

# **Future Servicemember Preparatory Courses: Background and Issues for Congress**

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# Future Servicemember Preparatory Courses: Background and Issues for Congress

The Constitution endows Congress with broad power over the armed forces, including to “raise and support Armies” and “provide and maintain a Navy.” In the exercise of these authorities, Congress typically sets the overall size—or end-strength—of the armed forces in an annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The armed forces have sometimes failed to meet these authorized end-strengths, due in part to contemporary recruiting shortfalls.

In response to these shortfalls, the Army and Navy have established programs—collectively called the Future Servicemember Preparatory Courses (FSPC)—that attempt to expand the pool of eligible recruits through remedial education and physical training. The courses consist of two tracks. The first focuses on physical fitness and aims to reduce recruits’ body fat to within two percent of accession standard. The second focuses on improving recruits’ Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) scores.

In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY2024 NDAA), Congress required the services to establish FSPC programs under certain circumstances. The Air Force and Marine Corps have stated that they do not plan to establish analogous programs. The Coast Guard has established an analogue, called the Future Sentinel Preparatory Course, though this report will focus on the military services exclusively. The FY2024 NDAA also established reporting requirements for the program, which Congress expanded in the Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 (FY2025 NDAA).

Among the issues Congress may consider are:

- overall budget for the FSPC programs;
- degree to which the services are adhering to established admission and graduation standards for the programs;
- adequacy of present resourcing for the programs;
- potential impact on recruit quality;
- degree to which the FSPCs support high-aptitude military occupational specialty (MOS) staffing; and
- impact on enlisted personnel attrition rates.

Oversight options Congress may consider include

- requesting or requiring further information from the Department of Defense (DOD), which is “using a secondary Department of War designation,” under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025, for the purpose of oversight;
- directing an external assessment of one or more aspects of the FSPCs;
- modifying the programs’ funding, staffing requirements, admission requirements, or graduation requirements;
- pursuing society-wide policies to increase the share of the population that meets military accession standards; and
- permitting the programs to continue with the current level of oversight.

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# Background

## End-Strength and Recruiting

The Constitution provides Congress broad powers over the Armed Forces, including the power to “raise and support Armies” and to “provide and maintain a Navy.”<sup>1</sup> Congress exercises these powers in various ways, including by setting the annual end-strength of each service of the Armed Forces in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

End-strength specifically refers to the number of personnel in a given armed service on the last day (September 30) of a fiscal year.<sup>2</sup> Congress also periodically sets minimum end-strength levels for the Armed Forces, which may be identical to or lower than the authorized end-strength. While Congress sets minimum and maximum end-strengths, each military service meets that range through recruiting and retention efforts to achieve an actual end-strength.

In accordance with congressionally authorized end-strengths, the military services set—and attempt to meet—annual recruiting goals.<sup>3</sup> During parts of the United States’ military history—including during the Civil War, First and Second World Wars, Korean War, and Vietnam War—the armed services used conscription to help meet their end-strength goals.<sup>4</sup> In 1973, the military ceased conscription and became an all-volunteer force (AVF).<sup>5</sup> As a result, the services replenish or grow their ranks by retaining (i.e., reenlisting) personnel and persuading eligible recruits to join.

In the early 2020s, some of the services fell short of their recruiting goals. In 2022 and 2023, the Army missed its recruiting targets by roughly 15,000 personnel. The Navy missed its 2023 and 2024 targets by roughly 7,000 and 5,000 recruits, respectively. The Marine Corps and Space Force met their targets, while the Air Force missed its 2023 target by roughly 3,000 personnel.<sup>6</sup>

Recruiting shortfalls may result in unfilled job positions (billets) in the near term, with potential impacts on readiness and mission execution. A lack of a sufficient pool of entry-level personnel may have longer-term impacts on the services’ ability to develop a strong cadre of mid-level and upper-level enlisted leaders.

The number of people who are both willing and eligible to enlist determines the size of the recruit pool. As the Future Servicemember Preparatory Course only concerns eligibility factors, this report will not discuss factors affecting willingness (i.e., propensity) to enlist.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. CONST. art. I, § 8. There are six Armed Forces: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and Coast Guard (10 U.S.C. §101). The Coast Guard normally falls under the Department of Homeland Security.

<sup>2</sup> 10 U.S.C. §115.

<sup>3</sup> For more information see CRS In Focus IF11147, *Defense Primer: Active Component Enlisted Recruiting*, by Kristy N. Kamarck and Carly A. Miller.

<sup>4</sup> For more information see CRS Report R44452, *The Selective Service System and Draft Registration: Issues for Congress*, by Kristy N. Kamarck.

<sup>5</sup> See also Alan Chase Cunningham, “Fifty Years Strong: The All-Volunteer Force of the United States Military and Resolving the Recruiting Crisis,” *Military Review Online*, June 2023.

<sup>6</sup> For more information see CRS In Focus IF11147, *Defense Primer: Active Component Enlisted Recruiting*, by Kristy N. Kamarck and Carly A. Miller.

This report focuses on the uniformed services under sole command of the Department of Defense. Discussion of the Coast Guard, Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps is therefore limited.

# Current Recruiting Standards

## Accession Standards

While the military works to meet its recruiting goals, it also seeks to admit only those recruits with the potential to succeed in military service. Some enlistment accession standards are set in law; others are established through policy.

These standards include

- **Age.** Title 10, Section 505, of the *U.S. Code* restricts original enlistment to those between the ages of 17 and 42.<sup>7</sup>
- **Citizenship.** Title 10, Section 504, of the *U.S. Code* restricts enlistment to U.S. citizens, nationals, legal permanent residents, and residents of certain Pacific islands with which the United States maintains Compacts of Free Association, though service secretaries may grant waivers under certain circumstances “vital to the national interest.”<sup>8</sup>
- **Education.** Per Department of Defense (DOD)<sup>9</sup> policy, “Possession of a high school diploma is desirable, although not mandatory, for enlistment in any component of the Military Services.”<sup>10</sup> Title 10 Section 520 of the *U.S. Code* requires recruits without a high school diploma to score at least in the 31<sup>st</sup> percentile on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT)—though “a person may not be denied enlistment in the armed forces solely because of his not having a high school diploma if his enlistment is needed to meet established strength requirements.”<sup>11</sup>
- **Medical Condition.** DOD deems a range of medical conditions disqualifying for enlistment, though waivers may be granted in some circumstances.<sup>12</sup>
- **“Character/Conduct” Standards.**<sup>13</sup> Title 10, Section 504, of the *U.S. Code* restricts enlistment of those with felony convictions. Service secretaries have discretion to grant waivers “in meritorious cases.” The Armed Forces also restrict entry of recruits with misdemeanor convictions, along with histories of illicit drug use, though they have some discretion to grant waivers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USDP&R), *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, Department of Defense Instruction 1304.26, March 23, 2015, Incorporating Change 3, October 26, 2018, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> USDP&R, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, , p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> The Department of Defense is using “Department of War” as a “secondary title” under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.

