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Military Recruiter Access to High Schools

Improving Policy and Practice



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Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

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About This Report

Graduating high school students are a critical source of new recruits for the U.S. military. The military services have struggled to meet recruiting goals in recent years, and military recruiters' access to high schools is essential. Despite federal statutes that require military recruiter access to high schools, schools are often unclear about these requirements, and recruiters' access to high schools can be limited. The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, Accession Policy, asked the RAND Corporation to provide the U.S. Department of Defense with analysis and recommendations on how to improve recruiters' access to high schools and the process for gaining compliance from noncompliant schools.

The research reported here was completed in June 2023 and underwent security review with the sponsor and the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review before public release.

RAND National Security Research Division

This research was sponsored by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, Accession Policy and conducted within the Personnel, Readiness, and Health Program of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD), which operates the National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense intelligence enterprise.

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the support of our sponsor, Stephanie Miller, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel Policy. We would like to thank Dennis Drogo (Assistant Director, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel Policy, Accession Policy) and Evelyn Dyer for their continued support throughout the study.

We would like to thank the many school representatives and recruiters who provided their time to participate in interviews and invaluable feedback on issues of school access.

We offer our appreciation to Molly McIntosh and Daniel Ginsberg, Director and Associate Director of the Personnel, Readiness, and Health Program, for their guidance throughout the project. We thank Nelson Lim and former RAND colleagues Monica Mean, Christopher Maerzluft, and Monica Rico for their contributions to the study. Kirsten Keller provided valuable quality assurance support throughout the project, and we also appreciate the careful reviews of drafts of this report by our external reviewer, Russell Beland. Clifford Grammich provided valuable assistance with communicating the ideas in this report.

Summary

Issue

In recent years, the U.S. military has struggled to meet its recruitment goals. In fiscal year (FY) 2022, the Army, the service requiring the most personnel, achieved only 75 percent of its recruiting goal, while other branches fell behind as they entered FY 2023 (Baldor, 2023; Barno and Bensahel, 2023).

Access to high schools is among the most effective methods available to military recruiters to reach potential recruits. Federal statutes require that military recruiters be given the same access to high schools that colleges and employers receive. Yet many schools are unclear on their obligations, and enforcement mechanisms are not well understood. As a result, the access that military recruiters have to military schools varies widely. In this report, we sought to address the following questions:

1. What school and neighborhood characteristics influence recruiter access?
2. What is the level of recruiter access to and nature of cooperation with high schools? What school policies or practices hinder recruiter access?
3. What policies and practices are needed to improve recruiter access to high schools?

Approach

We used a mixed-methods approach, including both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Our quantitative data on public schools included challenges recruiters faced with recruiting students, school and community characteristics, presidential election voting for the county in which the school is located, and proximity to recruiter station locations. Our qualitative data included interviews with military recruiters and school representatives. To our knowledge, this topic has not previously been systematically examined. Therefore, this report provides unique insights and understanding of recruiter issues, as well as recommendations for improving it.

Key Findings

- Overall, recruiters identified 5.3 percent of high schools as failing to provide what they considered to be adequate access. The most common problems were schools not complying with the law by failing to provide contact information for students, not allowing recruiters access, or both. Fewer schools limited recruiter access than failed to provide student contact information.

- Access problems varied by state, with up to 14 percent of schools in some states failing to comply with the law or provide adequate access.
- Controlling for school and neighborhood characteristics, we found access problems to be greater in large schools, schools with lower proportions of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch, schools with higher proportions of Asian students, and schools in urban areas. We did not find differences by political leanings of school communities, the presence of military or veteran populations, or the proximity of recruiter stations to schools.
- In our interviews, recruiters reported no standard process for gaining access to high schools. Appropriate contact information is often lacking on school websites.
- Schools vary widely in the access they give to on-campus recruiters, including providing recruiters with student contact lists, frequency of visits, and level of engagement with students.
- Our interviewees noted that past negative interactions with recruiters or local community bias against the military can pose a barrier to access. Local school policies may also limit access.
- Accountability systems for recruiters to report access concerns may not be well understood or inconsistently implemented, according to our interviews with recruiters, despite relevant guidance being provided to the services by the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) Accession Policy Directorate.
- Processes for reporting recruiter misconduct also lack consistency.
- Recruiters noted a lack of training on identifying and adapting to local school context but noted that having school alumni as recruiters can help improve access.
- School representatives noted two ways that recruiters could help build relationships with schools. One is greater education on military benefits and opportunities. The other is becoming more involved in school activities and the broader school community, such as helping with school events or coaching teams.

