



Defense Primer: Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC)

Overview and Mission

The Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) is a voluntary high school program of instruction administered by the Department of Defense (DOD) through the military departments. A key purpose of JROTC, according to 10 U.S.C. §2031 (as amended by P.L. 116-283), is “to instill in students in United States secondary educational institutions the values of citizenship, service to the United States (including an introduction to service opportunities in military, national, and public service), and personal responsibility and a sense of accomplishment.” JROTC was established as an Army program by the National Defense Act of 1916 (P.L. 64-85) and in 1964 expanded to the Navy and Air Force. Congress authorized Coast Guard JROTC units at two schools: the Maritime and Science Technology Academy in Miami, FL, in 1989 (P.L. 101-225), and Camden County High School, NC, in 2005 (P.L. 109-241).

In FY2021, there were about 3,500 JROTC units operating in every state and in DOD schools overseas (see **Table 1**). Eighth-grade students are allowed to participate in JROTC if physically co-located with 9th-12th grade students. Home-schooled students may also participate.

Table 1. Estimated Size of JROTC Program

| Service | Number of units | Estimated enrollment |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Army | 1,727 | 305,000 |
| Navy | 643 | 92,700 |
| Marine Corps | 256 | 30,990 |
| Air Force | 875 | 110,000 |
| Total | 3,501 | 538,690 |

Source: DOD Comptroller, FY2022 budget justification documents.

Notes: Navy figures include 583 JROTC units and 88,000 JROTC cadets, in addition to 60 National Defense Cadet Corps (NNDCC) units and 4,700 NNDCC cadets.

JROTC Instructors

Most JROTC instructors are retired or reserve officers and enlisted noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who serve as employees of the school district. Service-level policies require JROTC schools to have a minimum of one officer (*Senior Military Instructor*) and one NCO (*Junior Military Instructor*) on staff. Requirements to qualify as a JROTC instructor (e.g., education, certification) are specified in law (10 U.S.C. §2033). Instructors are also required to abide by standards set by their parent service, as well as the policies set by their host institution.

Retired servicemembers who are eligible for retired pay may continue to receive such pay while employed as an instructor. By law (10 U.S.C. §2031), military departments may subsidize instructor positions by reimbursing the host institution for a portion of the salary. DOD financial regulations refer to the salary that a school must pay the instructor as the *Minimum Instructor Pay (MIP)*. The MIP is the difference between (1) the active duty pay and allowances the instructor would receive if recalled to active duty and (2) the instructor’s retired pay entitlement. For example, if annual military retired pay is \$24,000 and total active duty pay and allowances is \$52,000 the institution would pay the instructor the difference of \$28,000. The military may reimburse the institution \$14,000 (one-half of \$28,000). Additional sample salary calculations can be found in DOD Instruction 1205.13.

Curriculum

JROTC courses are taught over a three- or four-year period with academic coursework on topics such as leadership and ethics, civics, history, and health and wellness. The FY2020 NDAA authorizes instruction in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. JROTC also includes service-specific courses such as Aerospace Science or Seamanship and Navigation. In addition, units offer extracurricular activities such as color guard/drill team, marksmanship, and field trips to military installations.

Establishing a JROTC Program

Educational institutions interested in hosting a unit must apply to the respective military department. By law, participating host schools are required to maintain participation levels of 10% of the student body, or 100 students, whichever is less. The military departments establish criteria for unit placement. For example, the Army maintains an *Order of Merit List*, based on a point system that awards credit to institutions for categories such as *Title I* status under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P.L. 89-10, as amended), local indicators of need (e.g., high unemployment or illiteracy), student enrollment, school financial solvency, and fair and equitable distribution of JROTC programs among states.

Schools may also apply to host or convert an existing JROTC unit to a National Defense Cadet Corps (NDCC) per 10 U.S.C. §2035. NDCC statutory and regulatory requirements are similar to host a JROTC unit. However, instructor salaries and other costs for NDCCs are the responsibility of the host institution and not subsidized by the government.