<sup>10</sup> USDP&R, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, pp. 7 – 8.

<sup>11</sup> 10 U.S.C. §520(b).

<sup>12</sup> USDP&R, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, , p. 8 and USDP&R, *Medical Standards For Military Service: Appointment, Enlistment, Or Induction*, Department of Defense Instruction 6130.03, Volume 1, Change 5 Effective: May 28, 2024. For more information on medical accession standards see CRS Insight IN12428, *FY2025 NDAA: Medical Standards to Join the Military*, by Bryce H. P. Mendez .

<sup>13</sup> USDP&R, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> USDP&R, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, pp. 9-11.

- **Dependency Status.** DOD policy restricts those with more than two dependents under the age of 18 from enlisting—but waivers may be granted “for particularly promising entrants.”<sup>15</sup>
- **Physical Fitness.** DOD requires individuals to meet height and weight standards; the armed services may require compliance with additional fitness requirements.<sup>16</sup>
- **Aptitude.** Title 10, Section 520, of the *U.S. Code* restricts admission of recruits who achieve scores “below a prescribed level” on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT).

DOD research estimates that a relatively small portion of the eligible population meets military accession standards. The 2022 Qualified Military Available (QMA) report, prepared by DOD’s Joint Advertising and Market Research & Studies (JAMRS), estimated that 23% of American youth aged 17-25 are qualified for military service under existing standards. The remaining 77% would likely be disqualified based on the aforementioned accession criteria.<sup>17</sup>

The armed services, through the Future Servicemember Preparatory Course, seek to expand this eligible pool by improving the physical fitness and aptitude test scores of prospective recruits. These accession standards are discussed below.

## Physical Fitness

Title 10, Section 113 of the *U.S. Code* delegates authority, direction, and control of DOD to the Secretary of Defense, who is using “Secretary of War” as a “secondary title” under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025. Title 10, Sections 505 and 532, of the *U.S. Code* provide for the enlistment or appointment of “able-bodied”<sup>18</sup> and “physically qualified”<sup>19</sup> personnel. Under these authorities, DOD policy requires that recruits, “meet the pre-accession height and weight standards.” The DOD policy also states, “The Military Services may have additional physical fitness screening requirements.”<sup>20</sup>

## Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) Score

The armed services use a standardized test—the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)—to determine recruits’ general capacity for military service and what occupational specialty might suit their aptitudes.<sup>21</sup> The AFQT score—derived from the Arithmetic Reasoning, Mathematics Knowledge, Paragraph Comprehension, and Word Knowledge sections of the

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<sup>15</sup> Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, Department of Defense Instruction 1304.26, March 23, 2015, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, Department of Defense Instruction 1304.26, March 23, 2015, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> DOD Office of People Analytics (OPA); Joint Advertising, Market Research & Studies, *Qualified Military Available (QMA) Technical Report*, OPA Report No. 2022-085, Alexandria, VA, March 2022, pp. 35-37, [https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Personnel\\_Related/23-F-1060\\_QMA\\_Technical\\_Report\\_Mar\\_2022.pdf](https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Personnel_Related/23-F-1060_QMA_Technical_Report_Mar_2022.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> 10 U.S.C. §505.

<sup>19</sup> 10 U.S.C. §532.

<sup>20</sup> Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, *Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction*, Department of Defense Instruction 1304.26, March 23, 2015, Incorporating Change 3, October 26, 2018, p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, “ASVAB Fact Sheet,” pg. 4, [https://www.officialasvab.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ASVAB-Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](https://www.officialasvab.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ASVAB-Fact_Sheet.pdf).

ASVAB—determines a recruit’s eligibility for enlistment and projects their “trainability and on-the-job performance.”<sup>22</sup> AFQT scores are divided into categories (see **Table 1**).

**Table 1. Armed Forces Qualification Test Categories**

AFQT Category	Percentile	Comment
I	93-99	Above average
II	65-92	Above average
III A	50-64	Average
III B	31-49	Average
IV	10-30	Below average
V	1-9	Ineligible for enlistment.

**Source:** DOD, *Qualitative Distribution of Military Manpower*, DODI 1145.01, September 19, 2024, p. 5, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/114501p.pdf?ver=2019-03-22-095340-833>.

Note: Comment descriptors relate to enlistee “trainability and on-the-job performance.”

Title 10, Section 520(a), of the *U.S. Code* stipulates that “the number of persons originally enlisted ... on active duty ... in any armed force” whose AFQT score is in Category IV may not exceed 4% “of the total number of persons originally enlisted or inducted to serve on active duty” in a given fiscal year unless the relevant service secretary takes certain actions. The service secretary concerned may request that the Secretary of Defense raise this threshold up to 20%. If approved, the Secretary of Defense is to inform Congress of this action within 30 days.<sup>23</sup>

According to DOD regulations, “The minimum aptitude test score for acceptance of chargeable accessions is a score at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile on the AFQT,” therefore those scoring in Category V are unlikely to be accepted into the armed services.<sup>24</sup>

Research conducted by the Armed Forces in cooperation with the National Academy of Sciences indicated that “the AFQT has a positive relationship with hands-on performance” in a range of military occupations.<sup>25</sup> There is also some evidence to suggest negative performance issues among lower-scoring recruits. For example, during the Vietnam War, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara launched *Project 100,000*, an effort to onboard recruits whose AFQT scores and physical fitness would otherwise have barred them from enlistment. The majority of these recruits were rated in Category IV, though a few were rated in Category V.<sup>26</sup> These personnel “performed less well in the military than their higher-aptitude peers. They had lower completion rates for both basic and skill training; their premature attrition rates were higher; and they had higher rates of indiscipline.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> “ASVAB Fact Sheet,” pg. 4. DOD, *Qualitative Distribution of Military Manpower*, DODI 1145.01, September 19, 2024, p. 5, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/114501p.pdf?ver=2019-03-22-095340-833>

<sup>23</sup> 10 U.S.C. §520(a)(2).

<sup>24</sup> DOD, *Qualitative Distribution of Military Manpower*, DODI 1145.01, September 19, 2024, p. 5, <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/114501p.pdf?ver=2019-03-22-095340-833>.

<sup>25</sup> Alexandra K. Wigdor and Bert F. Green, *Performance Assessment for the Workplace*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1991), p. 162.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Sticht, “Project 100,000 in the Vietnam War and Afterward,” in *Scraping the Barrel: The Military Use of Substandard Manpower, 1860-1960*, ed. Sanders Marble (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 285.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Congress, House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, *Readjustment of Project 100,000 Veterans*, 101<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., February 28, 1990, H. Hrg. 101-38, p. 3.