Recommendations

- To build stronger relationships between recruiters and high schools, the services should engage with high schools to encourage schools to make contacting procedures clearer to recruiters, and recruiters should develop an understanding of the high school environment, invest in general activities to build high school buy-in, and develop procedures to systematically document effective engagement and activities with high schools.
- To optimize recruiter structure and capacity, the military should pay attention to recruiter characteristics that may help build relationships with schools, provide training on the school environment, and provide incentives for relationship-building activities.

- The services should review their current infrastructure for reporting and accountability related to school access compliance to ensure that their systems capture relevant information and to optimize use by DoD leaders and the services.
- The services should ensure that schools have access to information on reporting recruiter misconduct and transparency on actions taken in response to complaints or concerns.
- DoD and the services should work closely with state departments of education to encourage clear communication to high schools about federal regulations on military recruiter access. In the absence of clear federal definitions of “adequate” levels of access, states could provide guidelines to high schools and their districts to inform their access practices.
- The services should also provide clearer guidance to their recruiters regarding federal regulations.
- Representatives of the services, such as education service specialists or education specialists, could encourage school districts to take a more active role in reviewing their access policies and practices, as well as any additional school-specific policies, to ensure that they are aligned with federal requirements. The services could have a supportive role in this effort if school districts wish to engage them.

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Introduction

In recent years, the U.S. military has struggled to meet its recruitment goals. In fiscal year (FY) 2022, the Army, the service requiring the most personnel, achieved only 75 percent of its recruiting goal, while other branches fell behind as they entered FY 2023 (Baldor, 2023; Barno and Bensahel, 2023). There are also concerns that the U.S. military's All-Volunteer Force is at a breaking point and that there is a need to attract new recruits (Wellman, 2023).

Recruiting at high schools is an effective method to successfully meet manning requirements of the All-Volunteer Force and ensure that the services have the troops they need to help defend the nation (Baldor, 2023). High schools are critical venues for recruiters as they seek to provide information about military careers to the widest relevant audience (Kilburn and Asch, 2003).

However, recruiters have been facing challenges in accessing high schools. A 2017 poll of recruiters conducted by the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) Joint Advertising Market Research and Studies (JAMRS) program found that 52 percent were denied what they considered to be "appropriate access" to high schools (JAMRS, unpublished). Even when access was provided to recruiters in accordance with legal requirements, there were concerns that for some high schools the level of access fell short of what is needed for effective recruiting. More recently, U.S. Army leaders have acknowledged that high school access sometimes is a challenge and have started visiting high schools and talking to stakeholders to understand what the military can do better to reach young people and convince them that the military is a good career choice (Baldor, 2023). New legislation, the Military Service Promotion Act, is also being introduced by a group of senators to allow recruiters greater access to high schools by obligating high schools to respond to recruiter access requests within 60 days, as well as forcing high schools to allow military recruiters to attend career fairs and similar events (Wellman, 2023).

Beyond the question of access, the recruiting environment is becoming more challenging. The military must now compete with other large companies that are offering high school students substantial compensation and college tuition assistance (Winkie, 2022). This competition makes it even more critical for military recruiting efforts that recruiters have access to high schools to educate students on the competitive opportunities the military offers.

Given the competition and the challenges that military recruiters face, the Office of Accession Policy within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs asked the RAND Corporation to research the military recruiting environ-

ment among high schools and students and how recruiters might gain better access to high schools and improve recruiting relationships.

We begin in this chapter with a brief overview of the DoD military recruiting system, by summarizing federal policies surrounding military recruiter access to high schools and the limited research that has been done on this topic. We then explore recent issues that recruiters have faced. Chapter 2 explains our study objectives and methods. Chapter 3 presents a quantitative analysis of the landscape for recruiters seeking to access high schools. Chapter 4 summarizes findings from interviews with recruiters and school representatives regarding access. Chapter 5 presents our conclusions and recommendations.

