least for a short while, 46 percent passed the ASVAB upon retaking it, 33 percent changed their minds about enlisting in the military and instead found civilian employment or else enrolled in school or college, and 11 percent were waiting to retake the test when PMDP ended. Only 10 percent dropped out.[39]

3. JROTC Programs and Career Academies

Congress established the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC) back in 1916 as a vehicle to promote good citizenship and responsibility among young people.[40] For decades it operated mostly in public high schools in southern states.[41] That all changed after General Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, visited South Central Los Angeles following the riots there in 1992. Declaring that inner-city youth needed the discipline and structure offered by the military, he decided to expand JROTC.[42]

All four branches of the military sponsor JROTC programs. These days, as many as 3,500 schools and half a million cadets nationwide participate in JROTC.[43] It is offered as an elective course that combines classroom instruction with extracurricular activities and is taught by retired military officers and noncommissioned officers. The curriculum typically covers citizenship, leadership, physical education, and communication.

JROTC took a yet another leap forward when the U.S. Departments of Defense and Education joined forces to implement an innovative vocational education program designed to keep dropout-prone students in school. They created JROTC career academies—small schools within schools—that maintain students together in the same classes and that integrate academic instruction with local business involvement in employment and counseling.[44] The Army alone runs about thirty career academies and partners in others.

There is some evidence that JROTC cadets demonstrate slightly better academic performance than their contemporaries in the general school population. According to Moskos, they have a 10 to 15 percent higher graduation rate than their peers in the same high school.[45]

In Chicago, for instance, the Center for Strategic and International Studies reported that sustained membership in JROTC over several years paid off. Although many of the enrollees were considered at-risk youth, classroom performance and behavioral indicators equaled or exceeded the average in individual schools.[46] Seventy-one percent of the 2004 graduating JROTC cadets in Chicago continued on to post-secondary education, while 18 percent enlisted in the military.[47] Studies conducted by the Army found that their JROTC cadets have lower levels of disciplinary infractions than the overall student population, higher attendance and graduation rates, and stronger grade point averages and SAT scores.[48]

Although JROTC is ostensibly not intended as a military recruitment vehicle and while cadets incur no obligation to serve once they graduate from high school, surveys indicate that approximately 42 percent of JROTC graduates expect to establish some connection with one of the military services and that they are five times more likely than their peers to join the military.[49]

4. Youth Challe*NG*e Program

Earlier in this paper I recounted the origins and evolution of the Youth Challe*NG*e program. It is run by the National Guard with funding from the U.S. Departments of Defense, Justice, and Labor, augmented by matching grants of 40 percent from the participating states.

The straightforward mission of Challe*NG*e is to "intervene in the lives of at-risk youth and produce program graduates with the values, skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as adults."[50] It serves 16- to-18-year-olds who have dropped out of high school. They can be unemployed or underemployed, but they must be drug-free, never convicted of a felony, and not on parole, probation, or under indictment.[51]

The Challe*NG*e program consists of a Residential Phase lasting twenty-two weeks, which is situated in a quasi-military environment, typically an underutilized military base, and which focuses on basic lifestyle changes

approached through a rigorous program of education, training, and service to the community.[52] During the Post-Residential Phase, graduates are mentored by a caring adult who is a consistent and positive role model and who works with the graduate to sustain the positive new outlook and lifestyle.

Typically about twenty percent of enlistees wash out in the grueling early stages, which are aimed at determining who has the ability and gumption to persevere.[53] About 7,000 enrollees complete the Residential Phase annually. Their average age is seventeen years and four months. Between its inception in 1993 and the end of the 2005 program year, the Challe*NG*e program received nearly 130,000 applications, enrolled close to 77,000 dropouts, and graduated 60,000 cadets.[54]

The outcomes are heartening. An independent firm, AOC Solutions, conducts an annual assessment of the program. Their most recent study found that since 1993, 65 percent of graduates have been awarded academic credentials upon completion, with the vast majority of them passing the GED and some earning high school diplomas. In 2005, the Challe*NG*e graduates raised their math scores by 2.1 grade levels and lifted their reading scores by 1.6 grade levels. And this during the five-month residential phase alone. AOC managed to maintain contact with 71 percent of the graduates who completed the twelve-month Post-Residential Phase in 2005. Four out of five of these cadets were either employed or continuing their education, just under 15 percent had joined the military, and fewer than one percent were incarcerated.[55]

Conrad Mandsager, a management consultant who is a longtime observer of the Challe*NG*e program, cites other possible benefits gleaned from his conversations with local project directors. Some young people previously considered learning disabled or hyperactive who complete the taxing program manage to shed those labels in the process. Mandsager was also told that some of these youngsters actually end their reliance on psychotropic medications like Ritalin.[56]

For the past decade, the Challe*NG*e unit in Oklahoma has operated a planned variation that seems promising. The so-called Thunderbird Regimented Training Program, aka Bravo Company, serves cadets between the ages of twelve and eighteen who are officially in the custody of the state juvenile justice system and would otherwise be confined to a corrections facility.[57]

5. Public Military Academies

Several school districts have created entire schools, not simply schools within schools, in the image of the military. Oakland launched a military academy in the fall of 2001. Chicago runs several Army-oriented high schools serving more than 1,600 students.[58] Philadelphia has one in operation and two more in the offing. Minnesota, Maryland, and Florida reportedly have academies in operation or on the drawing boards.

What explains this trend? As Robert Cervantes, military liaison between California's Department of Education and the active armed forces, puts it: "Districts are desperately looking for something that works. Traditional schools aren't working. Students aren't getting the attention they need."[59] He adds that school districts are looking into public military schools because there are clearer expectations for students' conduct, attendance, and performance. Also, uniforms and military instructors in the classroom foster a more structured learning atmosphere.

The demand for slots is robust, with 1,300 youngsters applying to one of the Chicago military schools to fill 140 openings and 2,000 applicants for 250 slots in Philadelphia.[60] Some of these schools steer clear of both the brightest or the most troubled youngsters and instead select what they view as well-rounded applicants. As Brigadier General Frank Bacon, who heads Chicago Military Academy, noted, "They can have been in trouble and still come here. They just can't stay in trouble and stay here."[61] The Philadelphia Military Academy is picky as well.

Applicants must be performing on grade level in reading and math, submit two letters of recommendation from school faculty, have good attendance and disciplinary records, and complete a mandatory two-week summer training program.[62]

While the academies exist to help youngsters escape their harsh surroundings, these schools typically operate in the midst of adversity. Starting in the 2002-2003 school year, Prince George's County, Maryland converted Forestville High School, one of its lowest performing high schools in one of its roughest neighborhoods, into the Forestville Military Academy, which eventually will house over 1,000 cadets. Nearly half of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunches. Much like Forestville, the Bronzeville neighborhood surrounding the Chicago Military Academy is predominately African American and saddled with high rates of crime, unemployment, drug use, and gang activity.[63] The cadets come from poor families and have experienced academic failure in the past.[64]

The Chicago Military Academy (CMA) imposes a curriculum that is heavy on basics and light on electives. Students take such core subjects as English, math, social studies, and science all four years. Surprisingly enough given the military nature of the enterprise, some academies struggled in the early going with unruly students who were accustomed to having their way. But the academies invariably established an orderly and disciplined atmosphere. Military instructors, usually reservists or retirees, roam the corridors and cafeteria on the lookout for untoward behavior, even to the point of shirts that aren't neatly tucked in. Discipline for misbehavior or failing to follow orders is meted out quickly and unequivocally. Punishment may be levied at the teachers' discretion when a cadet is tardy, fails to turn in homework, or acts out.[65] It may take the form of push-ups, standing during an entire class, or calls home to parents.

