

Session 3: Option of First Choice: Education Requirements for Success in the Military July 07, 2016 **Transcript**

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Mr. Willcox: Good afternoon, and welcome to the Virginia Department of Education, Office of Career and Technical Education Professional Development series. Today's focus will feature the Military Science courses offered in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the ASVAB exam. I am George Willcox, Coordinator for the Office of Career and Technical Education. Joining me today is Mr. Aaron Hall who is here to provide information that will be helpful to CTE directors and to school guidance counselors pertaining to opportunities for students to enlist in the various branches of the military. Mr. Hall, I noticed in the caption for today's session that the term "Options of First Choice" is used. Would you give us a little background on that catch phrase?

Mr. Hall: Yes sir. So, I represent specifically the Army, but for the Department of Defense as a whole, the Option of First Choice reference is really the key terminology that we are using to recruit the nation's finest, specifically the Commonwealth of Virginia's high-performing students. The technical requirements, the educational requirements for promotion, and enlistment within the Army, have increased at a rate that in order to stay competitive we have to recruit those that consider the Army or the military their Option of First Choice, meaning high-performing students looking for opportunities within the military.

Mr. Willcox: Let me follow up on that with two questions. The first would be what are the specific requirements to enlist in the various branches, and also what type of score must students obtain in order to have a real good opportunity in terms of career options and fields within the branches?

Mr. Hall: The main educational identifier or qualifier for anyone who wants to enlist in the military is the ASVAB test, and from that ASVAB test, where they test, it is a vocational aptitude battery test. It is a battery of tests that go in together and create an armed forces qualification score or AFQT. Those scores for qualification, or the baseline for qualification, start at 31 and 32 for the Army and the Marine Corps and go all the way up to a 50 for the Coast Guard. So, there are different levels for qualifications, and again, that is just the minimum qualification that a student would have to achieve on the armed forces, on the ASVAB, in order to enlist. Once they get in and take the ASVAB, there different line scores that are associated with their academic prowess that will identify certain positions within that branch of service that they qualify for, so even though that branch may have a 31, like it is in our case with the Army for initial entry, a lot of MOSs (Military Occupational Specialty) require much higher line scores in order to open up all the opportunities for that student.

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Mr. Willcox: What are some of the higher scores that a student would have to earn in order to take advantage of the different programs?

Mr. Hall: So, within the Army most MOSs will have their different requirements for each MOS. Generally speaking, a 110 GT score which for the normal applicant the 110 GT score is not out

of reach. For instance, our ranger contracts currently require a 110 GT score. That shows that person has the ability to learn and to react quickly and become a leader within our service. So those scores are required in order to pursue those particular careers.

Mr. Willcox: What type of educational programs do branches of the military offer?

Mr. Hall: The department of defense has recognized that within our nation our priority is to have students stay in school. They must graduate in order for them to be competitive for a military career, so we have developed certain programs that encourage participation and continuation of their education at the secondary level. Some things that we have incorporated into our secondary schools within the commonwealth is the March to Success program. It is also available at marchtosuccess.com. And that is for students who are looking to increase their standardized test scores, whether that be the SOL offered through the Virginia Department of Education or the standardized tests, which the ASVAB is since 1968 is the most commonly used standardized test in the nation. The March to Success program is built toward helping those students increase their scores and open up opportunities for them, whether that be directly after high school going in the workforce, going into technical college, community college, four year college, or trying to go into the military. The higher they can score the more opportunities that are open for them. The March to Success program specifically can be done individually. There is no enlistment requirements if you use this program. It can be individually used, an educator can set up a classroom presentation where he or she monitors up to 20 students going through it one time. They can assign coursework, they can assign practice tests, and they can monitor that student's progress and assign additional course load as they see fit. It is really a supplement to the classroom environment for that educator, and it also increases scores on standardized testing and opens up opportunities for students.

Mr. Willcox: What are the procedures for the release of those students' scores?

Mr. Hall: Within the Commonwealth of Virginia we have options 1 through 8 for the ASVAB test. They are open to each individual school, and it is really up to that school administrator, to the principal, guidance counselor, and even open to the district level to make that decision on how those results are released to the Department of Defense. Option 1 is the quickest release of those results, so it is within seven days of testing those results will be released to the school and also to the Department of Defense for recruiting purposes. All the way down to option 8 where those results are never released to the Department of Defense, and that can be used as a tool for the school to supplement their guidance program, to assess their student's ability on standardized tests, and to compare them across the nation, so each time that a student takes the ASVAB they are compared to their peer group across the nation. If an 11th grade female takes the test, she is compared against 11th grade females across the nation. It gives a little bit broader perspective. A lot of times we see standardized tests that are really concentrating on one geographical area. This allows the state of Virginia and that district within the Commonwealth of Virginia to compare their students on a national basis.