Department of Defense Military Recruiting System

Military service members typically serve in recruiter assignments for about three years, after which most return to an assignment in their primary career field. DoD military recruiting is managed by separate recruiting commands for each of the military services.¹ Each service establishes yearly accession goals, driven by the desired end strength for the year, including the mix of backgrounds and skills desired. These yearly accession goals are filtered down to monthly goals and further refined at the recruiting station by supervisors who provide accession or contract goals to the individual recruiters. Often these goals at the local level take into account past productivity in the local area. While the general DoD military recruiting system framework is consistent across the services, each service tailors its approach to meet its unique needs. The number of high schools and size of the geographic area assigned to an individual recruiter varies significantly by service (e.g., some services may assign a greater number of recruiters to a recruiting station than other services) and location (e.g., recruiters in rural areas cover a greater geographic area than those in urban areas). The number of recruiters for each supervisor also varies.

Federal Policies

Congress has passed a series of statutes that seek to effectively expand the pool of recruit candidates to students of educational institutions. The Solomon Amendment of 1996 systematically addressed recruiting in postsecondary institutions, but legislation and policies regarding recruiting in high schools have been more piecemeal (Burrelli and Feder, 2009). The legislation regarding recruiter access to high schools has often lacked clarity on what high schools are expected to do to provide adequate access to military recruiters. This has led to wide variation in recruiter experiences in accessing high schools.

¹ Air Force Recruiting Services recruits for both the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Space Force.

Early legislation allowed the Secretary of Defense to collect directory information on each 11th- and 12th-grade student enrolled in a U.S. secondary school (Burrelli and Feder, 2009). School compliance with this legislation was voluntary, as nothing in the law authorized the Secretary to require any educational institution to furnish the information. In 2000, **Title 10** of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2001 (Pub. L. 106-398, 2000), commonly referred to as the **Hutchinson Amendment**, mandated that public high schools provide recruiter access to campuses and lists of enrolled 11th- and 12th-grade students (private and religious schools were exempt from this requirement). The language also delineated a process on how to deal with noncompliant schools. The Hutchinson Amendment was strengthened under the **NDAAs for FYs 2002 and 2004** (Pub. L. 107-107, 2001; Pub. L. 108-136, 2003), which highlighted the mandatory aspect of military access to high schools and indicated that only parents (or students with parent consent) can opt out of the process that would provide a student's contact information to recruiters.

The **No Child Left Behind Act of 2001** (NCLB) (Pub. L. 107-110, 2002) further firmed up earlier language on military access in two ways. First, although it did not delineate what military access to high school entails, it defined adequate military access to high school "as the same access to secondary school students as [schools] provide to postsecondary institutions or to prospective employers." Second, it specified that for public education institutions to receive federal funds, they must, on request, provide military recruiters access to directory information (Feder, 2009). Opt-out provisions were included as before.

The 2015 **Every Student Succeeds Act** (ESSA) (Pub. L. 114-95, 2015) replaced NCLB. It maintained the requirement for schools to provide military recruiters with the same access that other postsecondary recruiters received, as well as with relevant student data, while including individual opt-out provisions (King, 2016). It also included several revisions. First, ESSA removed the ability of secondary school students under 18 years of age to request that their information not be disclosed without their parent's prior written consent (King, 2016). Second, it clarified that eligible secondary schools could use no system other than an "opt-out" process to withhold access to student data (King, 2016). A school could not, for example, use an "opt-in" process in which only students who agreed to disclose their names would have their contact information provided to recruiters.

Like NCLB, ESSA includes exceptions for schools that do not receive federal funding (King, 2016). Also like previous legislation, ESSA stipulates that schools required to but not complying with recruiter access provisions could lose federal funding. Nevertheless, the federal government has yet to exercise its right to enforce ESSA's military recruitment statutes with schools that are out of compliance (Kime, 2019).

We did not find any state laws that further govern military recruiter access. We did find examples of school- and district-specific policies aimed at regulating military recruiter

access.² For example, we found a few districts and high schools that set policies that limit the number of visits recruiters can make to a high school within a year. They limited recruiters to designated areas on campus and prohibited recruiters from getting contact information directly from students. Because such policies do not prohibit all access, but only set specific parameters regarding access, they may not be considered against the law, which does not clearly define what “adequate” access is.

Review of Military Recruiter Access to High Schools

The goal of our review was to shed light on concerns or factors that we would want to include in our analytic framework and investigate systematically.