## Army and Navy Future Servicemember Preparatory Courses

Prior to the enactment of the FY2024 NDAA, the armed services operated FSPCs under existing authorities.<sup>28</sup> The FY2024 NDAA (P.L. 118-31, §546, 10 U.S.C. §520 note) added statutory requirements for the programs; it declared the purpose of the FSPCs “to improve the physical and aptitude qualifications of military recruits.”

This provision requires that

- an Armed Force establish a Future Servicemember Preparatory Course “If the number of non-prior service enlisted personnel covered under Section 520 of Title 10, United States Code [i.e., those with AFQT scores in Category IV (see **Table 1**)], exceeds 10 percent of the total number of persons originally enlisted in an Armed Force during a fiscal year”;
- all personnel whose AFQT score is between the thirty-first and ninth percentiles (Category IV) be enrolled in the academic track; and
- enrollees improve their scores by at least 10 points prior to proceeding to basic training.<sup>29</sup>

The FY2024 NDAA gave enrollees a maximum of 180 days to achieve graduation requirements.

The FY2025 NDAA (P.L. 118-159 §531) added statutory requirements for the program, firstly, amending the graduation time limit to read, “meaningful progress, as determined by the Secretary concerned, within 90 days of enlistment”.<sup>30</sup> If a course is established, the statute further requires the relevant service secretary to submit an annual report to Congress detailing how many personnel attended the course, how many graduated, the average AFQT score improvement, and any other matters the secretary deems relevant. The requirements of this law are to sunset on September 30, 2028.

The FY2025 NDAA further amended the basic training attendance requirements within 10 U.S.C. § 520 note to either a ten-point AFQT score improvement or a score of at least 31. It also required the relevant service secretary to report their assessment of the efficacy of the course, how to improve the course, and whether to expand the course.

The services evaluate recruits’ eligibility for service at Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS). Prospective soldiers and sailors whose body fat or AFQT scores do not meet accession standards—but fall within a certain range of those standards—may attend the academic track, physical track, or both. In both tracks the course lasts three weeks, at which point recruits who pass typically proceed to basic training. Those who do not meet standard may repeat the course for a period of up to 90 days, after which they are typically administratively separated (see **Figure 1**).<sup>31</sup> The services periodically adjust the admission and graduation requirements for their

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<sup>28</sup> The Army’s Future Soldier Preparatory Course, the Navy’s Future Sailor Preparatory Course, and the general term “Future Servicemember Preparatory Course” employ the same acronym (FSPC). When discussing the two programs together, this report generally uses the plural, “Future Servicemember Preparatory Courses” (FSPCs).

<sup>29</sup> 10 U.S.C. §520 note.

<sup>30</sup> P.L. 118-159

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Army: Gary Loten-Beckford, *Investing in Our Youth: Army Develops Future Soldier Preparatory Course*, U.S. Army, July 26, 2022, [https://www.army.mil/article/258753/investing\\_in\\_our\\_youth\\_army\\_develops\\_future\\_soldier\\_preparatory\\_course](https://www.army.mil/article/258753/investing_in_our_youth_army_develops_future_soldier_preparatory_course).

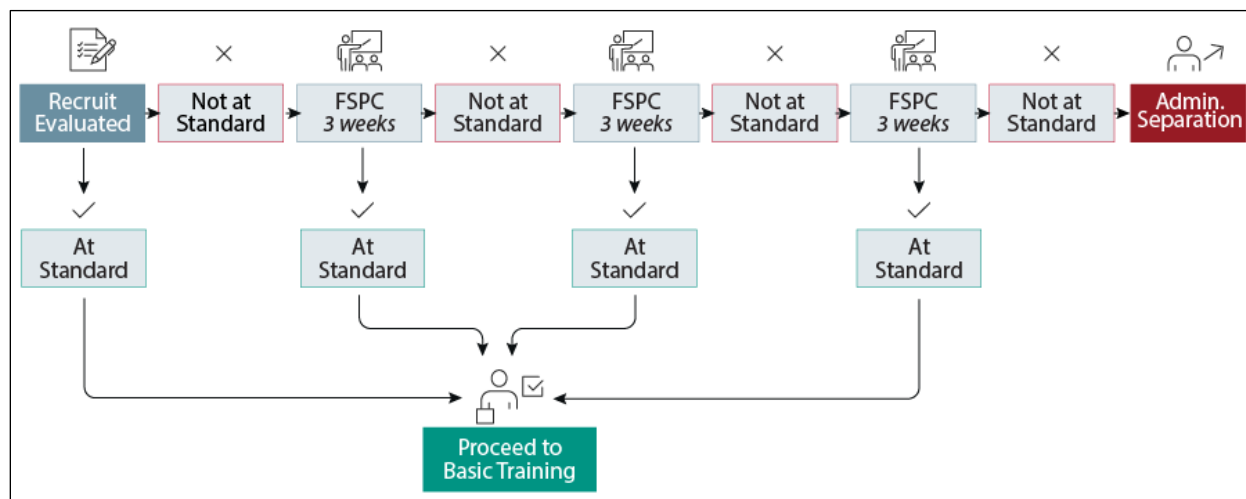
(continued...)



preparatory courses. For instance, in October 2025 the Army announced it would prohibit recruits from taking both the academic and fitness courses.<sup>32</sup>

The Department of Defense Inspector General (DODIG) released reports on the Future Soldier Preparatory Course fitness track and academic track in February and May 2025, respectively (see “DOD Inspector General Investigation of Army Fitness Track” and “DOD Inspector General Investigation of Army Academic Track” sections). DODIG has also released an evaluation of the Future Sailor Preparatory Course (see “Navy Program—Future Sailor Preparatory Course” section). These evaluations comprise part of DODIG’s review of what it identifies as DOD’s primary management concerns, which include increasing military readiness by alleviating “shortages of military recruits.”<sup>33</sup>

**Figure I. Generalized Schematic of Future Servicemember Preparatory Course**



**Source:** CRS adaptation of graphic in U.S. Navy Recruit Training Command, *Future Sailor Preparatory Course: Fitness and Academic Program*, <https://www.37trw.af.mil/Portals/57/RTC%20FSPC-CORBT%20Overview%20Brief.pdf>

Navy: LT Ben Pedersen, *Future Sailor Preparatory Course Fitness and Academic Program*, U.S. Navy Recruit Training Command, p. 2, <https://www.37trw.af.mil/Portals/57/RTC%20FSPC-CORBT%20Overview%20Brief.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Eve Sampson, “Army scales back eligibility for Future Soldier Prep Course,” *Military Times*, October 22, 2025. <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2025/10/22/army-scales-back-eligibility-for-future-soldier-prep-course/>.