Although the evidence of whether and to what extent these military academies work hardly meets the gold standard for evaluation, the sketchy data that's available paints an encouraging picture of what these kinds of schools potentially can accomplish. For example, the Chicago Military Academy in Bronzeville ranked in the top quarter of all public high schools on a recent round of standardized tests. The latest Test of Achievement and Proficiency administered in high schools showed that CMA's academic performance resembled that of a magnet school, rather than a neighborhood school where the majority of its 150 students were recruited. Fifty-one percent of CMA's cadets performed at or above national norms in reading. The figure was 62 percent in math. These scores exceeded the citywide average in reading by 40 percent and in math by 30 percent.[66]

In Philadelphia, the attendance rate of 97 percent at the academies surpasses the district-wide average of 83 percent. The graduation rate of 97 percent at the academies easily outshines the district rate of 61 percent. What's more, the teacher absentee rate at the academies of less than one percent, versus the district rate of 8 percent, appears to attest to the teachers' desire to work in this distinctive environment.[67]

Of the 98 seniors in the first graduating class at Chicago Military Academy, 85 were accepted into college, receiving more than $1 million in grants and scholarships.[68] At Forestville Military Academy, the suspension rate is lower than some nearby high schools and, according to school officials, the number of students taking the SAT has grown.[69]

The compelling stories of cadets and their parents, culled from newspaper accounts of these public military academies, illuminate the profound difference that this unconventional approach to educating and developing young people can make. Their impassioned and authentic voices speak volumes about the potential benefits of this approach.

Marcia Colbert is the single mother of Tatrell Sims and three other children. The Oakland Military Institute represents her last hope of ensuring that Tatrell gets an adequate education. Earlier in the year he was causing disruptions and was often asked to leave the classroom because he couldn't settle down.

Tatrell, dressed in army gray pants, white shirt, black boots, and black hat, leaves his West Oakland home every morning at 6:30, goes to a nearby deli for breakfast, and catches a bus to arrive at school on time. After eight hours at school, he catches a bus home at 4:30 in the afternoon. Upon arrival home, he does a daily round of household chores before being allowed to play outside.

Tatrell and his mother meet regularly with his teachers to discuss his behavior, devise plans and set daily academic goals for him to succeed. She says: "Right now he is on an academic point system, I'm trying out everything. When he was in public schools, I wasn't consistent about making him go to bed at the right time and do all his homework. But the school is keeping me strong and it is helping me be consistent." If Tatrell does well in each class, he receives a number of points for which he is rewarded at the end of the week.

According to Tatrell, "At my other school I use [sic] to be a follower, but now I'm a leader. I used to believe that if other kids could do bad stuff, I could do it too. But I'm a squad leader now. And I feel good because I never did anything like this before."

Marcia Colbert poignantly sums up the difference OMI has made in her son's life: "So far the school is working well for Tatrell. They are working with him. This is the only school that has gone the extra mile for my kid. They aren't trying to kick him out. They are trying to build up a sense of tolerance in his life. The teachers are trying to work with him, but it is up to him. If he makes it through this first year, hopefully, next year he'll do better."[70]

Attributes Worth Emulating

The military programs described above exhibit many attributes that appear to contribute to the young people's success and therefore might be appropriate to incorporate in a new approach to educating youngsters who are falling way behind academically, disengaging from school, or dropping out. Each has merit in its own right. In combination, they represent a potentially compelling vision on how to design and operate educational programs and schools whose mission is to maximize adolescents' chances for success. It should be noted that these characteristics are not exclusive to military programs. They are found to varying degrees in the Job Corps, Conservation Corps, YouthBuild, and successful public schools and charter schools, among other programs.

1. Belonging

Theories abound about why teenagers belong to street gangs. Researchers cite a wide array of reasons, among them low self-esteem, hunger for respect, limited economic opportunity, peer pressure, physical protection, alienation from parents, financial incentives, communal honor and loyalty, and fellowship.[71] The most memorable and insightful explanation I have ever heard was offered by Tee Rogers, a Los Angeles gang leader, who would know. According to Rogers:

> "What I think is formulating here is that human nature wants to be accepted. A human being gives less of a damn what he is accepted into. At that age—11-17— all kids want to belong. They are unpeople."[72]

In the view of Norman Johnson, a retired Army colonel who helped found and now runs the Integrated Design and Electronics Academy Public Charter School in Washington, D.C.:

> "In order to get the attention of the inner city youth, you must first relate to them in some way. The military structure has [been] successful in relating to them because the military has a belonging atmosphere in which inner city youth feel they can relate. Inner city youth understand the 'gang structure' and the sense of belonging so they can easily adapt to this type of structure at the 8th through 12th grade levels . . . The military structure allows faster integration of older students into a more cooperative spirit for learning and therefore greater academic success."[73]

Early adolescence is the age of highest "influenceability" according to Carol Goodenow of Tufts University. The student-teacher relationship frequently deteriorates just at the stage in their development when many teenagers begin to look to adults outside of the family as potential role models or sources of support.[74] Goodenow argues that:

> "Heightened self-consciousness, increased significance of friendships and peer relations, and decreased personal contact with teachers combine to make the middle or junior high school classroom a social context in which students' sense of belonging, personal acceptance, and social-emotional support are both crucial and problematic."[75]

She continues:

> "Although expectancy of success was the primary predictor of academic effort and grades, the subjective sense of belonging and support was also significantly associated with these outcomes."[76]

While the evidence often consists of self-reporting, surveys suggest that belonging to positive youth groups may boost participants' self-confidence and curb risky behaviors. As school psychologist Steven Rosenberg observes, outcasts need to feel that they belong to a socially acceptable group. Research and common sense tell us, he says, that many problems in schools derive from the desire of young people to belong to a group—a group where they matter, where they are depended upon, where their presence or absence is noticed.[77] Rosenberg continues:

> "Such success [with fringe students] begins by giving students a reason to behave appropriately—by giving them, first, the experience of belonging and contributing to a positive peer group dedicated to a mutually agreed-upon project and, second, the experience of both positive and negative consequences of the peer group's actions."[78]

Given their sheer size and anonymity, conventional schools represent the antithesis of belonging. Schools and other youth programs patterned after the military hold so much promise because, among many other reasons, they epitomize belonging. As Goodman writes,

> "Many students who gravitate to the program [at the Chicago Military Academy] seem to find it a place of belonging. JROTC classrooms often have the feel of a clubhouse, and like any popular club, they offer alluring perks: the field trips, dances, drill competitions, and community service projects build camaraderie and self-esteem."[79]

Belonging to the right kind of "gang" can transform the attitude of youngsters like Robert Shores, a student at Chicago Military Academy. His mother was a drug addict and his father a disappearing act. He got into lots of fights. Yet the school managed to reach him.

> "If you feel like nobody cares about you, then you feel like a nobody. But there's a lot of people here who really like me. They'll pull me aside and tell me what I did wrong. And they tell me what I've done right."[80]

2. Teamwork

Young people who "belong" become part of teams. As CSIS noted in its report about military culture:

> "Cohesion and esprit de corps are the fourth foundation of U.S. military culture. Cohesion is the shared sense of sacrifice and identity that binds service members to their comrades in arms. Esprit de corps is pride in the larger unit and service as a whole. Morale, a close relative, represents the level of enthusiasm and satisfaction felt by individuals in a unit."[81]

In his description of basic training, General Powell emphasized the importance of teaching young people to function as team members upon whom others can count, rather than Lone Rangers accountable to no one. In the real world, mutual reliance and interdependence are commonplace since workers routinely function in units with supervisors, peers, and subordinates. Success hinges on how efficiently and harmoniously the unit or team performs. By the same token, team members learn that everyone—from their companies and colleagues to their family members and friends—could suffer if they fail to perform or behave responsibly. Absorbing this lesson is one of the keys to growing up and getting ahead. And it's an essential attribute of the military approach to educating and developing young people.