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Mr. Willcox: If a student enlists in the military, share with us some of the options that they have in terms of basic training based on their MOS.

Mr. Hall: When students make the decision to serve in the military, they will, based off their qualification scores, that AFQT that we talked about earlier, they will qualify for different military occupation specialties, and whichever option is open to them and they choose, that will

determine where they go for basic combat training. If an applicant chooses something in the human resources or on the personnel side, they would likely go to basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, continue their basic training at AIT, which is Advanced Individual Training where they learn that specialty at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Then from there, roughly eighteen weeks of training, from there go to their first unit of assignment. If it is in the reserved component, that student will now come back into the Commonwealth of Virginia with that extra training and job skill and come back into the Commonwealth of Virginia immediately and serve in their reserve component one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer. If they decided to do active duty, they will go across the nation to different posts according to their service.

Mr. Willcox: Within the Career and Technical Education program we focus highly on career clusters, 16 career clusters and 79 pathways. How would military programs correlate to that, and how might a student select their occupational choice within those 16 clusters in a military environment?

Mr. Hall: Just like within the state of Virginia for guiding all the guidance counselors that I've met over the past three years as I've been talking about Army education programs, the goal really is early identification of the career cluster of choice for that student. For us in the military, it is the same as it would be for a student who is looking for a degree pathway or a career pathway when they separate from high school. We are looking for what indicators does that student present that would make them successful or have good passion for that career that they have chosen. Within that we developed a subset for the ASVAB, so anyone in the Commonwealth who takes the ASVAB test, it also opens up the Career Exploration Program for them, not unlike the Virginia Wizard; its focus is not on the federal 16 career clusters that the federal government has outlined. That student, once they take the ASVAB, you take their academic assessment, and they now go onto a website that can be either individually directed by that educator in the school or also led by someone like myself, as Education Service Specialist, or one of the recruiters from any of the services across the state to walk that student through a Career Exploration Program. The lead, the first step in that is to find your interest inventory, and that find your interest inventories based off the Holland theory of six career pathways for that student whether they are realistic enterprises, conventional, artistic, investigative. Those six ideal codes develop through that student self-assessment and can guide them into those career clusters, so now they are not just loosely associating what they would like to do with one of those 16 career clusters. They are now able to select individual career clusters and then jobs within that career cluster based off their interest inventory. As long as they do a good honest self-assessment, the codes that will come out of there will be one of those six, will be their leading code, to say that they would have the most career satisfaction in that career cluster, and they can actually further explore that.

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So, within the Career Exploration Program, once they have decided what that career cluster is that they would like to focus on or two career clusters they would like to focus on, they can further drill down using Department of Labor Statistics to find out what jobs are of interest to them. If they go into the healthcare profession, nurse practitioner is what they would like to do, it will also help them to drill down and say okay, the Department of Labor is saying this job is on the rise. They have had a 9 percent increase in positions available across the nation for that position, so that is, you know, a good valid growing career field for them to go into, and it will also help them explore what educational requirements they will have to do in order to meet that

goal. Our goal, just like all the guidance counselors in the commonwealth, is to identify that early. The earlier we can identify that, the earlier we can guide their academic pathway into being successful in that career pathway. Additionally, at the end of the Career Exploration Program, once they have found those careers that they are interested in, there is a link at the bottom that will guide them into military occupation specialties (MOS) that correlate with that career field. Just like in the civilian side, we have a nursing program within the army. If nurse practitioner would be one of those goals that they have associated, we can guide them into a military career that may correlate with that goal. If they would like to they could explore within the military. If not, then it is not a big deal. They have dug into that 16 career pathways, and they can take that assessment back into their guidance counselor, so that way they are not really starting from zero. We all know that guidance counselors across the state are, you know, that their time is very precious with the students that they have within their schools. Sometimes they may have a lot of time to spend with some, sometimes they may not have as much time as they would like. This is a way for us to supplement that guidance program to make sure the students are making good career choices using an Army education program, the Career Exploration.

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Mr. Willcox: Let me circle back around to the AFTQ score 31 for the Army. How important is that score to being able to enlist in the military? What if the student doesn't earn a 31?

