



Defense Primer: Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps

Background

The Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) is a Department of Defense (DOD)-funded program of instruction for high school-aged students administrated by the military departments (Army, Navy, and Air Force). A key purpose of JROTC, according to 10 U.S.C. §2031 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.” Congress established JROTC as an Army program in the National Defense Act of 1916 (P.L. 64-85) and in 1964 expanded it to the Navy and Air Force. Congress later 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 fiscal year (FY) 2022, the military departments reported funding 3,486 JROTC units operating in every state and in DOD schools overseas (see **Table 1**). Eighth-grade students may participate in JROTC if physically co-located with 9th-12th grade students. Home-schooled students may also participate. In FY2022, 10 Air Force units were converted to Space Force units.

Table 1. Estimated Size of JROTC Program in FY2022

Service	Number of units	Estimated enrollment
Army	1,701	302,500
Navy	654	93,100
Marine Corps	256	32,790
Air Force	865	110,000
Space Force	10	1,300
Total	3,486	539,690

Source: DOD Comptroller, FY2023 budget justification documents.

Notes: Navy figures include 71 National Defense Cadet Corps (NNDCC) units and 5,100 NNDCC cadets.

JROTC Instructors

Most JROTC instructors are retired or reserve officers and enlisted noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who are hired 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. Eligibility criteria to serve as a JROTC instructor (e.g., education, certification) are specified in law (10 U.S.C. §2033). Instructors are required to abide by standards set by their parent service, as well as the policies set by their host institution.

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 the (1) active duty pay and allowances the instructor would receive if recalled to active duty and (2) instructor’s retired pay entitlement. Sample salary calculations are found in DOD Instruction 1205.13.

Curriculum

JROTC courses are taught over a three- or four-year period on topics such as leadership, ethics, civics, history, and health and wellness. The FY2020 NDAA (P.L. 116-92) also authorized 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

Congressional offices may be approached by local educational authorities (LEAs) in their district with questions about how to establish a new JROTC unit. Schools interested in hosting a unit must apply to the respective military department. By law, 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*, with a point system awarding 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 are not subsidized by the government. Schools may seek to convert an existing unit to an unfunded NDCC if enrolment figures fall under the statutory threshold.

Federal Funding

Congress annually appropriates JROTC funds as part of DOD’s Operation and Maintenance (O&M) and Military Personnel (MILPERS) budget (see **Table 2**). Beyond instructor salaries, 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.

Table 2. DOD Funding for JROTC, FY2022
(Enacted total funding, in millions of dollars)

Service	O&M	MILPERS	Total
Army	190,948	33,992	224,940
Navy	62,323	15,891	78,214
Marine Corps	29,065	3,889	32,954
Air Force	70,931	18,783	89,714
Total	353,267	72,555	425,822

Source: DOD Comptroller, FY2023 budget justification documents. Space Force funding is included in Air Force figures.

Considerations for Congress

In Congress’s role in funding and overseeing JROTC, there are several questions for consideration.

How many JROTC units should Congress fund?

In determining the number of JROTC units to support, Congress may consider defense budget priorities, program benefits, and host school and constituent concerns. Congress had gradually increased statutory limits on the number of JROTC units over time; however, in 2001, Congress repealed all prior enacted limitations (P.L. 107-107 §537). Subsequent legislation in 2006 (P.L. 109-364 §541) and 2008 (P.L. 110-417 §548) directed the Secretaries of the military departments to expand the program to additional schools with a ceiling 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.

What are some of the program benefits?

The JROTC program may have some benefits for students and host schools. 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. For schools, the prospect of federal funding for instructors, STEM program grants (P.L. 116-283 §512), and other activities may create incentives to host and maintain units. Some critics maintain that these incentives may lead schools to pressure students into enrolling in JROTC to maintain the unit sizes required for continued funding.

How does JROTC participation affect recruiting?

Some parents and observers have expressed concerns about military influence in high schools. 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 seek to provide favorable exposure to military careers through JROTC and the program has potential to increase the propensity for military service. Some researchers have found a positive correlation between JROTC participation and enlistment, while others have found that the impact of participation on military enlistment is negligible when accounting for self-selection into JROTC. The FY2021 NDAA (P.L. 116-283)

required 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. 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.

Is the distribution of units equitable?

A continued consideration by 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) called for a DOD report on “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.” A 2017 RAND Corporation report in response to congressional interest found that JROTC is generally underrepresented in rural and remote areas and tend to be overrepresented in the South Atlantic states relative to the national average. The report also found that 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 have argued that it unfairly targets low-income and minority communities for military recruiting.

Other JROTC Oversight Matters

Additional oversight matters related to JROTC include:

- Quality and accuracy of curriculum and instruction materials, and
- Accountability for JROTC instructor performance and behavior (see for example, House Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, *JROTC: Protecting Cadets from Sexual Abuse and Instructor Misconduct*, 117th Cong., 2nd sess., November 16, 2022.)

Relevant Statute

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

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