3. Motivation and Self-Discipline

Many researchers have identified persuasive linkages between lack of motivation and low achievement.[82] Interestingly enough, a survey reported in *Education Week* found that high school dropouts themselves were far more likely to say they left school because they were unmotivated, not challenged enough, or overwhelmed by troubles outside of school, than because they were failing academically.[83]

This worrisome motivation deficit surfaces especially in low-income and minority youngsters. The explanations for these counterproductive attitudes run the gamut from the chilling effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, to the related inability to see a connection between academic achievement and opportunity for success in life, and to an embrace of so-called oppositional cultures that reject achievement. As Roslyn Mickelson has observed, "Working-class and minority youths have parents, older siblings, and neighbors whose real-world experiences challenge the myth that education equals opportunity for all."[84]

The strict discipline long associated with military training helps instill the motivation that may be in short supply among some young people. As CSIS stated,

> "Those who train military recruits, however, along with any experienced parents, will attest that discipline is part of what young people need most. It appears in many forms, whether it makes an athlete rise at

> dawn to train, drives a writer to spend personal time finishing a chapter, or motivates a military recruit to follow a squad leader's instructions. . . . Self-discipline, a significant factor of maturity, is what allows parents, tired from a day's work, to still care for a home and children, and it is what makes them go to work in the first place."[85]

In the words of Principal Phyllis Goodson, principal of the Chicago Military Academy-Bronzeville:

> "Military is the culture we follow; we say 'Yes sir' and 'No ma'am.' But we're not seeking outward control or manipulation of our students. We're taking dependent children and teaching them self-discipline, self-control and confidence."[86]

She adds:

> "When they come in, they're looking down. As they begin training, they begin to walk straight, they hold their heads up. I'm watching them grow. I'm watching them change. A lot is possible. You just have to give them the right possibilities."[87]

4. Valuing and Believing Every Youngster Can Succeed

Many young people who struggle academically yearn for adults who genuinely value them and believe they can be successful. Claude Steele, a social psychologist at Stanford University, contends that this problem is especially acute among black children. He refers to this phenomenon as:

> "[A] culprit that can undermine black achievement as effectively as a lock on a schoolhouse door. The culprit I see is stigma, the endemic devaluation many blacks face in our society and schools. This status is its own condition of life, different from class, money, culture. . . .[I]ts connection to school achievement among black Americans has been vastly underappreciated."[88]

Devaluation is not limited to black children. Other low-income and minority youngsters, children with Attention Deficit Disorder, and students prone to placement in special education who tend to struggle in school probably are susceptible to being underappreciated by their teachers. "Doing well in school requires a belief that school achievement can be a promising basis for self-esteem," Steele argues, "and that belief needs constant reaffirmation even for advantaged students."[89] Children who are devalued academically may "disidentify" with doing well in school.

In Steele's view, "Here psychology is everything: remediation defeats, challenge strengthens—affirming their potential, crediting them with their achievements, inspiring them." The key, he argues, is ensuring that youngsters who are vulnerable on so many counts get treated essentially like middle-class students, with conviction about their value and promise. As this happens, their vulnerability diminishes, and with it the companion defense of disidentification and misconduct. "Where students are valued and challenged," Steele notes, "they generally succeed."[90]

The military excels at valuing and challenging young people, and at believing in the potential of every recruit and cadet. Indeed, that is the essence of the way it operates. The determination of Lavin Curry's commandant and instructors at the Chicago Military Academy to pull him back from the abyss of academic failure illustrates this philosophy in action. Or as Shelly Garza recounts, when her daughter Kazandra, who attends Oakland Military Institute, landed on probation, the Oakland Military Institute started "doing double time" to help her catch up,

> "Her grades dropped because she spent the first two weeks lollygagging, but that tells you in itself something is working, because she used to do the same thing in public school and no one ever noticed."[91]

Cherry Campbell's story mirrors Shelly Garza's. In a newspaper interview, she fought back tears while describing how OMI has changed her son's attitude toward learning, as well as his habit of cursing and the authority-challenging behavior that resulted in many trips to the principal's office at his former school. "Every other school [he's] been at he's been an outcast," she recalled. "Now, since the educator has a lot more control of the classroom, he's much more focused."[92]

5. Educating and Developing the Whole Adolescent

Dismayed by the paramount focus among politicians and policymakers on testing and accountability to the virtual exclusion of other interventions, professional groups like the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), renowned school reformers like Dr. James Comer, and other respected education experts have begun insisting that focusing on education and development, that is, on the "whole child," will produce better outcomes for youngsters who struggle in school and for society writ large. As Dr. Comer, the eminent Yale child psychiatrist who founded the nationally-acclaimed School Development Program, has written:

> "[T]he attention of the entire education enterprise—preparatory institutions, practitioners, students, parents, and policymakers—has been riveted on academic-achievement outcomes, not on developmental issues. Thus, despite a large body of research showing the connection between development, learning, and desirable behavior, supporting development continues to receive inadequate attention, in the preparation of educators as well as in education practice."[93]

Dr. Comer continues:

> "Life success in this complex age requires a high level of development. So, almost all students are adversely affected by this situation. But the students who come from families and primary social networks unable to provide them with adequate developmental experiences are hurt the most. Most of them do not do well. And student, staff, and often parental responses to failure—from acting out, to increased control-and-punishment efforts, to withdrawal and apathy—produce difficult relational environments and underachieving schools. In time, this leads to dropping out of school . . . . Developmental principles are rarely used to guide curriculum, instruction, and assessment content and strategies; school organization and management; or staff and student interactions."[94]

Interestingly enough, the National Guard Youth Challe*NG*e Program probably gets the "whole child" philosophy more so than most schools. What's distinctive is the totality of the Challe*NG*e approach to turning these youngsters around, not its academic curriculum and instructional methods per se. The eight core components of the Challe*NG*e program reflect its commitment to educating and developing the whole adolescent:

- Academic Excellence: "All Challe*NG*e participants attend daily academic classes increasing their academic levels of performance and preparing them for testing for the General Education Development (GED) credential or a high school diploma. Evaluation of Cadets' progress during the Residential Phase is measured using the survey or the complete battery of Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scale scores."
- Health and Hygiene: "A structured holistic approach combines physical and mental well being as Cadets explore the effects of substance abuse and sexually transmitted diseases on their lives. Cadets learn the physical and emotional benefits of proper nutrition through participation in classes and structured group discussions."

- Job Skills: "Career exploration is accomplished through career assessment and interest inventories, job-specific skills orientation and awareness, and training in area vocational centers. Specific classroom activities focus on development of individual resumes, completing job applications, and preparation for, and conducting, job interviews."
- Leadership/Followership: "Identification and application of individual moral and ethical standards is the focus of the various roles and responsibilities as the Cadets live and learn in a structured group environment."
- Life Coping Skills: "Increased self-esteem and self-discipline are gained through a combination of classroom activities and a structured living environment. The development of individual strategies and coping mechanisms for managing personal finance and dealing with such emotions as anger, grief, frustration, and stress are developed through structured group discussion and in the classroom environment."
- Physical Fitness: "Programs conduct a physical fitness program based on the *President's Challenge*, a test battery based on data collected from a variety of sources including the 1985 President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports National School Population Fitness Survey, the Amateur Athletic Union Physical Fitness Program, and the Canada Fitness Award Program."
- Responsible Citizenship: "The U.S. Government structure and processes, along with individual rights and responsibilities at the local, state, and national level are addressed in the classroom environment, in the student government process, and through practical experiences within local communities."
- Service to the Community: "A minimum of 40 hours of service to the community and/or conservation project activities are performed by each Cadet in groups and on an individual basis. These activities provide additional opportunities for career exploration as well as enhancing a new level of community needs awareness in the Cadets."[95]

Almaz Teare, an Eritrean refugee whose son attends Burncoat High School in Worcester, Massachusetts, summed up the multidimensional approach of the military:

> "It's like another family to us here. I don't know what I would have done without them. It's not only that they learn basic things, but they learn about structuring their life, behavior, and how to get along with other people."[96]

6. Curriculum and Instruction

The military programs described earlier gear their curriculum and instruction to the academic circumstances of the youngsters they serve. As the NAEP data indicated, large proportions of adolescents perform Below Basic. The threshold goal of Challe*NG*e, for instance, is to lift its cadets to a level of functional literacy, such as filling out a job application and reading—and understanding—an instructional manual that will enable them to navigate the economy and life.[97]

Bella Rosenberg, an education consultant with the Economic Policy Institute and former senior advisor to the president of the American Federation of Teachers, observes that the military has experience promoting literacy on a big scale. During World War II, the Army and Navy taught its poor readers to read using their "Private Pete" and "Seaman Sam" texts.[98] More to the point, she believes that the military approach to cultivating functional literacy

is germane to students who read poorly. By focusing literacy training on the content and learning demands of relevant tasks, she notes, it is possible in a relatively short amount of time to develop reading competence not only in the tasks at hand, but also in general reading.[99]

The Oakland Military Institute may have missed the mark in the beginning by basing its curriculum on the assumption that every entering student could perform at the seventh grade level of proficiency. Few students could handle that level of work at the outset. Most did poorly because they couldn't. According to Gianna Polk, a history teacher: "We are told to teach them on a seventh-grade level but many of these kids are below a third-grade reading level. They can be disciplined all you want, but it is not going to make them read."[100] She quite realistically contends that teachers in such programs should focus on improving students' reading and writing to ensure that they understand what will be asked of them in every subject.