<sup>33</sup> Robert P. Storch, DOD Inspector General, *Fiscal Year 2025 Top DOD Management and Performance Challenges*, Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General, Washington, DC, October 15, 2024, pp. 1, 6. [https://media.defense.gov/2024/Nov/15/2003584454/-1/-1/1/MANAGEMENT%20CHALLENGES%20FY2025\\_SIGNED\\_15NOV.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2024/Nov/15/2003584454/-1/-1/1/MANAGEMENT%20CHALLENGES%20FY2025_SIGNED_15NOV.PDF).

## Army Program—Future Soldier Preparatory Course

In July 2022, the Army established the FSPC pilot program as part of a broader effort to address recruiting shortfalls.<sup>34</sup> Approximately 3,200 recruits graduated from the program by the end of that year.<sup>35</sup> In FY2024, the course hosted approximately 22,600 students<sup>36</sup> who contributed approximately 25% of new enlisted accessions for that year.<sup>37</sup> By January 2025, approximately 32,000 soldiers had graduated through the Army FSPC and entered initial entry training.<sup>38</sup> The graduation rates were 94.8% for the fitness course and 92.2% for the academic course.<sup>39</sup>

The course operates at Fort Jackson, SC; and Fort Benning, GA.<sup>40</sup> The Army restricts the FSPC to those recruits who (1) have a high school diploma or equivalent credential; (2) do not require a waiver for “major misconduct”; (3) pass the military entrance processing stations (MEPS) physical; (4) do not require English as a Second Language (ESL) training; (5) are “standard trainer[s] for the Reserve Components [cannot be a Split Training Option (STO)] for high school students; (6) enlist as a delayed trainee (09M); and (7) achieve a “TSC IV (score of 21-30) on the Armed Service Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB).”<sup>41</sup>

Policy documents for the Army FSPC released in July 2024 estimated “one-time” start-up Operation and Maintenance (O&M) costs of approximately \$3.9 million and annual “recurring” O&M costs of approximately \$23.9 million.<sup>42</sup>

## Army Physical Track

The Army calls the FSPC physical track the “Assessment of Recruit Motivation and Strength (ARMS) 2.0.”<sup>43</sup> A February 2024 memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs stated, “New applicants may access with body fat composition exceeding the accession standard ... by up to 8% based on gender, age, and height.” It continues, “Applicants who exceed accession body fat composition standards, at accession, by 2.1% - 8%,”

<sup>34</sup> Christine E. Wormuth, Secretary of the Army, *A Call to Service to Overcome Recruiting and Retention Challenges*, U.S. Army, Washington, DC, July 20, 2022, p. 2. <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2022/07/20/69722edb/sa-csa-memo-a-call-to-service-to-overcome-recruiting-and-retention-challenges.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Hunter Rhoades Center for Initial Military Training, U.S. Army, “Future Soldier Preparatory Course to expand based on initial success,” press release, January 9, 2023, [https://www.army.mil/article/263129/future\\_soldier\\_preparatory\\_course\\_to\\_expand\\_based\\_on\\_initial\\_success](https://www.army.mil/article/263129/future_soldier_preparatory_course_to_expand_based_on_initial_success).

<sup>36</sup> Per correspondence with Army legislative liaison on March 27, 2025; on file with the author.

<sup>37</sup> Per Brigadier General Jenn Walkawicz, “25% that joined this year through Future Soldier Prep [sic] Course” quoted in U.S. Army Public Affairs, *Media Roundtable: Army leaders discuss FY2024 recruiting*, September 26, 2024, [https://www.army.mil/article/280044/media\\_roundtable\\_army\\_leaders\\_discuss\\_fy2024\\_recruiting](https://www.army.mil/article/280044/media_roundtable_army_leaders_discuss_fy2024_recruiting).

<sup>38</sup> Mark R. Lewis, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and Reserve Affairs), *Report to Congress on Monitoring the Success of the Future Soldier Prep Course*, U.S. Army, January 31, 2025, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> Mark R. Lewis, *Report to Congress on Monitoring the Success of the Future Soldier Prep Course*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Mark R. Lewis, *Report to Congress on Monitoring the Success of the Future Soldier Prep Course*, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Army Training and Doctrine Command, *Assessment of Recruit Motivation*, Individual Training Plan (ITP); Course: 750-ARMS, July 22, 2024, p. 2, [https://rdl.train.army.mil/catalog-ws/view/100.ATSC/6BCB2F2C-777C-4DFE-A0C9-422FB4075355-1721403848540/media/750\\_ARMS\\_4\\_0\\_ITP\\_\\_20240722\\_.pdf](https://rdl.train.army.mil/catalog-ws/view/100.ATSC/6BCB2F2C-777C-4DFE-A0C9-422FB4075355-1721403848540/media/750_ARMS_4_0_ITP__20240722_.pdf). p. 2.

This memo refers to the test as the ASVAB, but the score categories mentioned suggest the authors mean the AFQT.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Q. Williams, *Academic Skills Development Program CAT3B Individual Training Plan (ITP)*, Training Development Division (TDD), Leader Training Brigade, Fort Jackson, SC, July 26, 2024, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Agnes Gereben Schafer, *Assessment of Recruit Motivation and Strength (ARMS) 2.0 Pilot Program (UPDATE 6)*, U.S. Army, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, February 12, 2024. On file with the author.

will participate” in the FSPC physical track. It concludes, “Prior to movement to Basic Combat Training/One Station Unit Training, applicants will need to be no more than 2% above current accession body fat composition standards.”<sup>44</sup>

## DOD Inspector General Investigation of Army Fitness Track

The DOD Office of Inspector General (DODIG) released a report, dated February 18, 2025, on the ARMS 2.0 Course. The DODIG found that Army FSPC trainees “did not consistently receive required medical services” (e.g., medical screenings or dietary consultations) due in part to Army-wide medical personnel shortages.<sup>45</sup> The DODIG also found that 14% of ARMS trainees exceeded the accession standard- plus- 8% body fat limit for entering the course, with the “highest being 19%” over the standard.<sup>46</sup> DODIG reported that Army medical authorities “identified and acknowledged increased risks to trainees’ health, including the risk of death, while trying to lose weight quickly to meet the body fat percentage standards.”<sup>47</sup>

The Commanding General of Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, “disagreed” with several of the Inspector General’s findings. They asserted that trainees did have regular access to medical services and denied that internal TRADOC communications “acknowledged” an increased risk of death among some FSPC trainees who were trying to lose weight quickly.<sup>48</sup> The Inspector General stood by the report’s conclusions.<sup>49</sup>