Mr. Hall: There are a couple options for a student who doesn't earn 31, and again, it is very important that that student does achieve a 31. The goal would be to get as high as possible on that scale; the higher that that student scores, the more jobs and opportunities that are open to them. That 31 is the baseline score, but if someone does fail to achieve that on their first exam, whether it be in the school or with a recruiter that they take the ASVAB, they can retest at the 30 day mark to try to increase that score, and they can also use the March to Success Program to try to increase that score above the 31, and again that March to Success Program is a self-guided, self-initiated study, but then it could also be guided and directed by an educator, recruiter in the area, or and education service specialist like myself.

Mr. Willcox: Okay, talk a little bit about, we focused here largely on the Army, but talk about some of the other military branches and specific requirements that they have. As we look, for example, at the Coast Guard that has a minimum score of 40. If a person, for example, makes a 50, what would be the difference in the options that student would have based on making a 40 and based on making a 50?

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Mr. Hall: So, I think I misspoke earlier when I said that the minimum cutoff for Coast Guard was a 50, and you are correct. It is a 40 for them currently. So, the difference being between those career opportunities that are available really digs into and kind of links into STEM, science, technology, engineering and math. So a lot of those jobs that require a high arithmetic ability, reading comprehension, paragraph comprehension, science and technology, those MOSs that do require a level of applicant that can comprehend quickly, learn quickly, and is most likely to complete that contract. That score goes up for each one of those individual criteria. So, what we are looking for, what you would see as far as job opportunities opening, you would see a lot of those STEM opportunities opening up to applicants, a lot of your more technical and your more academically rigorous job specialties would open up. And those also, you know, not surprisingly, those job options actually correlate better into civilian careers as well after military service, so any of our engineering jobs. I mean it is the same with each branch of service,

whether that be flight engineer for the Airforce, pilot, any kind of power plant maintenance, so that working on turbine engines for the Airforce and the Army, those jobs that would be opened up if you scored higher have a better civilian correlation on the backside of the contract as well.

Mr. Willcox: The military has been an all-volunteer army, we'll say, since the early seventies. How have the numbers maintained themselves in terms of enlistment, quality of enlistees, and whether those enlistment numbers have fluctuated in any given period or any combat situation?

Mr. Hall: We are currently in a period of right-sizing the army. And by right-sizing that means the size of the army for the army should be directly correlated to its need. We have also went through an expansive or extensive network of making an operational reserve component as well. So that way the reserve component is ready to be operational at any point in time. We are currently in a period that we are down-trending on the size of the army, and that is partly due to just the MOS, or the Military Occupational Specialties that are available. And then also just the requirement of soldiers, the official amount of soldiers that we need. For us, as far as the recruiting battalion, those numbers will stay pretty steady. For us, as far as the amount of people we have to initially get into the military, it may be on the other end, where the longer you serve, the more competitive it becomes to remain in the service, towards retirement or towards career progression, so that's really where you would see the change in the size of the army. For us the initial enlistment portion will remain pretty steady. We saw some periods of increase in 2007-2008 where we were required during the surge to have more general enlistments. That will come and go with the times. But the big thing right now that we're seeing is each of those military occupational specialties, the technology that these soldiers will be dealing with, the level of education that is required for both promotion and for just continuity of service has gone up, and so the quality of applicant has gone up as well. Nationally we see only about three out of ten military aged males, 17 to 24, fully qualify for military service, which is a little bit concerning. It could be health and fitness issues, whether they be overweight and just can't pass the physical assessment, moral convictions, so if they have something in their background that would keep them from service. All of our aviation mechanic positions require that there's no history of alcohol or drug abuse. So those are some of the disqualifiers that we see that brings that number down to around three of ten are fully qualified to enlist in the Army, so really the competitiveness to get into the military service, and that is why we termed this brief actually the Option of First Choice. In order for an applicant to be fully eligible this really has to be their first choice of what they want to do with their life, whether that be right after high school or after college and going into the career field.

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Mr. Willcox: Once you enlist, are there any requirements in terms of continuing education?