To make up for lost time, fast-track approaches to instruction should be a staple of educational programs aimed at youngsters who are far behind academically. Given the sharp rise in reading skills registered by Youth Challe*NG*e participants in a matter of five months, the program seems to possess an instructional method for rapidly closing the most fundamental of achievement gaps.

Another model of accelerated learning that may be worth emulating is the Pre-Military Development Program (PMDP) described earlier that was instituted in Mississippi to help aspiring soldiers quickly improve their reading scores on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), the military's qualifying exam. It may well be that these fast-track programs should be structured as literacy immersion experiences, to the exclusion of other subject areas, and offered during the school year and over the summer.

Functional literacy should not be the endgame for young people served by quasi-military programs, any more than it is for students in regular schools. Nor is it for cadets attending the Chicago Military Academy. Their schedules are consumed by basics and light on electives. They take such customary courses as English, math, social studies, and science throughout their high school years. Given the convergence of academic skills required for college and the workplace, these programs should strive for this level of proficiency in every young person they serve.

One of the many assets of military training programs is the uniform articulation of what every participant must know and be able to do in order to be adjudged successful. Uniformity and consistency of performance expectations is a decided strength, in sharp contrast to the variegated academic expectations, assessment systems, and pass levels that characterize public education from one state to the next.

7. Structure and Routine

The military is renowned for structure and discipline. Indeed those invariably are the first characteristics cited by many people when they initially learn about my interest in what the military has to offer low achievers, disengaged students, and dropouts. The objective of military-inspired programs like Youth Challe*NG*e and JROTC is not to whip youngsters into shape for combat. The goal is to negate the culture of the streets and instill in young people the skills and self-discipline needed to function in the workforce and life. For many youngsters who have disengaged from school or dropped out, the antidote for deeply ingrained behavioral problems and dysfunctional parenting is heavy doses of structure and regimentation. As Principal Phyllis Goodson says of CMA:

> "In urban societies, negativity is encouraged. You have to come across as not smart to fit into the organized, structured world of gangs. Here, we have a structure but we move in a positive way, by giving students responsibilities and allowing them opportunities to achieve."[101]

Ms. Goodson goes on:

> "[P]utting on a uniform is a focusing device. . . . They know there are certain things they can't do when they're in uniform. Similarly, having them march is part of a military context that has a specific purpose: it makes them walk tall. The discipline that we impose on them provides a structure for them to build on. They leave here more independent. They become contributors."[102]

As one illustration of the structure and regimentation in these programs, cadets at the Oakland Military Institute wear uniforms and participate in early morning marching and flag-raising drills.[103] Members of the National Guard monitor classrooms to support the teachers and help keep the cadets in line. Students like Lavin Curry have responded favorably to the strict military-like atmosphere.

When Lavin Curry arrived at the Chicago Military Academy as a freshman in 1999, he was brash. He was wild. As Frank C. Bacon, the academy's superintendent and a retired Army Brigadier General, said of Lavin, "He was a bad little sucker, always into something, always thought he was right."

Lavin couldn't live with his mother and he never met his father. He was raised by his cousin. By the time he got to high school, he was drinking, smoking, and ignoring everyone. "I just didn't care about the rules of the school," Lavin recalls. "I didn't think about the consequences of my actions."

One day he got drunk before the first period and passed out in the school bathroom. He was almost kicked out of school. Instead, his instructors and the commandant prodded him to change his behavior and salvage his academic career. Lavin was allowed to stay after he promised to attend a weekend counseling program.

A traffic accident where his cousin was injured proved to be a turning point. Lavin came to realize that his teachers had simply been trying to give him what he needed: some order in his life. The marching, the saluting, the obeying of rules were all part of turning him into someone who deserved respect.

As Lavin acknowledges, "They changed my life. They fought for me to stay in school. They really cared about me."

Now at 17, he has stopped drinking and smoking. He has bumped his grades up to A's and B's and begun talking about college, maybe even law school. He's also a running back on the football team, sketches Japanese animation characters, and holds a part-time job at the Loews Cineplex.

In the halls of the military academy, Lavin Curry feels safe, "I don't have to worry about somebody jumping me in the hallways or someone messing with me." But outside is different. He knows not to look directly at some teenagers in the neighborhood, especially when wearing his uniform.

"I feel proud when I go out in my uniform," Lavin says, "There's something about wearing it. You carry yourself differently."[104]

8. Mentoring and Monitoring

The programs described earlier pay close attention to how participants are faring personally and academically. While this level of attentiveness to students' overall development clearly requires more intensive staffing than traditional schools, young people evidently appreciate and profit from the heightened attention. The mentoring and monitoring extends to personal matters. As Heath Seacrest, a senior JROTC cadet at Mattoon High School in Mattoon, Illinois, said:

> "Down here you can talk to them about anything; personal problems. They're like your parents, your counselors; they're like everybody to you. You can come down here and just say, 'I'm having a bad day,' and they'll sit down and talk to you."[105]

9. Rewards and Recognition

In education, the prevailing practice is to recognize and reward the top achievers in any given category, whether for exemplary scholastic accomplishment or community service. This is perfectly understandable. The trouble is that students who are struggling academically or disenchanted with school may perceive these traditional forms of recognition as hopelessly out of reach. Thus these methods do little to stoke the motivation of these students.

The military is particularly adept at demonstrating to the broad swath of their charges that their contributions and accomplishments are valued. It long ago mastered the art of frequent recognition for virtually any contribution of value. As Dan Donohue, Chief of Public Affairs for the National Guard and mastermind of the Youth Challe*NG*e program, puts it, in the military, soldiers wear their importance on their shoulders and their worth on their chests.

Ceremonies and rituals affirm that society values the contributions and accomplishments, be they monumental or modest, of those who are celebrated. The military ritualistically metes out frequent doses of recognition via ceremonies and rights of passage. This military approach seems to work in high schools as well. As the supervisor of the JROTC program at Lackey High School in Charles County, Maryland, says of the students who are honored, "it gives many of them an opportunity to do things and be recognized where they might not otherwise receive recognition. The top scholars and top athletes get recognition. This is a place where they're recognized within their own."[106] At the OMI, a public high school started over much local opposition by Mayor Jerry Brown, awards assemblies are held twice a week.

Young people appreciate and profit from the kinds of rewards and recognition bestowed by these programs. As Heath Seacrest said, when he started other students mocked his JROTC uniform and called him "green bean." Seacrest weathered the hazing and now says:

> "The uniform's awesome. Started in July—wearing the uniform—got promoted—got rank and I love my uniform now, I'm like a Christmas tree."[107]

Kelly Velasquez, a cadet at OMI, proudly displayed the award she received for outstanding uniform. And Travis White recounted the time he and other cadets from DuVal High School's JROTC program wore their uniforms on a field trip to the Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. He recalls with wonderment and pride that many tourists mistakenly took them for officers from the Pentagon and asked to pose with them for pictures.[108]

10. Accountability and Consequences

One staple of military-style programs is immediate accountability and predictable consequences for misbehaving. This applies to those who foul up, of course, but may also extend to members of their unit, even to those who weren't involved in the misdeed. As Nancy Trejos, a *Washington Post* reporter who writes frequently about public military academies, once observed, the military isn't known for forgiveness, whereas forgiveness is bestowed almost daily in public high schools. Striking the right balance has been a challenge in some public military academies. Eric Lyles, principal of Forestville Military Academy, comments that: "My military instructors are not used to giving and receiving excuses. I'm working with them to remember they're dealing with adolescents."[109]

Military programs take accountability and sanctions so seriously because they want to establish an orderly climate where faculty can focus on teaching and where students need not fear for their safety. The threat of sanctions also transmits a clear message that students are expected to learn or else there will be unwelcome consequences.