We searched for literature on military recruitment and utilized multiple terms, such as *military recruitment in high schools*, *barriers to military recruitment*, *challenges to recruitment*, and *motivators to recruiting*. (See Appendix A for more information.) There is no systematic research on military access to high schools and what affects it. There have been commentaries, court cases, and nonresearch reports on the issue that delineate concerns regarding military recruiters on high school campuses and the challenges and facilitators to access. We discuss our review of these documents below.

One concern is the perception among some parents and educators that military recruiters disproportionately target low-income students and students of color (Kershner and Harding, 2015). Those raising this concern view military recruitment as limiting disadvantaged students’ educational and career opportunities. More specifically, those with such concerns have suggested that military recruiters entice low-income students and students of color by marketing the financial benefits of joining the military, including educational benefits, while downplaying the limitations of the benefits and the racial discrimination that may occur in the military.

Other research suggests that structural facilitators and barriers to the military accessing high schools include community political affiliation and school location. There is ample research showing that political affiliation is linked to confidence in the military, with those who identify as Republicans having more confidence in the military than do those who identify as Democrats or Independents (NORC at the University of Chicago, General Social Survey Data Explorer, undated). This suggests that communities with certain political leanings may be more likely to have parents and principals who are more open to having mili-

² In 2010, the San Diego Unified School District Board of Education voted to regulate military and college recruiting at district schools:

According to the policy, recruiters would have to stay in assigned areas on campus, sign in at the main office and would not be able to approach students. Students would have to initiate contact.

The policy also restricts recruiters from requesting contact information from students. Recruiters would only be able to provide their own contact information, giving students the option to contact them outside of school. (“San Diego Schools Restrict Military Recruiters,” 2010)

tary recruiters in schools, because they tend to have more trust in and enthusiasm about the military.

While there is no documentation on differences in recruiter access in urban or rural settings, Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) programs are underrepresented in rural areas in about two-thirds of states (Goldman et al., 2017). This suggests that urbanicity might affect military recruiter access to high schools in rural areas to the extent that high schools with JROTC programs are more welcoming to military recruiters.

Still other concerns may affect recruiter access. Incidents of coercion, deception, abuse, and other forms of misconduct by recruiters have been documented ("Army Recruiters Accused of Misleading Students to Get Them to Enlist," 2006; American Civil Liberties Union, 2008). These recruiting incidents, some of which were reported during the Iraq War, have undermined the credibility of military recruitment efforts. Cases of recruiter misconduct may promote the belief among parents and school administrators that military recruiters might endanger students or take advantage of those too young to understand the commitment of enlistment.

Misunderstandings over proper procedures, as well as conflicts with school events and scheduling, can also limit recruiter access to candidates (Lagotte, 2014).

Of course, not all recruiters may face all these challenges. To better identify the challenges that a recruiter is likely to face, we conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses of the recruiting environment among secondary schools and students. According to our review, this is the first systematic analysis of issues that recruiters face in accessing secondary schools and their students. We turn next to our methods for this analysis.

Study Objectives and Methodology

To improve military recruiter access to high schools, we sought to understand facilitators and hindrances to access, the experiences of recruiters and high schools in negotiating access, and policies surrounding access. Specifically, we sought to answer the following questions:

1. What school and neighborhood characteristics influence recruiter access?
2. What is the level of recruiter access to and nature of cooperation with high schools?
What school policies or practices hinder recruiter access?
3. What policies and practices are needed to improve recruiter access to high schools?

Methodology

We used a mixed-methods approach, including both quantitative and qualitative analyses. This allowed us to examine a variety of aspects regarding military recruitment in high schools. We describe below the primary components of our approach.

Quantitative Analyses

We used quantitative analyses to address the first question, regarding school and neighborhood characteristics influencing recruiter access. We generated data to answer this question by merging multiple school- and neighborhood-level datasets. Specifically, we linked the 2017 DoD dataset on high school recruiters who reported access challenges with the 2019 population of public schools identified by DoD. The 2017 DoD dataset included high school names and addresses, and descriptions of the challenges posed by the high schools as reported by recruiters. To examine noncompliance and access distribution, we grouped recruiter self-reported challenges into four categories: (1) no student list (high schools did not provide recruiters with student lists, as required by law), (2) no recruiter access (high schools did not allow recruiters to access their campus, and thus military recruiting activities were not implemented), (3) limited access (high schools limited the type and frequency of military recruitment activities), and (4) more than one challenge (high schools posed multiple challenges for recruiter access—a combination of challenges from categories 1 through 3). Each category was assigned to a high school. For the statistical analysis, we grouped all four categories mentioned above into one category, coded 1, to reflect “school posed challenges to

recruiter,” because the majority of high schools that posed challenges to recruiters were non-compliant (either did not provide student lists or allow any access to recruiters or both). The remaining schools in the merged dataset were coded 0, reflecting “no challenges.”

