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Military Youth Programs: ChalleNGe and STARBASE

Military youth programs are a type of civil-military cooperation in which military resources are used to assist young American civilians in a variety of ways. Typically, the programs provide civilian youth with educational and leadership opportunities in order to help them succeed as students and as adults. The programs are often targeted towards youth populations which are considered to be at disproportionately high risk for drug abuse, crime, academic failure, or unemployment.

The National Guard Challenge (ChalleNGe) program and the STARBASE (Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration) program are two relatively new military youth programs. ChalleNGe, currently a \$48 million program, is designed to help high school dropouts become more productive members of society by enhancing their skills, education, and employability. A boot camp followed by a mentored development period is used to achieve these results. STARBASE, currently a \$4 million program, is designed to stimulate interest in math, science and technology among younger children, particularly those in fourth through sixth grade. Hands-on educational programs, exposure to technological environments, and guidance by positive role models are used to achieve results. Both programs are targeted primarily, though not exclusively, towards minority and lower income youth; both use military facilities and National Guard or Reserve personnel.

This report provides background information on civil-military cooperation and military youth programs in general, and information on the ChalleNGe and STARBASE programs in particular. It provides a summary of each program's goals, curriculum, results, and funding levels, along with points of contact for further information. This report will not be updated.

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Legislative History of Recent Military Youth Programs

Military youth programs are a type of civil-military cooperation in which military resources are used to assist young American civilians in a variety of ways.¹ The main legislative impetus for recent military youth programs came after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact in 1990-91, which caused policy makers to reevaluate the focus of U.S. military activities. Senator Sam Nunn, then chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, was particularly supportive of an effort to utilize some military resources in addressing the domestic needs of the nation. He argued that “our society faces numerous domestic challenges that in many respects are as daunting as any potential foreign threat to our national security. While the Soviet threat is gone, we are still battling drugs, poverty, urban decay, lack of self esteem, unemployment, and racism...I am convinced that there is a proper and important role the Armed Forces can play in addressing many of these issues.”²

Congressional support for this concept led to the inclusion of several provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1993 which expanded the authority of the Department of Defense to use military resources to help meet domestic needs.³ One provision in the bill authorized the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, working in conjunction with the governors of up to 10 states, to establish a pilot program known as the National Guard Civilian Youth Opportunities Program.⁴ The purpose of the program was to “evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of military based training to improve the life skills and employability of high school dropouts.”⁵

After the 1994 elections, the new Republican majority in Congress took another look at civil-military cooperative programs. Arguing that scarce military dollars were being used for several social, health, and other civilian programs that did not directly contribute to the military’s warfighting mission, they scaled civil-military cooperation programs back significantly in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1996.⁶ Authority for the National Guard Civilian Youth Opportunities Program was extended until August, 1997, but the program’s authority was to be terminated at that time.⁷ Just after this temporary authorization ran out, however, the 105th Congress permanently reauthorized the program under the new name of “National Guard Challenge Program,”⁸ commonly referred to as the ChalleNGe program.⁹

¹ Civil-military cooperation has been a longstanding part of DoD’s mission to protect the national security of the United States. Historically, this has included responding to some domestic emergencies, such as large scale disasters and civil disturbances. The best known precedent for military involvement in the mitigation of domestic social problems is the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s.

² Sam Nunn, *Domestic Missions for the Armed Forces*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, February, 1993, 2.

³ P.L. 102-484, Secs. 1081 and 1091-95, October 23, 1992. 106 Stat. 2514-16 and 2519-36.

⁴ P.L. 102-484, Sec. 1091, October 23, 1992. 106 Stat. 2519.

⁵ United States Congress. *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993*. Conference Report. House Report No. 102-966, 764-5.

⁶ P.L. 104-106, Sec. 571, February 10, 1996. 110 Stat. 353.

⁷ P.L. 104-106, Sec. 573, February 10, 1996. 110 Stat. 355.

⁸ P.L. 105-85, Sec. 1076, November 18, 1997. 111 Stat. 1911. 32 U.S.C. 509.

⁹ The unusual capitalization used in the word “ChalleNGe” is taken from promotional materials which seek to highlight the connection between the program and the National Guard. As this unusual capitalization is the more common way of referring to the program, it is used throughout this report.

The STARBASE program has a background similar to that of ChalleNGe in some regards, but distinct in other ways. STARBASE was originally started as a privately funded initiative. Its purpose was to involve “at risk” youth in science, math, technology, goal setting, and positive life choices early on in their lives through hands-on educational programs, exposure to technological environments, and guidance by positive role models. In 1992, just three weeks before Congress authorized the predecessor of ChalleNGe in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1993, language was included in the DoD Appropriations Act for FY 1993 “to establish the STARBASE youth education program.”¹⁰ The conference report which accompanied the bill earmarked \$2 million for the program.¹¹ Since then, STARBASE has received federal funding each year, though the amount has varied.