Federal Funding

Beyond instructor salaries mentioned earlier, the military departments also fund uniforms, cadet travel, training aids, text books, educational materials, and other unit operating expenses. Host institutions provide classroom space, facilities, and administrative support for the unit. Congress annually appropriates JROTC funds as part of DOD's Operation and Maintenance (O&M) and Military Personnel (MILPERS) budget. JROTC funding for all of the Services in FY2021 was approximately \$428 million, with the Army program accounting for about half of the total (see **Table 2**).

Table 2. DOD Funding for JROTC, FY2021
(Enacted base funding, in millions of dollars)

| Service | O&M | MILPERS | Total |
|--------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Army | \$185.120 | \$30.409 | \$215.529 |
| Navy | \$62.385 | \$15.533 | \$77.918 |
| Marine Corps | \$31.084 | \$3.928 | \$35.012 |
| Air Force | \$81.085 | \$18.451 | \$99.536 |
| Total | \$359.674 | \$68.321 | \$427.995 |

Source: DOD Comptroller, FY2022 budget justification document.

Considerations for Congress

In Congress's role in funding and overseeing JROTC, there are several potential areas for consideration.

What are some of the program benefits?

While research on comparable student populations has been limited, several studies have found positive correlations between JROTC participation and student outcomes, including school attendance and graduation rates, improved test performance, higher self-esteem for female students, and lower rates of disciplinary action.

JROTC funding may also benefit schools through support for teaching and extracurricular activities. However, some critics have questioned whether cost-sharing requirements create a burden for poorer school districts.

How many units should DOD support?

The number of JROTC units that the services can support depends on annual budget levels, funding priorities, staffing resources, and host school interest. Statutory limits on the number of JROTC programs were gradually increased over time and, in 2001, Congress repealed all limits (P.L. 107-107 §537). Subsequent legislation in 2006 (P.L. 109-364 §541) and 2008 (P.L. 110-181 §548) directed the secretaries of the military departments to expand the program to additional schools with a target of 3,700 units by September 30, 2020. In 2020, the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service recommended expanding the number of JROTC units to 6,000 by 2031.

Is the distribution of units equitable?

A continued concern for Congress has been the equitable distribution of JROTC units across various demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic indicators. Language in the Senate report to accompany the FY2015 DOD Appropriations Bill (S.Rept. 113-211) expressed concern about JROTC participation at the individual and school

levels, and asked for a DOD report on "any plans to ensure adequate representation of all regions in the United States to ensure the capabilities of the Armed Forces to recruit from a diverse background to sustain the all-volunteer force."

A 2016 report from the RAND Corporation found that JROTC is generally underrepresented in rural and remote areas. In addition, JROTC units in public schools are not evenly distributed geographically and tend to be overrepresented in the South Atlantic states relative to the national average. Public high schools with larger-than-average minority populations and in schools serving economically disadvantaged populations are also overrepresented as JROTC host schools.

Higher representation in economically disadvantaged and larger, more urban schools has largely been a function of service-level policy decisions that award preference for Title I schools and other structural program requirements (e.g., minimum student participation, availability of instructors). While advocates for JROTC point to positive outcomes for high-risk youth, some critics of JROTC have argued that it unfairly targets low-income and minority communities for military recruiting.

How does participation affect recruiting?

Participation in JROTC does not incur any military obligation and military recruitment is not a stated objective in statute or policy. Nevertheless, the military services intend to provide favorable exposure to military careers and the program has potential to increase the propensity for military service. Some researchers have found a positive correlation between JROTC and enlistment while others have found that the impact of JROTC participation on military enlistment is negligible when accounting for self-selection into JROTC. The FY2021 NDAA (P.L. 116-283) requires a DOD study to, among other things, examine the relationship between JROTC and propensity to join the military.

JROTC participants who pursue enlistment or appointment as an officer may receive some benefits at the time of entry into service. For example, per DOD policy (DODI 1205.13), a student successfully completing at least two academic years of the JROTC program is entitled to advanced promotion to the grade of no less than E-2 upon initial enlistment in. The military departments may award the grade of E-3 for successful completion of three academic years. The secretaries of the military departments may also nominate up to 20 honor graduates from JROTC units designated by the secretaries as *honor schools* for appointment to one of the three military service academies (10 U.S.C. §8454 for Naval Academy, §7442 for U.S. Military Academy, and §9442 for Air Force Academy).

Relevant Statute

Chapter 102, Title 10, United States Code: Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps

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