To this merged data, we appended 2017 data from the National Center on Education Statistics’ Common Core of Data, which provide information on school location, size, and student characteristics. We identified the neighborhood each high school covers and, using 2015 American Community Survey data, identified poverty levels, as well as veteran and military population percentages. We also matched each high school with data on the recruiter station closest to it. Finally, we matched each high school with county-level presidential election returns to identify the political leaning of the community. We excluded from our analysis high schools administered by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) and the Bureau of Indian Education. These schools are not operated by the states and have different contexts. Appendix B provides more information on the datasets.

Once we constructed this dataset, we conducted logistic regression on 19,184 public high schools to identify high school and community variables that are associated with recruiter access. Table B.1 in Appendix B lists the variables.

Qualitative Analysis

To answer our second and third research questions, we conducted in-depth case studies of high schools and recruiters in four states: California, Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. We selected these states because of the prevalence of schools within them that prohibit or limit access by military recruiters and because they represent different regions of the United States.

We sought to achieve across these four states a good representation of high schools with and without recruiter access challenges, regardless of whether the two groups of schools were similar in characteristics.¹ At each high school that agreed to cooperate with us, we interviewed personnel—typically the principal, vice principal, or guidance counselor—who had the most experience with military recruiters. For recruiter interviews, the Office of Accession Policy identified recruiter stations across the DoD military branches and provided a list of recruiters and their supervisors to contact and interview.

We developed a set of interview protocols to gather information about (1) the ways in which military recruiters access high schools, (2) activities recruiters engage in, and (3) the nature of partnerships between high schools and recruiters. To cover these topics but allow for others to emerge, we used semi-structured in-depth interviews that included open-ended questions with supplemental probes to examine specific topics. The protocols were common

¹ Initially, we sought to identify pairs of high schools within each state that are similar in characteristics but vary in recruiter access. We conducted propensity score matching (a statistical technique that allows analysts to identify a comparison group with similar observable characteristics as the group being investigated) and identified the paired schools, but this design would have ultimately required both paired high schools to participate in the study. Given the challenges of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the demands on the time of school personnel, we modified the high school selection design.

across the sites but differed for each type of interviewee. We conducted interviews with high school personnel across 17 high schools and two districts and 23 recruiters/supervisors covering all DoD military branches. Appendix C provides details about the characteristics of our interview sample, and Appendix D provides our full interview protocols.

To analyze the interview data, we considered four major topical domains: (1) process for contacting a high school, (2) military recruiting activities at high schools, (3) barriers and facilitators to access, and (4) relationship-building between military recruiters and high schools. We extracted text associated with a particular domain and created subthemes or subcodes within each domain and compared them across contexts and groups of interviewees. Appendix C provides more details about our qualitative methodology.

Study Limitations

Our study has limitations. Existing datasets do not capture all school and neighborhood characteristics. Hence, there may be unobserved variables affecting recruiter access that we have not accounted for. For example, the dataset does not quantify recruiter activities or processes or the amount of training that recruiters received or include other community characteristics, such as population density around high schools. Hence, we cannot determine whether such variables affect access. Although the analysis looked at recruiter self-report regarding access, the dataset did not include other measures related to access, such as recruiting success. A future study might want to include such outcome measures, if they are made available by DoD for every high school.

Given that the number of high schools in the dataset not allowing or limiting access is relatively small, we cannot detect all predictors of access limits. Nevertheless, the logistic regression we used is appropriate for analyzing the data, given that we have an adequate number of high schools in each group. We were able to identify few structural predictors that are associated with recruiter access.