Mr. Hall: There are. So within their military occupation specialty, they are going to continue their career or their education automatically. So as you progress in rank, there's ALC or WLC, which is Warrior Leaders Course and Advanced Leaders Course, and Senior Leaders Course, within that specialty where they are automatically going to be going through an advanced education program. In order to remain competitive for promotion as well, you have to continue your civilian education. I would say roughly 80 percent of our enlisted force are pursuing a degree of some sort whether being associate or bachelor's degree. In order to be an officer, the current requirement is a bachelor's degree from an accredited university. We have about 98 percent of our officers are qualified at this point. Those that are not are either through the OCS programs

who are working towards degree completion or an early commissioning from one of the military schools. So, education is the backbone of success within the military. We also, for those who were just enlisting straight out of high school or actually coming off any gap in education, whether that be a 19-year-old that graduated 2 years ago or a year ago from high school and comes into our office, we have the ConAP program which is called Concurrent Admissions Program, where at the time of enlistment we are working with that applicant to apply to a college as well. We have over 300 participating colleges across the nation that will assist that soldier or that applicant in applying to their university to continue their education simultaneously of enlistment within the Army. So, education is really the driving force for success in the military, and it is almost a requirement to get promoted and to remain competitive against your peer group.

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Mr. Willcox: One of the questions that quite often comes to our office from local school divisions deals with the requirement for earning a standard diploma and using the ASVAB to satisfy that requirement. And that is one of the reasons that brought us together, in that in order to use the ASVAB to satisfy the standard diploma, the student must also complete one of the military science programs that are in the **CTE** manual. And when we explain that, we get the question, "Well, they can just take the ASVAB and go straight into the military?" Does that run afoul to your theme here of Optional First Choice? It tends to make me think that the military is not really after students anymore that are just going to take the ASVAB without demonstrating other academic and technical competence.

Mr. Hall: I do not think it runs afoul to it. I think it probably runs parallel to those and most of those students who are pursuing a CTE stamp for their diploma are those people who are looking to make themselves career-ready, which in reality the state, or the Commonwealth of Virginia, and with the military, all branches of the Department of Defense, having someone who is career-ready as soon as they graduate from high school is really key. So that, I do not think it runs afoul to it, but I do think it runs parallel in the fact that the goal is to maximize career readiness as soon as they exit from that secondary institution, whether that be they are ready to pursue a career or to go into their post-secondary education, whether that be technical, community college, or a 4-year institution. And really, I think it complements, you know, those goals within the CTE program. It is great that within the state of Virginia, which is not common across the nation, that we are able to certify a standard diploma and the CTE pathway would be ASVAB. I think it validates the test, and I think it also expresses the rigors that are required in order to be eligible to enlist in the military.

Mr. Willcox: Wonderful. Could school divisions, school counselors, or other personnel contact you directly if they have questions?

Mr. Hall: Yes, sir. And that is really my focus. I cover the majority of Virginia, and I do have the points of contact for those up in Northern Virginia that I do not personally cover, and any also across the border into West Virginia. I welcome people to contact me directly. It is really my job, so my focus within my position as an Education Service Specialist is really to communicate with civilian educators how they can use federal education programs, specifically Department of Defense, ASVAB, Career Exploration, March to Success, the Concurrent Admissions Program, all those, to fully integrate them into their guidance program and into their administrative platform and able to use federal dollars, save local district and state dollars so that they can be used in different ways and functions. We have so many federal programs that are available that

often go either not used or not used to their full potential, and that is really my job, so I welcome any kind of direct contact or anyone who would reach out to me.

Mr. Willcox: Great. We will show on the screen your contact information, phone number, and email address. We have covered an array of topics in this short period of time. Are there any closing comments that you would want to reinforce or anything that we did not discuss that would be important to know?

Mr. Hall: I think the biggest thing is that we want to encourage administrators, guidance counselors, teachers to just fully consider federal service as an option for the students. A lot of times we know military service is not listed on one of the 16 career clusters even though within military service all 16 career clusters are covered. We want, the perception has to be that this is an Option of First Choice for high-performing students. The eligibility requirements, the character that is required, the physical fitness that is required, really limits us to around 30 percent of the population, so that is really the emphasis that I would like to express is to help us fully ingrain the requirements that are already set for military service, and the honor, the education, and the opportunities that are available to those that make that commitment to the United States.

Mr. Willcox: Wonderful. It has been a pleasure to meet you, and we appreciate the partnership and assistance that you are providing our office in terms of ensuring that we are providing local school divisions accurate and up-to-date, current information about options to enlist in the various branches.

Mr. Hall: Yes, sir. Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. Willcox: Thank you very much. We hope that this program has been a benefit to CTE directors and also to school counselors. We would ask that you take a couple of minutes to complete the evaluation of this program. We utilize that information to continuously improve the type of professional development that is offered throughout the year. Again, thank you for participating in today's session, and we wish you a very productive 2016-17 school year.