The TRADOC Commanding General has requested an audit of the FSPC by the U.S. Army Audit Agency. DODIG stated that it would update its report when that audit was completed.<sup>50</sup> TRADOC has reportedly begun “entry-level separation proceedings for trainees who arrived with body fat accessions that exceeded standards by 10 percent or greater” along with those with body fat between 8-9.9% over accession standards “who tested positive for additional risk factors.”<sup>51</sup>

## Army Academic Track

The Army’s academic track is called the Academic Skills Development Program (ASDP).<sup>52</sup> The course is open to recruits who scored in the range of 21-30 on the AFQT. The Army ran a “limited pilot” program for recruits who scored in the range of 16-20 but as of January 2025 “is no longer pursuing this cohort.”<sup>53</sup> The Army also previously operated a parallel academic track for recruits

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<sup>44</sup> Agnes Gereben Schafer, *Assessment of Recruit Motivation and Strength (ARMS) 2.0 Pilot Program (UPDATE 6)*, pp 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, *Management Advisory: Army’s Future Soldier Preparatory Course Places Trainees at Increased Risk of Adverse Health Effects*, Report No. DODIG-2025-069, Alexandria, VA, February 18, 2025, p. 2, [https://media.defense.gov/2025/Feb/20/2003649057/-1/-1/1/2025-069-MGMT-%20HQ%20TRADOC%20REDACTED\\_SECURE.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2025/Feb/20/2003649057/-1/-1/1/2025-069-MGMT-%20HQ%20TRADOC%20REDACTED_SECURE.PDF).

<sup>46</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-069, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-069, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-069, p. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-069, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-069, p. 4.

<sup>51</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-069, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander Gago, *Fort Benning Academic Skills Development Program aims to improve Soldiers academic skills*, U.S. Army, March 15, 2023. [https://www.army.mil/article/264877/fort\\_benning\\_academic\\_skills\\_development\\_program\\_aims\\_to\\_improve\\_soldiers\\_academic\\_skills](https://www.army.mil/article/264877/fort_benning_academic_skills_development_program_aims_to_improve_soldiers_academic_skills)

<sup>53</sup> Mark R. Lewis, *Report to Congress on Monitoring the Success of the Future Soldier Prep Course*, p. 2.

in AFQT Category IIIB (31-49), but “suspended” this option as of April 2024.<sup>54</sup> Those who test above 30 may graduate from the FSPC and proceed to Initial Entry Training (IET).<sup>55</sup>

## DOD Inspector General Investigation of Army Academic Track

According to a May 2025 DODIG report on the ASDP, “the Army’s implementation of the ASDP portion of FSPC was effective in increasing the enlistment of category IV personnel.”<sup>56</sup> The Inspector General nevertheless assessed that

the Army used the ASDP trainees’ retest scores to incorrectly reclassify their enlistment categories from AFQT category IV to III or higher. In accordance with 10 U.S.C § 520, the Army cannot use AFQT test scores achieved after a Soldier enlists in the Army to circumvent the requirements limiting category IV enlistments. This allowed the Army to avoid additional oversight of enlistment standards by the Secretary of Defense and Congress, as required by 10 U.S.C § 520.<sup>57</sup>

DODIG also assessed that “the Army enacted less restrictive testing standards for ASDP trainees” than the Army’s standards required. For instance, “the Army did not adhere to its own policy that limits retest frequency to every 6 calendar months, but instead, allowed ASDP trainees to retest on the AFCT in as few as 7 days.”<sup>58</sup>

DODIG further stated that “according to ASDP personnel and what we observed during site visits to Army Training Center and Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and Fort Benning, Georgia, a significant portion of trainees had difficulty speaking or understanding English.”<sup>59</sup>

DODIG issued a series of recommendations to the Army to resolve the issues. The Army issued responses to DODIG’s recommendations, many of which, according to DODIG, “did not address the specifics of the recommendation[s].”<sup>60</sup> DODIG also raised the issue of the categorization of Army academic track graduates in a December 11, 2025, report.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Dahms, *Army expands Future Soldier Preparatory Course at Fort Moore*, U.S. Army, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA, April 4, 2024, [https://www.army.mil/article/275110/army\\_expands\\_future\\_soldier\\_preparatory\\_course\\_at\\_fort\\_moore](https://www.army.mil/article/275110/army_expands_future_soldier_preparatory_course_at_fort_moore).

At the time of the article’s publication, the installation was named Fort Moore. It has since been renamed as Fort Benning.

<sup>55</sup> Basic Combat Training, Leader Training Brigade (LTB), U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training (USACIMT), *Academic Skills Development Program CAT3B*, October 28, 2024. pp. 1-2. On file with the author.

<sup>56</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, *Management Advisory: Review of the Army’s Future Soldier Preparatory Course*, Report No. DODIG-2025-092, Alexandria, VA, May 1, 2025, p. 3, <https://www.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2025-05/DODIG-2025-092.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-92, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-92, p. 3. For the Army Policy, see Army Regulation 611-5 “Personnel and Classification Testing,” April 25, 2022.

The term “Armed Forces Classification Test” (AFCT) is synonymous with the ASVAB, the test from which AFQT scores are derived.

<sup>59</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-92, p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2025-92, pp. 5, 6, 7, 8.

<sup>61</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, *Management Advisory: The DOD’s Calculation and Reporting of Future Servicemember Preparatory Course Graduates for Recruiting Metrics*, Report No. DODIG-2026-031, Alexandria, VA, December 11, 2025, p. 3.

## Navy Program—Future Sailor Preparatory Course

The Navy launched the Future Sailor Preparatory Course, on April 10, 2023. This program occurs at Naval Station Great Lakes, IL—the Navy’s sole recruit training facility. As of March 31, 2025, the Navy had graduated 6,002 recruits from the FSPC—1,137 from the physical track and 4,865 from the academic track.<sup>62</sup>

The academic track accepts students in Category IV (AFQT scores between 10 and 30), and requires an increase of at least 10 points to graduate. Successful students may choose a new rating (i.e., occupational specialty) based on their improved scores.<sup>63</sup> The fitness track accepts students whose body fat is between 2-6% over accession standard. Students who meet body composition standards may proceed to basic training.<sup>64</sup> According to the Navy’s report to Congress on the FSPC, 51.5% of recruits who participated in the FSPC academic course from June 1 to September 30, 2024, proceeded to basic training.<sup>65</sup> According to the Navy, FSPC graduates tend to complete basic training at a higher rate than non-graduates and complete their terms of enlistment at higher rates. Data on basic training graduation are limited since the course became active in the second quarter of FY2024, though *Military Times* obtained some preliminary data from the Navy (see “What effect do the FSPCs have on attrition?”).<sup>66</sup>

The FSPC is funded through the Navy’s Military Personnel (MILPERS) and Operations and Maintenance (O&M) accounts. The course’s annual budget for FY2023, FY2024, and FY2025, and its planned budget for FY2026 is as follows:

**FY2023:** \$2,685,000; **FY2024:** \$2,565,000; **FY2025:** \$5,242,000; **FY2026:** \$8,856,000.<sup>67</sup>

## DOD Inspector General Investigation of the Future Sailor Preparatory Course

In a December 11, 2025, report, DODIG raised issues with the Navy’s compliance with 10 U.S.C. §520 that were similar to those of the Army program (see “DOD Inspector General Investigation of Army Academic Track” section).<sup>68</sup> On December 17, 2025, DODIG released a report on the Future Sailor Preparatory Course. DODIG assessed that Navy Recruit Training Command

<sup>62</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, *Evaluation of the Navy’s Future Sailor Preparatory Course*, Report No. DODIG-2026-38, <https://media.defense.gov/2025/Dec/18/2003844476/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2026-038.PDF>, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> U.S. Navy Recruit Training Command, *Future Sailor Preparatory Course*, Great Lakes, IL, [https://www.bootcamp.navy.mil/Recruits/Future-Sailor-Preparatory-Course-FSPC/?utm\\_source=Social&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_campaign=FSPC-Web&utm\\_id=FSPC-Web](https://www.bootcamp.navy.mil/Recruits/Future-Sailor-Preparatory-Course-FSPC/?utm_source=Social&utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=FSPC-Web&utm_id=FSPC-Web).

<sup>64</sup> U.S. Navy Recruit Training Command, *Future Sailor Preparatory Course*,

<sup>65</sup> Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Manpower and Reserve Affairs), *Report to Congress on the Future Sailor Preparatory Course*, U.S. Navy, March 1, 2025, p. 5.

Several sources have published differing graduation rates for the Future Sailor Preparatory Course. These variances may be explained in part by differing reporting periods, during which the Navy’s administration of the course may have changed, along with a degree of random fluctuation.

Sources presenting differing FSPC graduation rates include

Konstantin Toropin, “After 2 Years, Navy Sees Successes with Pre-Boot Camp Prep Course,” *Military Times*, April 24, 2025. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/04/24/after-2-years-navy-sees-successes-pre-boot-camp-prep-course.html>.

Joshua Skovlund, “The Navy’s Future Sailor Prep Course was aimed at marginal recruits. It’s producing honor grads.,” *Task & Purpose*, February 3, 2025. <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/navy-prep-course-honor-grads/>.

<sup>66</sup> Correspondence between U.S. Navy legislative liaison and author on April 14, 2024.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. Navy memo on file with author.

<sup>68</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2026-031, p. 1.



(RTC)—which administers the FSPC—“did not take all steps necessary to ensure the long-term success of the FSPC program.”<sup>69</sup> DODIG stated:

Specifically, RTC officials did not establish FSPC-specific procedures ... to govern the day-to-day operations of the program ... Additionally, RTC officials did not maintain source documentation on Body Composition Assessments (BCAs) conducted while recruits were in the FSPC-FSD [the fitness track] ... According to RTC officials, they did not establish formal procedures because they decided to wait for the program to mature and stabilize, citing frequent policy changes that impacted the FSPC ... Without documented procedures, RTC officials do not have reasonable assurance that FSPC processes are applied consistently, especially as RTC officials rotate out of the FSPC program. Additionally, without maintaining reliable documentation on BCAs conducted during the program, RTC officials may be limited in their ability to determine the long-term effectiveness of the program.<sup>70</sup>

DODIG recommended that RTC:

establish written procedures to govern the day-to-day operations of the FSPC and implement a process to record and maintain FSPC BCA results in an authoritative Navy repository in accordance with the Navy’s record retention policy.<sup>71</sup>

DODIG stated that RTC implemented written procedures for the program in June 2025 and committed to implement DODIG’s BCA record-keeping recommendation.<sup>72</sup>

## Other Branches’ Interest in the FSPC program

Both the Air Force and Marine Corps have stated they do not need a preparatory course to meet their recruiting goals.<sup>73</sup> In 2024, the Coast Guard implemented a fitness track, dubbed the *Future Sentinel Preparatory Course*.<sup>74</sup>

## FSPC Issues in the FY2026 NDAA

The FY2026 NDAA (enacted as P.L. 119-60 on December 18, 2025) contains measures for the oversight and modification of the Future Servicemember Preparatory Course. House and Senate reports accompanying FY2026 NDAA drafts detailed some congressional concerns with FSPC implementation. For example, S.Rept. 119-39 accompanying the Senate NDAA draft (S. 2296) echoed DODIG’s concerns regarding the ASDP’s compliance with 10 U.S.C. § 520 (see “Army Academic Track” section). The report stated that the Army’s practice of excluding FSPC academic track graduates from the AFQT Category IV cohort “contradict Section 520 of Title 10, United States Code,” and undermine “transparency and congressional oversight and should be discontinued.” The report required DOD to “track and report both the original AFQT scores and

<sup>69</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2026-038, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2026-038, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2026-038, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Office of Inspector General, Department of Defense, DODIG-2026-038, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Department of Defense, “Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Recruiting Media Roundtable With Service Leaders,” press release, October 30, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3952493/fiscal-year-2024-2025-recruiting-media-roundtable-with-service-leaders/>.

<sup>74</sup> U.S. Congress, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee, *Testimony of Vice Admiral Thomas G. Allan—Deputy Commandant for Mission Support, U.S. Coast Guard*, 118<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., September 25, 2024.

[https://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/09-25-2024\\_cgmt\\_hearing\\_-\\_vice\\_admiral\\_thomas\\_allan\\_jr\\_-\\_testimony.pdf](https://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/09-25-2024_cgmt_hearing_-_vice_admiral_thomas_allan_jr_-_testimony.pdf).

the improved AFQT scores for any recruits who attend the Future Servicemember Preparatory Course for purposes of academic improvement.” The report also required USD (P&R) to brief the House and Senate Armed Services Committees no later than October 1, 2025, on:

- (1) An updated response to the recommendations provided by the DOD Inspector General’s May 1, 2025, report titled “Review of the Army’s Future Soldier Preparatory Course”; (2) Accurate accession quality data for each military service since the inception of the Future Soldier Preparatory Course and the Future Sailor Preparatory Course, based on AFQT scores at the time of enlistment; (3) A plan to ensure full compliance with section 520 of title 10, United States Code; (4) Any legislative or policy proposals that would improve the Department’s ability to report accessions data to reflect improvements in pre-basic training candidates who attend a Future Servicemember Preparatory Course as well as its ability to improve the overall transparency and integrity of accessions reporting; and (5) Any other information that the Under Secretary deems necessary and relevant.<sup>75</sup>

This provision was not included in the enacted FY2026 NDAA.