For the qualitative component, only one of the 17 high schools that we selected for interviews was located in Florida. This limits the applicability of our results to other schools in the state. Similarly, our case study findings reflect a specific set of high schools and associated recruiters and cannot be interpreted to represent practices across the nation. While our sample was not intended to be representative of schools across the nation and thus not generalizable, interviews revealed similar themes across states, indicating findings that may be relevant beyond the case studies included in our sample. Although the case study data were self-reported, we enhanced the validity of our findings by interviewing multiple high school staff, as well as recruiters and their supervisors. Obtaining data from multiple sources is commonly done in qualitative research to extract reliable information for complex issues. We also observed common themes across high schools, recruiters, and states, which increases our confidence in the results.

Although our quantitative analysis of the challenges recruiters had experienced is based on 2017 data, our interviews were conducted in 2022 and 2023. This may mean that interviewees are reflecting concerns that are not evident in the earlier quantitative data, or that the quantitative data point to difficulties that interviewees were not encountering. Given this limitation, we do not focus our qualitative findings on possible trends within schools.

The study does not quantify level of recruiter access in comparison with college and civilian employer access, as this was beyond the study scope and relies on recruiter self-report.

As indicated earlier, there is, to our knowledge, no previous research that has used both quantitative and qualitative data to explore military recruiter access to secondary schools, including recruiter practices, relationships with high schools, and facilitators and barriers to access in multiple states. Thus, despite the limitations noted above, this work provides the first systematic analysis of recruiter access to secondary schools, providing unique insights and advancing our understanding of these issues while offering actionable recommendations.

Structural Factors Influencing Recruiter Access to Public High Schools

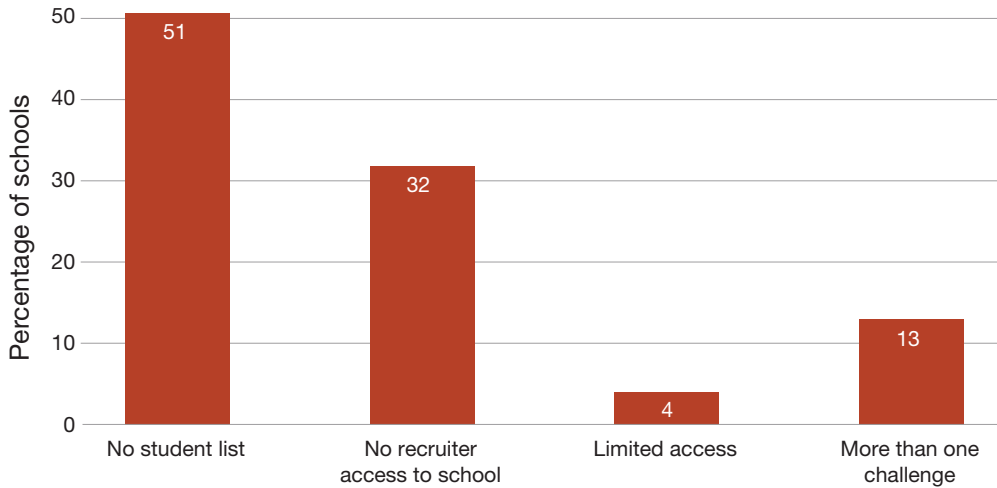
To answer our first research question, on how school and neighborhood characteristics may influence recruiter access, we rely on the merged dataset we describe in Chapter 2. We first start by describing the distribution of high schools that were reported by recruiters as not complying with the federal law regarding access. Specifically, we note the proportion of schools posing access challenges and some common characteristics among them.

We found that recruiters indicated that 1,107 public high schools—5.3 percent of all public high schools in our database—posed access challenges. Figure 3.1 illustrates the distribution of these challenges among schools posing them. The most common challenge military recruiters faced was high schools not providing student names, as required by federal law. Prohibitions of recruiter access to schools were also common. About 83 percent of the schools were noncompliant: 51 percent did not provide student lists to recruiters. And 32 percent did not allow any access. Recruiters reported that 4 percent of the high schools posed challenges limiting their level of access. Among more-specific limitations to access that recruiters noted were schools not providing them with the same access that colleges had, limiting their visitation on campus to no more than one day per semester, not allowing them to participate in college fairs, not advertising the recruiters' presence to students, and not allowing recruiters to talk to students. Finally, 13 percent of the high schools posed multiple challenges: a combination of noncompliance and limiting access. For example, some recruiters indicated that these high schools provided them with neither student lists nor any access to students. Other recruiters reported that these schools did not provide them with student lists and limited their access.