Penalties come in many forms. A cadet caught with his hands in his pockets may be told to drop to the floor and do push-ups. At one school, cadets who disobeyed orders were required to count the bricks in a wall. Failure to complete homework assignments can result in punishment, like cleaning scuff marks off the gym floor, even in demotion, suspension or, if the recalcitrance persists, expulsion from school. If a student acts out in class or sasses a teacher, parents will be called and told about their child's misbehavior. Students who don't attend mandatory tutoring are banned from taking free time in the gym. In some instances, teachers or military monitors mete out the punishment. At Chicago Military Academy, demotion as well as promotion is often determined by peers.

The point isn't punishment for its own sake. In Oakland, cadets with behavior problems are assigned to a separate platoon of sixteen youngsters. There they receive more attention for the purpose of improving their attitude and enabling them to rejoin their peers in regular classes. OMI students on academic probation must attend Saturday school, an evening tutoring session four times a week, and classes during holiday breaks.[110]

To reinforce the military philosophy of collective responsibility for the conduct of team members, onlookers may even pay the consequences for the misdeeds of perpetrators. One day at the Chicago Military Academy in Bronzeville, five students in the fifth period lunch hurled raisins around the cafeteria. Afterward, all seventy students in the cafeteria at the time had to clean up the mess and then write essays about proper lunchroom conduct and get their parents to sign off.[111] The next day, students in all of the lunch periods were required to sit in silence. Not surprisingly, some students thought the blanket punishment was unfair. But James Phillips, a freshman, got the point:

> "It was a message sent out to let you know the school wasn't playing any games. I bet no one will ever throw raisins again. . . . It's a lesson not to do it, even if you didn't do it. It's like saying, we can't let one of us do bad because the rest of us will be punished. We have to activate as a group. We have to work together."[112]

11. Safety and Security

Since the chaos and violence of urban neighborhoods often spills onto school grounds, even inside the classroom, military programs and academies stress safety and security. Military reservists and retirees roam the corridors and classrooms to keep a tight lid on acting out and gang activity. This enables educators to teach and cadets to learn without fear of disruption or danger.

Although some academies struggle to maintain order in the beginning, most succeed in imposing and maintaining order. Students affirm that they feel safer in military settings where the gangs they encounter in their neighborhoods and at other public high schools are not tolerated.[113] For example, when La'Camii Ross was a sixth grader at Roosevelt Middle School in Oakland, weapons and violence were all-too-familiar realities of campus life.[114] Some Roosevelt students, she says, were out of control, stole play equipment, and made learning nearly impossible.

At La'Camii's new school, the Oakland Military Institute, the strict codes of behavior and discipline appear to have kept it free of many problems affecting other schools in the city. Seventh graders sporting military-like dress uniforms gather just after sunrise every day on the former parking lot at the Oakland Army Base. This orderly morning ceremony sets the tone for the entire day.[115] Louis Adams, a savvy 14-year-old at the Philadelphia Military Academy, echoed why safety matters, stating that PMA "isn't a boot camp but a controlled environment where you don't worry about the kid next to you pulling a knife on you."[116]

12. Demanding Schedule

The quasi-military programs described above place considerably greater time demands on young people than regular schools. Of course, Challe*NGe* is a residential program that keeps participants on military bases around the clock for five months.

Even public military academies operate longer hours. It's commonplace for cadets to line up in formation by about 7:30 in the morning. At the Chicago Military Academy, cadets convene for the band and drill team at 6:30 each morning.[117] Extracurricular activities often run late into the afternoon, while extra help is offered on Saturdays. In addition, students must complete forty hours of community service prior to graduation. The school year may stretch out as well. The Oakland Military Institute holds classes 220 days per year, in contrast to 180 days at other public schools.[118]

Problematic Characteristics and Issues

Patterning the education of civilian youngsters after the military does raise legitimate anxieties and worrisome issues. The military approach should not be mimicked per se because the ultimate purpose of military training is markedly different than public education. The key is to embrace and customize those attributes than strengthen the education and development of children who have disengaged or dropped out of school, while avoiding the characteristics and methods that do not belong in a civilian entity.

1. Inappropriate Discipline or Tone

Military-style educational programs geared to adolescents can and do mete out punishment and sanctions, but there is a line of physical and psychological intimidation they ought not to cross. After all, these youngsters aren't Army recruits or enrolled in basic training per se. Instead of ratcheting up the sanctions beyond reason, students who do not take to the structure and discipline as imposed should be screened out in the beginning, transferred to another school, or, if need be, expelled.

2. Constraints on Individuality

Military service differs from civilian entities in other significant respects, including the tension between cohesion and individuality. As CSIS stated in its report on military culture:

> "Although civil and military cultures share many values in a democracy, there must be significant differences between the cultures. For example, while our civil culture appropriately emphasizes liberty and individuality, military culture downplays them and emphasizes values such as discipline and self-sacrifice that stem from the imperative of military effectiveness on the battlefield."[119]

CSIS continues:

> "Because the driving imperative behind U.S. military culture is the unique responsibility to fight and win the nation's wars, basic individual freedoms in the military are often curtailed for the sake of good order and discipline, and the armed forces reserve the right to dictate strict rules of behavior that would be clearly inappropriate for a civilian employer."[120]

Educational programs that emulate the military must be mindful not to utterly stifle the individuality and creativity that civilians have every right to enjoy and that especially ought to be nurtured in young people. In the design of educational programs for students who have dropped out or disengaged from traditional schools, striking the right balance between military-inspired structure and cohesion on the one hand, and opportunities for self-expression and discovery on the other, will be challenging but unavoidable. This tension should be weighed and resolved at the very outset.

3. Not for Everyone

Not surprisingly, some students who try quasi-military programs become alienated by all the structure, pressure, and constant threat of sanctions. One father felt the JROTC instructors yelled too much at the teenagers and suspended them too frequently. "Negativity breeds negativity," says Robert Tibbs. "So a lot of times, [students] put a defense up."[121]

Typically the military-like programs try to screen out youngsters who aren't likely to embrace the discipline and thrive in the atmosphere. Some youngsters transfer to other schools. Still others may be expelled if they act out too egregiously and repeatedly. And then there are youngsters like Christopher Woody who summon the inner strength to overcome their initial skepticism and end up prospering in the quasi-military setting.

Christopher Woody originally insisted that Forestville Military Academy hadn't done him any good, that he shouldn't have to put up with teachers who scream at him like he's a soldier, that his mother was raising him just fine without the military's help. He spent the early months in the academy fighting change with the fierce determination that the school wanted him to apply to his conduct and his studies.

The Christopher who first roamed the halls wearing baggy jeans and shoulder-length cornrows was not the same 14-year-old who four months later knew how to march, dress for school in a uniform, and respond to teachers in Army speak.

According to his mother, Linda Woody, "I was getting desperate. I felt like, I know this child is bright, I know he's creative. He's not dull. We can expect more of him."

The changes in his behavior have been quite noticeable. Last year Christopher came home scuffed and bruised and bloodied from the many fights he got into at Andrew Jackson High School. This year, his mother hasn't noticed a scratch. His grade point average, which had sunk to 0.5 out of a possible 4.0 during part of eighth grade, stood at 1.29 for his first report card at Forestville. His highest grade was C and he had earned four of them.

Even so, Christopher Woody claimed that the Forestville environment is too controlling, "I don't want a father figure. . . The military is not for everyone. It's not for me."[122]

A year later, there are times when Christopher Woody surprises even himself. He's now the one who inspects his classmates to make sure every shoe is polished and every shirt is tucked. At lunchtime he stands at attention until his instructors grant permission to talk. After strongly resisting the rigor and rituals imposed on cadets, the transformation in Christopher has not gone unnoticed by his instructors. They gave him the "Most Improved Cadet" award at the end of the school year. He agreed reluctantly to be a cadet corporal, the highest rank given to sophomores. His GPA is still not stellar, at just over 2.0 out of 4.0, but it represents an improvement over last year and the 0.5 he got for a while in middle school.