Section 534 of the FY2026 NDAA (P.L. 119-60), entitled “Clarifying the Calculation of Enlistments for Persons Whose Score on the Armed Forces Qualification Test is Below a Prescribed Level for the Future Servicemember Preparatory Course,” amends 10 U.S.C. §520 so that service secretaries may exclude recruits who graduated from the FSPC academic track from the quotas imposed on Category IV recruits by 10 U.S.C. §520(a) if: 1) the recruits achieve an AFQT score of Category III or above during the fiscal year in which they enlist and 2) the score is “obtained during the period the individual was originally enlisted to serve.”<sup>76</sup>

The report (H.Rept. 119-231) accompanying the House version of a FY2026 NDAA (H.R. 3838) contained a section titled “Attrition and Accession Pathways Across the Military Services.” This section stated that

While the committee is encouraged by the Department’s [i.e.: DOD’s] efforts to expand the population eligible for military service, such as the establishment of the Medical Accession Records Pilot (MARF) and future service member preparatory courses by the Army and Navy, the committee is concerned about the impact of these changes, along with more frequent approval of accessions waivers, on attrition by first-term service members. Understanding how emerging accession practices, particularly waiver issuance and preparatory programs, correlate with early separations is critical to evaluating the effectiveness of current recruiting strategies and the long-term health of the all-volunteer force.<sup>77</sup>

The report directed the services and DOD to brief Congress—no later than February 1, 2026—“on the service’s accession and attrition trends from Fiscal Year 2022 through Fiscal Year 2025.” Elements of the briefing specified in the report that are relevant to the FSPCs include (1) the number of servicemembers who enlisted during this period; (2) “the number of recruits accessed through the Future Soldier Preparatory Course and the Future Sailor Preparatory Course, in total and categorized by physical fitness track, academic track, or both”; (3) the number of recruits who did not complete basic training, and whether or not they participated in an FSPC; (4) the number of recruits who completed basic training but did not complete their initial enlistment contract, and whether or not they participated in an FSPC; and (5) “an explanation of the Department’s methodology for assessing the long-term effects of ... the future service member preparatory courses, how recruitment quality is being evaluated, and how early separations are

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<sup>75</sup> S.Rept. 119-39 pp. 105-106.

<sup>76</sup> P.L. 119-60

<sup>77</sup> H.Rept. 119-231, p. 159.



being tracked and addressed, including any plans for longitudinal accessions cohort analysis, with particular attention to impacts on readiness, retention, and end strength.”<sup>78</sup> This provision was not included in the FY2026 NDAA.

## **Potential Oversight Issues for Congress**

### **Budget**

The FSPCs are not listed as line items in annual DOD congressional budget justification documents. Congress may consider whether or not to require DOD to report FSPC budget information as line items for oversight purposes. Cost-related information of possible interest to congressional oversight may include dollar amounts and full-time equivalent personnel used for FSPC courses, the appropriations accounts used to support related costs, and the criteria DOD and/or the military services use to measure the return on investment of such courses. Congress may also evaluate whether the FSPC is receiving sufficient funds for its activities and whether the operation of these courses impacts the services’ ability to conduct other activities.

### **Consideration of Issues Raised in DOD Inspector-General Reports**

Congress may evaluate the extent to which the services comply with their established standards when operating their FSPCs. In doing so, Congress may consider the issues raised by the DODIG in its investigation of the Future Soldier Preparatory Course (see “Army Physical Track” and “Army Academic Track ” sections) and Future Sailor Preparatory Course (see “Navy Program—Future Sailor Preparatory Course” section). Congress may also evaluate compliance or program execution issues raised in media reporting or from Congressional oversight efforts.

### **Do the FSPCs have sufficient resources?**

Congress may consider whether the FSPCs have sufficient funding to operate safely and effectively. Congress may evaluate whether the Army has addressed the resourcing issues raised by the DODIG’s evaluation of the fitness track.

### **Do the FSPCs improve recruit suitability for service?**

Studies by the military services and the National Academy of Sciences have correlated AFQT scores and on-the-job performance in the military (see “Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) Score” section). Congress has demonstrated a concern about the cognitive aptitude of recruits through statutorily limiting the number of Category IV recruits the services may admit.<sup>79</sup> CRS has identified no studies that have investigated the job performance of FSPC graduates. Potential issues may come to light as FSPC academic track graduates complete their terms of enlistment and if the services or researchers choose to study FSPC graduate outcomes.

Congress may consider the extent to which the FSPCs can increase “measures of performance.” For example, Congress may monitor performance of FSPC graduates who were on the fitness track. The program’s objective is to reduce recruits’ body fat to at least near-standard. While the course provides nutrition and lifestyle instruction, it is not yet apparent whether graduates maintain the habits required to keep their weight within service standard during their term of

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<sup>78</sup> H.Rept. 119-231 pp. 159-160.

<sup>79</sup> 10 U.S.C. §520.

service. Congress may monitor fitness track graduates as they complete their terms of enlistment and consider requiring that the program be further studied. Congress may also assess whether these graduates require assistance maintaining acceptable weight standards during their enlistments.

## **Do the FSPCs help the services fill high-aptitude roles?**

Congress may assess the extent to which the FSPCs are effective in filling high-aptitude MOS billets. Many occupational specialties, such as radar technicians, air defense system operators, and medical technicians, have high aptitude requirements. Given that reported data on aptitude levels among FSPC graduates are limited, it remains to be seen the extent to which ASVAB scores among FSPC graduates are sufficient to fill high-aptitude billets. Congress may consider requiring that ASVAB scores of FSPC graduates be reported so as to determine the extent to which FSPC graduates are capable of filling high-aptitude MOS billets.

Service-level restructuring initiatives may further increase demand for recruits with high aptitudes. The 2024 Army Force Structure Transformation Initiative—which responds in part to the challenges posed by “technologically advanced military powers” such as Russia and China—calls for an increase in long-range fire and air defense capabilities, which may in turn require an increase in billets with higher ASVAB requirements.<sup>80</sup> CRS has found no public information regarding the impact of the FSPC on the staffing of high-aptitude billets. Congress may wish to gather further information on this issue.

## **What effect do the FSPCs have on attrition?**

Congress may consider whether—or to what extent—FSPC participation is associated with enlisted personnel attrition rates. According to a March 10, 2025, article in *Military Times*, 25% of FSPC graduates left the Army within two years of enlistment, compared to 20% of recruits who did not attend the course. The same article reported that Army recruits who graduated from the FSPC dropped out of basic training at higher rates than their non-FSPC peers. “Some service officials,” whom the author interviewed, presented the following attrition rates for basic training:

- Soldiers who did not attend any prep course: 11.3%;
- Academic track prep course: 15.3%;
- Fitness track prep course: 16%; and
- Soldiers who attended both prep courses: 18.7%.<sup>81</sup>

Congress may consider whether available data on the attrition rates of FSPC graduates warrant further investigation or action.