Access challenges varied by state. As Figure 3.2 shows, recruiter challenges with high schools were more common in the West and Northeast. The proportion of high schools by state posing access challenges ranged from 0 to 14 percent (see Table B.2 in Appendix B). High schools in only four states (Alaska, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and Vermont) were not reported to deny student lists or prohibit or limit recruiter access.

Most high schools for which recruiters reported having access challenges were in urban and suburban areas, where most U.S. high schools are located. Only 26 of 1,455 rural high schools (1.8 percent) posed access challenges (Table B.3 in Appendix B). These 26 rural high schools were distributed across 14 states.

FIGURE 3.1
Percentage of High Schools Posing Access Challenge, by Type of Challenge
(n = 1,107)



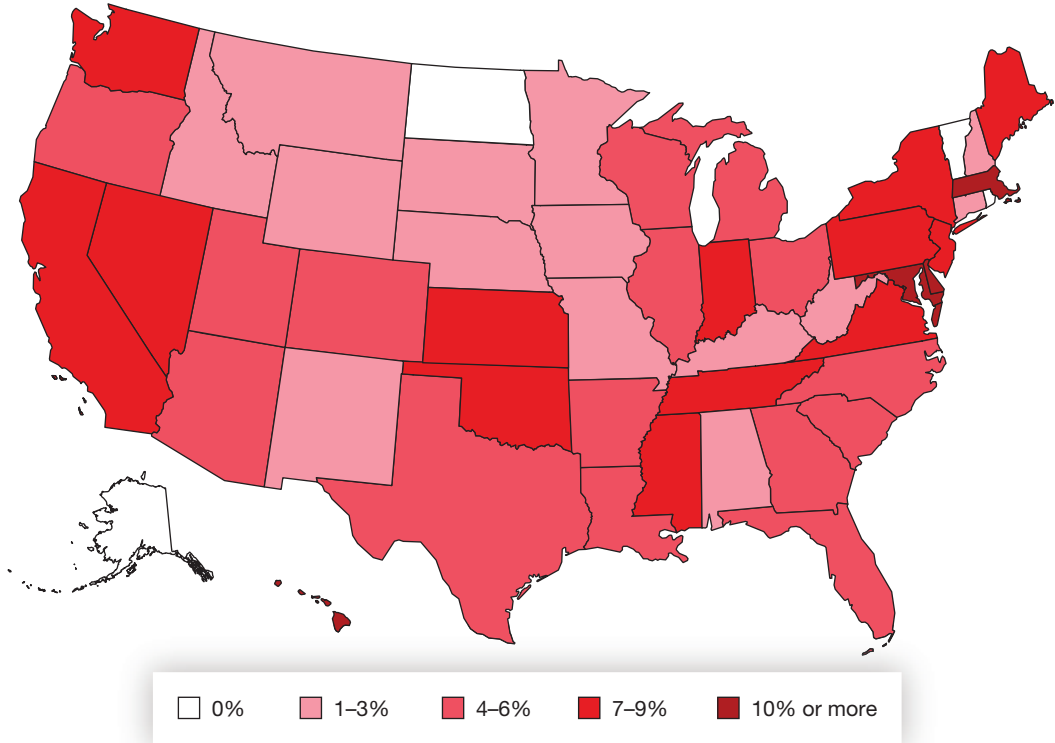
NOTE: *No student list* refers to high schools that did not provide military recruiters with student lists as required by law. *No recruiter access to school* refers to high schools that did not allow recruiters any access, and thus no recruitment activities were implemented. *Limited access* refers to high schools that limited the type and frequency of recruitment activities. *More than one challenge* refers to high schools that posed multiple challenges for recruiter access that include a combination of *No student list* and *No recruiter access to school* or *No student list* and *Limited access*.

Using logistic regression analysis, we also identified characteristics that may explain why some high schools allow access and others did not. We selected variables for this analysis based on their availability and our review of military access in Chapter 1. For example, our review suggests that high schools might resist providing recruiter access if they have a large proportion of low-income students or students of color (Kershner and Harding, 2015). We therefore included in our predictive model student socioeconomic characteristics. Similarly, we reviewed commentaries that suggest that political affiliation and openness of communities to the military might affect recruiter access (NORC at the University of Chicago, General Social Survey Data Explorer, undated). Hence, we included variables on political affiliation of a high school's community, as well as on the proportions of veterans or military families living in a high school's community. We also include in our analysis school size and urbanicity (see Table B.1 in Appendix B).