His mother summed up her gratitude for Forestville: "They seem to have something invested in Christopher."[123]

4. Implementation Challenges

Despite the military's deserved reputation for execution, the quasi-military programs it runs or partners in operating face many of the start-up and ongoing implementation struggles confronted by other innovative programs in public schools. Reservists and veterans who are recruited for these programs must be screened carefully and then trained to work effectively with youngsters who have serious academic shortcomings and personal issues. Educational and military personnel working alongside one another need to establish a sensible division of labor and reconcile the civilian and military cultures lest they conflict and foment confusion in the school building and the minds of students.

Leadership turnover at the top of school districts can impede operations in the schools. School superintendents come and go with destabilizing frequency. They may view their predecessors' priorities and initiatives with skepticism, determined to implement their own and thus undermining the continuity of solid programs already in place.

The Rand Corporation studied the rollout of JROTC career academies and found that they encountered many of the same problems that have bedeviled other efforts to launch new small schools. Although these innovative schools got off the ground, for instance, they often proved less successful in changing their curricula and instructional focus. The school district may lack sufficient funding for common planning time for teachers and the state-mandated curricular guidelines may limit the flexibility they need to devote to the occupational focus of the academy.[124]

Students enrolled in these programs bring significant academic deficits and faculty turnover can stall their progress. For example, at OMI, one-third of the youngsters earned D averages during the first marking period and landed on academic probation. Unfortunately the reading teacher then departed for a higher paying job, disrupting the rollout of a new phonics program intended to address the students' reading problems.

As with any innovation, these quasi-military programs can be works in progress during their formative years. Col. Charles Fleming is principal of the Chicago Military Academy. He counsels realism, patience, and persistence. "It's going to be more expensive right up front than your everyday high school. Give it time to let it work—at least five to seven years—then the dividends will pay down the road."[125] Or as Brigadier General Ralph Marinaro, OMI's superintendent, put it wryly: "This isn't instant pudding; you can't just add water and get a college-bound student."[126]

Promising Ideas Worth Testing

Several potentially important interventions emerge from the foregoing lessons gleaned from the military approach to training. They are:

1. ***Offer reading and math immersion programs*** patterned after the military's fast-track instructional methods. Target the programs on secondary school students who are performing below grade level or the equivalent of Below Basic per NAEP. Offer the immersion programs during the school year, over the summer, or both. The aim is to get faltering youngsters back on track academically as quickly as possible so they can then press forward toward the level of proficiency required for success in post-secondary education, the labor market, and life.

   Eddy Bayardelle of the Merrill Lynch Foundation believes that these programs must be quite different from instruction as usual, which has already been shown not to work. Fast-track content and delivery, he argues, should be more interesting, intense, and enticing.[127] Since teenagers often work in the summer and after school to help support their families and earn spending change, fast-track courses may need to be coupled with jobs, indeed with the opportunity for the latter made contingent on participation in the former.[128]

2. ***Establish quasi-military public middle schools and high schools.*** These schools would emulate those desirable attributes identified earlier in this paper. Quasi-military schools could be created out of whole cloth as charter schools or via other mechanisms used to create innovative theme schools. They could also be situated in traditional schools that were shuttered because of incurably poor performance or plunging enrollments. Those so-called dropout factories might be prime candidates for conversion into quasi-military high schools.

   One particularly knotty issue to be resolved is whether the schools should be open to a broad cross-section of students who express genuine interest. Another option is to restrict admission to youngsters who are struggling in school, perhaps even just to ninth grade repeaters who would profit from a markedly different approach. Yet another scenario is to operate them strictly for dropouts. Diverse student bodies have many self-evident virtues, while those restricted to low achievers risk being branded as schools for "losers." This is a tough call because public resources are scarce and slots taken by solid achievers limit opportunities for low achievers in greatest need of promising alternatives.

   Under any of these scenarios, the schools would be strictly civilian operations. In all likelihood, they would be staffed in part by military veterans and utilize methods of school organization, instruction, structure, belonging, discipline, monitoring, mentoring, recognition, and so forth that are rooted in the military experience. The "Troops to Teachers" program could help these schools have it both ways by recruiting military veterans eager to teach in public schools. The feasibility of this approach hinges on the willingness of the military to share its knowledge, methods, and systems, and on the ability of the schools to amass this knowledge and design these systems on their own.

3. ***Create quasi-military public boarding schools*** for ninth through twelfth graders, including dropouts seeking a second chance. These schools would mirror the quasi-military middle schools and high schools described above. As 24/7 operations, they hold the promise of offering more intensive, comprehensive, and sustained educational and developmental supports and of providing even safer havens for youngsters whose home and community environments are especially counterproductive. Enveloping troubled adolescents in a totally different—and developmentally supportive—environment may be their only escape from the pernicious influence of the mean streets.

Since it is unrealistic to expect government to build new residential facilities, the boarding schools could be situated on idle or underutilized military bases, which presumably already have many of the necessary facilities like housing, cafeterias, classrooms, gymnasia, and athletic fields. It is difficult to predict how many young people would opt for boarding schools and how many parents or guardians would let them attend, no matter how hard they struggle to manage their youngsters. Fiscal prudence dictates that this be ascertained prior to developing the facilities.

As residential operations, these boarding schools obviously would cost more per student than conventional day schools. Therefore, they would require either special appropriations or combinations of funding from school systems as well as education, labor, social services, law enforcement, and corrections agencies at the federal and state levels that have a shared stake in getting these youngsters solidly on track.

4. ***Establish quasi-military alternatives to incarceration.*** Drawing on the concept behind Bravo Company in Oklahoma, teenagers who run afoul of the law and are destined for confinement could be offered the chance to straighten out their lives by enrolling in a quasi-military residential program that is rigorous and closely supervised. Those who blow this opportunity would be remanded to reform school or jail. Because the state finances the corrections department, it presumably would pay for this alternative. Important design considerations include who would be eligible—and ineligible—to apply, and how the authenticity of their eagerness to participate should be gauged.

5. ***Help public schools implement the key attributes.*** An alternative to letting schools fend for themselves is to provide various guidance and support services—information and models, operating standards and systems, training and technical assistance, monitoring and assessment—to schools that desire to implement most, if not all, of the military-like attributes identified earlier. The performance of these schools and their students could be evaluated and contrasted with comparable schools and student bodies that hew to conventional methods as well as with alternatives that take an even more rigorous military approach.

Promising ideas like these typically follow one of several pathways into public schools. One route is basically ad hoc and mirrors much the way public education functions now. In other words, entrepreneurial school districts could cherry pick those military-like attributes and methods that they believe would enhance their ability to reach and teach low-achieving, disengaged students. Local districts on their own initiative could also establish entire programs and schools that are patterned after these approaches and cobble together the necessary funding from their own budgets augmented by grants from government agencies and corporate and philanthropic benefactors.

Innovation and expansion can occur this way, albeit by fits and starts, and hindered every step of the way by the challenges of aggregating knowledge, standardizing curricula and operating systems, and assembling resources to finance and sustain the program as the designers intended.

In my view, the five interventions suggested above are too controversial, untested, and potentially costly to try taking to scale in the absence of convincing evidence that they work. As should be apparent from this working paper, the evidence of effectiveness is tantalizingly positive, but admittedly sketchy and to a substantial extent anecdotal. If schooling for youngsters who are failing, disengaged, or dropping out is to be reconceived as suggested here, then the evidence that any of these new approaches work should be convincing in terms of its rigor and, I would add, truly compelling in terms of the difference it makes in the lives of children.

That is why these ideas should be launched in several locales as demonstration projects and subjected to random-assignment evaluation, longitudinal data analysis, as well as implementation and ethnographic analysis. If pos-

sible, it would be instructive to include existing public military academies in the study, not as experimental or control sites but as illuminating, real-world points of comparison.

Military vs. Civilian: Best Bet for Going to Scale?

If the pilot programs produce compelling results, then the stage will be set to take any successful models to scale. Devising an expansion strategy that is programmatically sound, politically feasible, and fiscally viable necessitates a thoughtful examination of a particularly knotty issue. Should the scaled-up programs operate under the aegis of the military or independent of it? Asked another way, is the very asset that helps explain their success, namely the active and enthusiastic engagement of the military, also a formidable obstacle when it comes to exponential expansion?