In its congressionally mandated report on the FSPC, the Army stated that “FSPC graduates are completing IET [i.e., basic training] at comparable rates to non-FSPC graduates.” The Army did not specify what it meant by “comparable rates.”<sup>82</sup> The Army Research Institute (ARI) is

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<sup>80</sup> For more information see CRS Report R47985, *The 2024 Army Force Structure Transformation Initiative*, by Andrew Feickert.

<sup>81</sup> Steve Beyon, “The Army Is Losing Nearly One-Quarter of Soldiers in the First 2 Years of Enlistment,” *Military Times*, March 7, 2025, [https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/03/07/army-losing-nearly-one-quarter-of-soldiers-first-2-years-of-enlistment.html?utm\\_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=sailthru](https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/03/07/army-losing-nearly-one-quarter-of-soldiers-first-2-years-of-enlistment.html?utm_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sailthru). In the context of these figures, attrition refers to failure to complete basic training.

<sup>82</sup> Mark R. Lewis, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Manpower and (continued...)

conducting a longitudinal study to determine the rate of first-term enlistment attrition among FSPC graduates.<sup>83</sup> CRS has not learned when the Army might complete the study. This effort may provide Congress with additional insight into the efficacy of the Army program.

Initial data from the Navy suggest that graduates of the Future Sailor Preparatory Course complete basic training at a higher rate than their non-FSPC peers, but have a higher attrition rate in the six-month period following basic training. A *Military Times* article from April 24, 2025, presented data from the Navy, which indicated that 1.6% of FSPC fitness track graduates and 0.7% of academic track graduates fail to complete basic training—as compared to 10% of regular recruits. However, 6.4% of fitness track graduates and 10.6% of academic track graduates attrit within six months of graduating basic training—as compared to 0.6% of regular recruits.<sup>84</sup>

The House report on the FY2026 NDAA required DOD to brief Congress on attrition rates among FSPC graduates (see “FSPC Issues in the FY2026 NDAA” section) by February 1, 2026—though the enacted NDAA did not include this provision. Congress may consider whether these provisions elicit sufficient information to facilitate congressional oversight. Congress may subsequently consider whether the information presented in this briefing warrants further oversight or legislative action.

## **Under what circumstances should the services maintain an FSPC?**

Congress may consider whether or not to alter the statutory requirements for implementing a Future Servicemember Preparatory Course. Section 520 note, Title 10, of the *United States Code*, requires the services to implement such a course when more than 10% of non-prior enlisted recruits in a given year are in Category IV of the AFQT. Some may favor raising this threshold, arguing that the services can absorb a higher quantity of Category IV recruits. Others may support maintaining or lowering the threshold, arguing that an influx of Category IV recruits would be detrimental to operational efficacy without remedial instruction.

## **How should graduates of the academic track of the FSPCs be categorized?**

The Senate report on the FY2026 NDAA concurred with DODIG’s assessment (see “Army Academic Track” section) that the Army’s operation of the FSPC violates the intent of 10 U.S.C. §520 (see “FSPC Issues in the FY2026 NDAA” section). Congress subsequently modified 10 U.S.C. §520 in the FY2026 NDAA (see “FSPC Issues in the FY2026 NDAA” section) to allow the service secretaries to exclude FSPC graduates whose AFQT scores improved sufficiently from quotas on Category IV accessions. Congress may determine whether or not further adjustments to the statutory categorization of FSPC graduates is warranted.

## **Potential Oversight Options for Congress**

To assist in its oversight role of the FSPCs, Congress may consider the following options:

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Reserve Affairs), *Report to Congress on Monitoring the Success of the Future Soldier Prep Course*, U.S. Army, January 31, 2025, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Mark R. Lewis, *Report to Congress on Monitoring the Success of the Future Soldier Prep Course*, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Konstantin Toropin, “After 2 Years, Navy Sees Successes with Pre-Boot Camp Prep Course,” *Military Times*, April 24, 2025. <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2025/04/24/after-2-years-navy-sees-successes-pre-boot-camp-prep-course.html>.

## Acquire more information on the FSPCs

Congress may assess whether or not DOD reporting on the FSPCs is sufficient to conduct effective oversight of FSPC programs. If Congress determines it lacks sufficient information, it may take several actions, including

- Visit the FSPCs;
- Increase DOD reporting requirements;
- Hold oversight hearings;
- Require periodic briefings to relevant committees;
- Direct an external review of aspects of the FSPCs;
- Amend reporting requirements so that FSPC data is disaggregated by enrollment in academic vs. fitness track, improvement in AFQT score / body fat reduction, MOS of graduates, or other factors.

## Modify the FSPCs

Congress has typically delegated specific decisions about medical and physical entry standards to the armed forces. Congress has nevertheless codified some minimum entry standards. Congress could modify these requirements or other aspects of the FSPCs through legislation, as it did in the FY2024 and FY2025 NDAs. When considering modifications to the FSPCs, Congress may ask:

- Are the FSPC admissions and graduation requirements adequate to meet and maintain individual and unit readiness standards?
- Is the FSPC curriculum and training regimen preparing recruits to succeed in military service?
- Are the Army and Navy receiving and allocating sufficient funds to meet program objectives?

## Implement a “whole of government” approach to grow the pool of eligible recruits

Congress may also consider past efforts to increase the pool of eligible recruits by implementing society-wide public policy initiatives. Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy, for example, called for national physical fitness campaigns to increase the share of the youth population eligible for service in the Armed Forces.<sup>85</sup>

Congress may also consider broader cross-governmental policy initiatives aimed at reducing the incidence of disqualifying factors in the service-eligible population. Such efforts may build upon existing policies and initiatives. For instance, work to reduce the rate of obesity may involve agencies under the Department of Health and Human Services. The *Make Our Children Healthy Again Assessment* raises the medical ineligibility of many Americans for military service as a potential impetus for future efforts to address public health issues.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Sanders Marble, “Bring Them Up to Standard: Historical Perspective on How the Army Has Worked with Unqualified Recruits,” *Army History*, Winter 2023, pp. 36-47.

<sup>86</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Secretary of Health and Human Services, Vincent Haley, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, and Brooke Rollins, Secretary of Agriculture, et al., *The MAHA Report: Make Our Children Healthy* (continued...)

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*Again Commission*, Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission, Washington, DC, May 2025, p. 9, footnote 9, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/MAHA-Report-The-White-House.pdf#page=9>.

Likewise, policies to reduce the rate of disqualifying illicit drug use among the eligible population may include law-enforcement efforts to reduce narcotic supply and preventative and treatment efforts to reduce narcotic demand. Improving AFQT scores may be addressed as part of a nationwide effort to improve educational outcomes among elementary, middle, and high school students.

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