There appears to have been a clear policy link between Congress’ decision to establish ChalleNGe in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 93 and its decision to fund STARBASE in the DoD Appropriations Act for FY 93; namely, a desire to utilize military resources to help young Americans -- especially those at risk for economic and social failure -- to lead more successful lives. This link was made clearer in the DoD Appropriations Act for FY 1994,¹² when Congress provided funding for ChalleNGe, STARBASE, and one other program under the common designation of “military youth programs.”¹³ However, it should be pointed out that the legislative authority (as distinct from funding) for DoD to get involved in a program like STARBASE has a different origin. In 1990, Congress was concerned that a projected shortage of scientists and engineers would have a negative effect on the nation’s defense capacity. In response to this concern, Congress included a provision in the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1991¹⁴ which authorized the Secretary of Defense “to sponsor and assist in science, mathematics, and technical education at all levels of education.”¹⁵ One subsection allowed the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Education, to “establish programs for the purpose of improving the mathematics and science knowledge and skills of elementary and secondary school students and faculty members.”¹⁶ This provision provides the statutory authority under which DoD supports a program like STARBASE and implicitly ties such programs, at least in part, to a specific national defense objective: ensuring an adequate supply of scientists and engineers within the national labor pool to meet defense needs.

The ChalleNGe Program

The ChalleNGe program is designed to improve the life skills and employment potential of certain high school dropouts. Applicants must meet certain eligibility standards in order to be admitted to the program. At a minimum, they must be between the ages of 16 and 18, drug free,

¹⁰ P.L. 102-396, October 6, 1992. 106 Stat 1882.

¹¹ U.S. Congress. *Department of Defense Appropriations Act for FY 1993*. Conference Report. House Report 102-1015, 80.

¹² P.L. 103-139, Nov. 11, 1993. 107 Stat. 1418 *et seq.*

¹³ U.S. Congress. *Department of Defense Appropriations Act for FY 1994*. Conference Report. House Report 103-339, 68-9.

¹⁴ P.L. 101-510, Sec. 247, November 5, 1990. 104 Stat. 1521 *et seq.*

¹⁵ U.S. Congress. *National Defense Authorization Act for FY 1991*. Conference Report. House Report No. 101-923, 564.

¹⁶ P.L. 101-510, Sec. 247, November 5, 1990. 104 Stat. 1521. 10 USC 2193 (b).

unemployed or underemployed, and be physically and mentally capable of participating. Negative involvement with the criminal justice system can also be grounds for ineligibility.¹⁷

The program consists of a 22-week long residential phase followed by a year long non-residential phase. The residential phase is conducted in a military style “boot camp” environment. This phase is typically conducted on a military base and staffed by state employees, some of whom may be members of the National Guard. The curriculum revolves around eight core components: leadership and followership, community service, job skills, academic excellence, responsible citizenship, life coping skills, physical fitness, and health, sex education and nutrition.¹⁸ A typical day in the residential phase of the program involves an hour of physical fitness training in the early morning, followed by six hours of instruction, an hour of military drill and ceremony, and two hours of study hall. Upon completion of the residential phase, ChalleNGe participants enter into a year long non-residential phase. During this phase, participants are eligible to receive stipends of up to \$2200 to assist them in pursuing educational or employment opportunities. They are also paired up with mentors, who work with them individually. The mentors assist the participants in making the transition from the imposed discipline of the residential phase to the self-discipline necessary for a productive life.

The program has achieved some notable successes. Between 1993 and 1997, over 14,000 individuals have graduated from the program. Based on the results of tests administered before and after completion of the program, the average ChalleNGe graduate achieved a 1.3 grade-level increase in reading and a 2.0 grade-level increase in math. Seventy-four percent passed the General Educational Development (GED) test.¹⁹ Each graduate also performed 60 hours of community service while enrolled in the program. One survey conducted in 1996 reported that “at the conclusion of the post-residential phases, and after a year of being out of the controlled ChalleNGe environment, 56.1% [of graduates] reported placements in the work force and 24.3% reported that they were continuing their education.”²⁰ Nonetheless, there has been some criticism of the program. This criticism relates not to the effectiveness or goals of the program, but to the broader issue of whether, in an era of tight military budgets, the Department of Defense should be spending money on a program that is not so distantly related to national defense and so closely aligned to other spending categories.