Whether and to what extent scaling up should be contingent upon, indeed dependent upon, formal military involvement turns on how the following considerations and concerns, among others, are resolved:

1. Military Devotion to Mission

Arguably the most distinctive and indispensable attribute of the programs described earlier may also be the one least susceptible to replication in a non-military entity or environment. I refer to the zeal inculcated in military personnel to pursue and successfully complete whatever mission they undertake. With the possible exception of firefighters and civil rights warriors in the movement's heyday, this determination, bred of a profound sense of camaraderie and duty, is seldom matched by civilian agencies and bureaucracies. Deeply committed to accountability and results, the military sets measurable goals and finite timetables for accomplishing whatever it sets out to do.

The highly decentralized structure of public education impedes the application, replication, and systemic implementation of best practices. By sharp contrast, the military prizes continuous assessment, consistency, and standardization, and transforming improvements in one site into best practices applied across all sites.

This deep sense of mission matters enormously to the effectiveness of the programs described earlier. Any new education paradigm derived from these approaches that ignores or dilutes the missionary ethos that drives military people risks underestimating or misconstruing the distinctive way that the military works. Put another way, any civilian counterpart that aspires to adapt these military attributes and approaches must endeavor, in the words of Rev. James Forbes, to "tangibilitate" this missionary zeal from top to bottom. Otherwise, the enterprise may degenerate into business as usual, crippled by operational distractions and indifference, competition and collective ignorance, and, worst of all, debilitating skepticism about the young people's ability and potential.

2. Military Content in the Curriculum

If quasi-military approaches to education ever became more pervasive and served significantly more students, expansion could trigger a debate about whether and to what extent the curriculum and extracurricular activities should contain hardcore military content. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), no fan of using public schools to benefit the military, raises legitimate concerns about exposing civilian youngsters to certain material and methods.

In a survey of JROTC programs, AFSC questioned the inclusion of weapons training and drills, as well as course material devoted to military history and protocol. It also worries that JROTC textbooks disproportionately tout

military careers as opposed to civilian ones. The AFSC expressed many other concerns about the curriculum and instruction, alleging that it defines leadership as respect for constituted authority and chain of command, rather than as critical thinking and democratic consensus-building, and that it consistently conflates leadership and followership.[129]

3. Vehicle for Military Recruitment

The quasi-military programs that operate inside schools or as alternatives to school routinely disavow recruitment as an objective, let alone the objective. As Sgt. Major Joe Collins, a part-time drill instructor at Madero Military Academy in Chicago, put it: "We're not teaching them to go into the Army. We're just giving them a structured environment to succeed."[130]

Yet the fact remains that the rapid expansion of JROTC in the late 1990s coincided with a difficult recruiting environment for the armed forces. Former Secretary of Defense William Cohen once told the House Armed Services Committee that JROTC is "one of the best recruiting devices that we could have."[131] The booming economy with its abundance of entry-level jobs, coupled with the increased propensity of high school graduates to enter college, cut deeply into the Army's traditional recruiting market of high school grads that in previous eras tended not to head for college.[132]

Although JROTC and other quasi-military programs ostensibly are not intended as recruitment vehicles and while the military branches are not allowed to recruit, for example, at Philadelphia's JROTC academies, surveys indicate that JROTC cadets are five times more likely than their contemporaries to join the military.[133] The very real prospect that these programs serve as an overt or unofficial pipeline to military service could arouse opposition if their scale and numbers expand significantly. Expansion increases the odds that these programs could attract young people who would benefit from a highly structured and demanding experience, but whose parents and communities oppose the interaction between the military and growing numbers of young people.

Military service may not have been perceived as terribly dangerous after the Cold War ended. But the surprise attack on the World Trade Center and the subsequent eruption of the war against terrorism on multiple fronts has changed the safety calculus and increased the odds that soldiers could be wounded or killed in the line of duty. This new reality might trigger more spirited and contentious opposition to the widespread expansion of programs that end up funneling higher proportions of graduates into military service. If the military branches are formally involved as sponsors, operators, and funders, it is naive to expect them to resist the temptation to utilize these programs as a recruitment pipeline. If anything, given global conditions, the pressure on them to do so probably will intensify instead of subside.

Any expansion of military-inspired programs to reach vast numbers of youngsters invites the question of whether any facets of these programs that overtly encourage military service over other career pathways should be filtered out. Overt or implicit use of these programs for that purpose could severely limit their appeal to parents who do not want their youngsters to be pressured or prematurely tempted to enlist in the military.

4. Unstable Military Involvement

While the military branches believe in the education and youth development programs they run, their primary missions must take precedence and may disrupt the continuity of their engagement with these ancillary enterprises. For example, several of the National Guard sergeants assigned to the Oakland Military Institute were redeployed in conjunction with the Iraq War.[134] As a result, the adults who were supposed to be a reliable presence in the cadets' lives vanished and the youngsters acted out. The National Guard acknowledges that the war against terrorism has impacted staffing for the Challe*NG*e program:

> "[M]ore than 35 percent of Challe*NG*e staff members are active in the National Guard or Reserves. More than 85 percent of these staff . . . have been activated and deployed to serve for periods of 2 to 8 months overseas. These deployments have required the states to develop plans and procedures for quickly bringing in and training temporary replacements."[135]

These disruptions can be sudden and sustained. According to Lawrence Korb, the former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, Reserve Affairs, Installations, and Logistics:

> "The . . . consequence of the failure to reorganize the military's personnel structure in the face of its new mission [the war against terrorism] is that several National Guard and reserve units have been mobilized without reasonable notice, kept on active duty for longer than anticipated, and sent overseas to Iraq and Afghanistan without effective training. Members of the Michigan National Guard, for example, were sent to Iraq with only 48 hours notice. Maryland National Guard's 115th Military Police Battalion, meanwhile, has been mobilized three times in the past two years, and by the end of their last tour will have remained on active duty for 18 months."[136]

Whether summoned to war or assigned to patrol the nation's borders, airports, and populous public spaces or take on other OOTW assignments (known officially as Operations Other Than War), the military's commitment to ostensibly non-core programs can vacillate, for perfectly legitimate reasons. Yet the instability and sheer risk of it can undermine the orderly operation, not to mention significant expansion, of these programs to the detriment of the youngsters being served.

Another source of instability is the ambivalence of the Pentagon and some politicians toward what they view as peripheral programs. Much as politicians and parents appreciate it and as much as it has accomplished for troubled young people, the Challe*NG*e program has been the subject of spirited debate at the Pentagon and in Congress about whether soldiers should be social workers and whether the Pentagon should be in the business of running civilian programs that help dropouts.

Thus, for all its impressive benefits, operational dependence on the military carries risks and uncertainties. Any expansion scenario that is contingent on these military partnerships will run the constant risk of periodic destabilization, indeed of total withdrawal of participation and financial backing. The crucial question facing those who would expand them is how to mitigate or circumnavigate these considerable risks.

Deploying the National Guard to Rescue America's Troubled Adolescents

The most logical, practical, and straightforward strategy for taking this military knowledge and these quasi-military models to scale is for America's governors to deploy the National Guard in their states to do the job. After all, the National Guard performs domestic as well as national defense roles. Indeed, one of its mandates is to add peacetime value to America. In addition to the Youth Challe*NG*e program, the Guard has a long and proud tradition of operating after-school and summer programs for schoolchildren. What's more, governors routinely mobilize the Guard units in their states to cope with local crises, such a raging floods and fires, and civil disorders that threaten to spiral out of control.

The National Guard scenario I envision might unfold as follows:

- The governor assigns to the National Guard unit in that state the job of implementing the kinds of quasi-military interventions suggested above.

- Furthermore, the governor prevails upon the state legislature to finance the Guard's involvement in these new youth initiatives entirely out of state and, where appropriate, local funds so that these are strictly domestic functions that cannot be diluted, destabilized, or otherwise impacted by national defense needs.
- To ensure that the division of labor and line of demarcation between these domestic educational programs and other customary National Guard functions is crystal clear and impenetrable, perhaps each state should establish a separate administrative department under the aegis of the Guard whose sole mission is to implement and oversee these new initiatives.
- The National Guard then undertakes to launch and operate either or both of the two interventions that transcend local school districts, namely quasi-military public boarding schools and residential programs for youngsters under supervision of the juvenile justice system. Funding for these initiatives could come from the dedicated state appropriation or else be aggregated from several state agencies, such as education, labor, law enforcement, corrections, and social services.
- At the behest of the governor, the Guard could work collaboratively with interested school districts in their state to operate fast-track immersion programs, quasi-military middle schools and high schools, or schools that embrace the desired military attributes. In these instances, local schools districts would be required to invest their per pupil expenditures in these interventions, to be matched by state funding to pay for the Guard's role.
- To assure that these programs are genuinely civilian in nature, military history courses, weapons training, and military recruitment should be forbidden in the curriculum and daily regimen.
- One of the many questions to be answered is whether and how to replicate the overarching leadership, knowledge-building, accountability, and rallying point provided by the National Guard Bureau at the Pentagon on behalf of Challe*NG*e. One solution might be for the National Guard Bureau to continue to play this role with earmarked funding from Congress. Or perhaps the states could pool resources to create a new entity to provide these services across sites.

There are numerous reasons why deploying the National Guard to play this critically important domestic role in states makes sense, including:

- It captures and replicates the virtues of military training, while insulating these new initiatives from the funding and operational risks of depending on the military that were cited earlier.
- The National Guard's nearly twenty-year experience with the Youth Challe*NG*e program brings a distinct combination of institutional knowledge, mature operating models, and long-term experience on the ground working with troubled youth.
- As a branch of the military, the Guard presumably has the organizational capacity and management systems to take these programs to scale, political will and resources permitting.
- Through Challe*NG*e, the Guard at the national and, perhaps most important, state level is passionately committed to turning around the lives of troubled teenagers and it offers all of the attributes cited earlier that are worth emulating.
- Youth Challe*NG*e is buttressed by a formidable and enthusiastic political constituency, including many governors and their spouses, and U.S. senators and members of Congress, not to mention the military leaders of the Guard at the national level. This constituency can potentially be mobilized to support policies and appropriations to facilitate the widespread adoption and expansion of quasi-military approaches that prove successful.

- The National Guard may have readier access to idle military bases and other public facilities in their states than other entities.
- Lastly the Guard would enjoy continuing access to emerging military research, best practices, and training methods that are germane to young people served by quasi-military programs.

These impressive assets notwithstanding, the scenario I am suggesting is not entirely free of risk and uncertainty. Looking to the National Guard may generate fears that public education is being militarized even though the avowed aim is to demilitarize what the Pentagon knows about developing troubled young people. There is also the risk that school districts will opt not to cooperate with the National Guard or that the Guard, long accustomed to a command and control environment, could falter when called upon to collaborate with school districts.

Expansion poses formidable staffing challenges when it comes to finding seasoned and committed military veterans who are not vulnerable to reactivation and, also, recruiting educators willing to teach in a quasi-military environment. Any effort to preserve the civilian nature of these programs must be mindful, though, that the military flavor ought not to be diluted beyond recognition. Despite the robust interest, for example, in the public military academies thus far, it remains to be seen whether there will be sufficient additional demand among students, parents, and school districts to fuel significant expansion of these approaches.

Alternative Strategy for Going to Scale

If the notion of deploying the National Guard at the state level to spearhead expansion of successful quasi-military approaches does not fly, an option worth examining is to create a national nonprofit organization that functions as a repository of knowledge, expertise, models, technical assistance, and program monitoring and assessment. Mind you, its role is not to operate these quasi-military programs, but to facilitate their growth by supporting school districts or states that take the lead in establishing or expanding these programs.

The responsibilities and requisite capabilities of an intermediary would depend, of course, on whether it is the engine driving the national effort or else an indispensable source of support to help other entities propagate new quasi-military programs at scale. Depending on its raison d'être, the intermediary could play the following roles:

- Seek and negotiate relationships with states, local school districts, and military partners interested in implementing any of the models.
- Persuade those federal and state agencies that oversee education, labor, social services, justice, and corrections to provide the supplemental funding that will be needed above and beyond the annual per-pupil expenditures that participating school districts would be required to commit.
- Endeavor to maintain programmatic fidelity and quality control by wielding the following authority over the design, establishment, and operation of these quasi-military programs run by the agencies it assists:
    - Secure sustained funding from federal and state agencies, corporations, and philanthropies so that participating school districts will be assured the supplemental resources needed to operate these higher-cost schools and programs. One key to scaling up these models and keeping them national is for the intermediary to possess the authority to bring these supplemental resources to the table and to exercise authority over whether they are awarded, extended, suspended, or rescinded. This leverage is crucial for assuring the fidelity, integrity, and durability of the national models.

- Establish a national brand name that is copyrighted and bestowed exclusively by the intermediary and that would apply to all schools. For example, each might be called the Strivers Academy of (name of city, community, or neighborhood).
- Issue charters or licenses to all schools and programs officially anointing them as participants in the network overseen by the intermediary.
- Require that all participating school districts, schools, and programs sign a memorandum of understanding or terms of affiliation, stipulating the respective obligations and expectations of the participants and the national intermediary.
- Promulgate performance expectations that participating schools and programs must meet. Expectations include student academic progress and achievement, high school graduation rates and post-secondary outcomes, indications of healthy development vs. counterproductive behavior, as well as metrics related to the effective and appropriate operation of the school and program.
- Closely monitor whether the schools and programs are meeting expectations. If they fall significantly short, the intermediary should ascertain what the game plan is for getting back on course. Schools or programs that persistently falter could be placed on probation, or, if it comes to that, dropped from the network and stripped of the supplemental funding that the intermediary dispenses.
- Bestow the highly coveted equivalent of a Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval on soundly-conceived and well-run schools and programs that function in effect as the benchmarks for everyone else.
- Possibly treat all material and methods as proprietary—copyrighted and owned by the intermediary—and offer them only to schools and programs that operate under the brand name and adhere to the prescribed methods of operation. Proprietary content would include, among other items: curriculum content and materials; instructional methods; program components and structure; membership entity to which students belong; frequency, forms, and criteria for student recognition; requirements and methods for recruiting, screening and selecting the blend of lead administrators, teachers, military veterans, and other staff to run the school or program.
- Provide centralized, on-site, and virtual training for school and program staff during the planning stage, start-up phase, and ongoing implementation. Perhaps this could be patterned after the Army's acclaimed War College. Provide ongoing monitoring, technical assistance, trouble-shooting, and problem-solving to the participating school districts, schools, and programs.
- Stipulate the data that every site must collect and provide to the intermediary. This includes requiring that all students in all schools and programs submit to the same assessment system so that there is consistency and transparency of reported outcomes across all sites.
- Report annually on the implementation, progress, and student outcomes to all funding sources, legislative bodies, parents and families of the participants, the media, and the general public.

National intermediaries, whether conducting demonstrations or taking promising ideas to scale, must proceed cautiously and respectfully in working with beleaguered school districts, which have seen many an ostensibly effective reform and well-intentioned reformer come and go over the years. As Mike Casserly of the Council of the Great City Schools cautions, intermediary organizations should approach schools in an authentic spirit of collaboration.[137] Interventions need to be jointly developed and genuinely backed by local educators if they're to garner sustainable support locally. Otherwise, local school administrators and educators may feel put upon by outside reformers, implement the intervention poorly or indifferently, and then exchange bitter recriminations

over which side is to blame. If the National Guard gets more involved at the behest of their governors, it should heed this caution when it works directly with local school districts.

Conclusion

Millions of American students are marginalized academically and destined for social and economic oblivion in the twenty-first century. They will not be able to uphold their obligations as citizens and providers. Their plight stems from many factors: family and economic circumstances beyond their control; their own indifference to achievement and disenchantment with formal education as they've known it; and the inflexibility of public schools that fail to meet these troubled young people halfway.

The U.S. military figured out how to nurture and unleash the potential of young people like these generations ago. By demilitarizing and deploying what the Pentagon knows about educating and developing aimless young people, these troubled and troublesome young Americans can be transformed into a valued social and economic asset to our nation.

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