ChalleNGe is currently operating in 20 states.²¹ Fourteen other states, the District of Columbia, and one territory have applied for the program and are on a waiting list,²² pending the availability of funds. States on the waiting list are ranked in the order their application was received. Federal

¹⁷ Specifically, prospective participants are ineligible if they are on parole or probation for other than juvenile status offenses, serving time or awaiting sentencing, under indictment or charged with a crime, or have been convicted of a felony or capital offense.

¹⁸ Social Consultants International. *The National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program: A Comprehensive Report - 1996*. Arlington, Virginia, 1996, 7.

¹⁹ According to Colonel Maynard K. Bean, Director of Commonwealth ChalleNGe (Virginia), this GED attainment rate compared very favorably with other state programs. He stated “Of our graduates 74 percent have earned their GED diploma. This percentage is substantially higher than other State programs in Virginia, which average about 58 percent.” United States Congress. House of Representatives. *Hearings on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997*. H.N.S.C. Report 104-27. September 24, 1996, 1364.

²⁰ Social Consultants International, 39-40.

²¹ Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Also, Puerto Rico and Oregon have six to ten week “mini-ChalleNGe” programs.

²² Michigan, Nebraska, Puerto Rico, Florida, Texas, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Kansas, Montana, Indiana, Washington, New Mexico, Alabama, District of Columbia, and Kentucky. (Ordered by date of application).

funding for Challenge in FY 1998 is \$48 million. Participating states are required to share some of the cost of funding the program. The federal-state cost sharing ratio in FY 1998 is 75-25. It will shift to 70-30 in FY 1999, 65-35 in FY 2000, and 60-40 in FY 2001 and beyond. The shifting ratio of cost sharing will probably free up enough funds to establish a Challenge program in one or two more states, assuming that the federal contribution to the program remains at a level comparable to FY 1998. However, assuming the federal-state cost sharing ratios mentioned above, the federal contribution would have to be increased to about \$85 million to establish a program in all the states on the waiting list. The federal contribution would have to be increased to about \$110 million to establish a Challenge program in every state and territory.

The STARBASE Program

STARBASE is an acronym for Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration. The goal of the program is to “ignite the interest of at-risk youth in science, math, technology, goal setting, and positive life choices”²³ through hands-on educational programs, exposure to technological environments, and guidance by positive role models. The STARBASE program was initially established in 1991 with a grant from the W.H. Kellogg Foundation, but since 1993 it has been a federally funded program.

STARBASE facilities are most often located at Air National Guard bases, although the Air Force Reserve and the Navy have also established facilities on their bases and the Marine Corps is considering doing so as well. Students from targeted local schools — those schools with substantial minority or lower income populations — are brought to the STARBASE facility for five days, usually one day each week for five consecutive weeks. During this time, they receive instruction in scientific and mathematical principles, conduct experiments, witness high-tech equipment demonstrations, and interact with positive role models. The curriculum varies depending on the resources available at the local facility and the age of the students. The curriculum can be adapted to suit students from kindergarten through twelfth grade, but currently operating programs tend to focus on students in the fourth through sixth grade. A typical day for a fourth to sixth grade class might include instruction on the basic principles of flight, construction and launch of a model rocket, a tour of a military airplane, and interaction with military pilots and flight crews. Themes of self-respect, goal-setting, and drug avoidance are often incorporated throughout the day.

Since the program’s inception in 1991, over 75,000 children have participated in STARBASE activities and approximately 3,000 teachers have been trained on how to incorporate a more hands-on approach into their math and science curricula. A 1996 program evaluation by Social Consultants International²⁴ stated that, based on tests given before and after participation in STARBASE, students showed a 30% improvement in answers to math and science questions. The evaluation also stated that STARBASE participants acquired a more positive attitude towards math and science and improved their ability to set goals. However, there is a lack of quantitative data regarding the long-term impact of this program. As such, it is not known whether STARBASE influences children in subsequent academic achievement and pursuit of careers in math, science, and technological fields later in life. This absence of data makes it difficult to accurately assess the relationship between the program’s cost and its social benefits. Supporters of the program plan to conduct more research into long term effects in the future. Additionally, like the Challenge program, STARBASE receives criticism for depleting money from the

²³ STARBASE brochure, 1997, 2.

²⁴ Cited in STARBASE brochure, 1997, 1.

Department of Defense that might be better spent on programs more closely related to national defense.

In addition to the original site in Michigan, the program currently operates at military sites in 14 other states and one territory.²⁵ Sites may be added in South Carolina and Louisiana in 1999, depending on the availability of funds. Federal funding for STARBASE in FY 1998 was \$4 million. Expansion of the program to additional locations would cost about \$300,000 per site.

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²⁵ California, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Wyoming and Puerto Rico.