The statistical model explains 4 percent of why recruiters will encounter limitations to accessing high schools. That is, school and structural factors included in the statistical model, together, explain a very small percentage of the variation we see in the outcome of interest (whether or not recruiters had access to a school). This is because not all relevant factors that affect access are captured in the available datasets.

Nevertheless, our model, and the odds ratios we calculate from it, suggest that some characteristics may affect recruiter access while others do not. The odds ratios we examine show

FIGURE 3.2
Proportion of High Schools, by State, Posing Access Challenges to Recruiters



the probability of access difficulties for a school with a given characteristic, assuming that all other characteristics are held constant (see Table B.4 in Appendix B).

Figure 3.3 shows the probability of a recruiter reporting access restrictions at schools of varying sizes. We find that recruiter access is challenged as school student population increases. Specifically, we find that a recruiter would be four times more likely to report access restrictions to a school with 6,000 students than at a school with 1,000 students and otherwise identical characteristics. Perhaps recruiters experience more difficulty understanding and navigating the procedures of gaining access to larger high schools, and more difficulty in developing close relationships with administrators and guidance counselors because of the large number of them, as well as the broad duties of top administrators (Tajalli and Opheim, 2004).

FIGURE 3.3
Probability of Recruiter Access Restrictions, by Number of Students in School

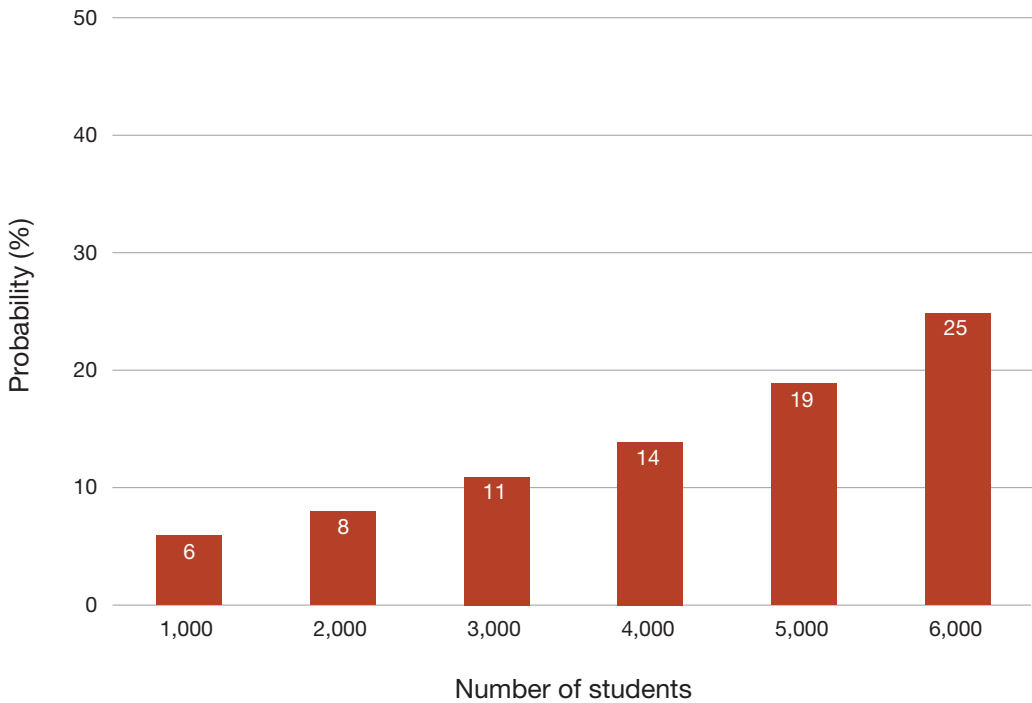


Figure 3.4 shows the probability of access restrictions by the proportion of Asian students in a school. Our model suggests that recruiters are about twice as likely to report access restrictions at schools where Asian students make up 50 percent of the student body than they are at schools where Asian students make up 10 percent or less of the student population. We did not find statistically significant differences in level of access by differing proportions for students of other racial or ethnic groups.

FIGURE 3.4
Probability of Recruiter Access Restrictions, by Proportion of Asian Students in School

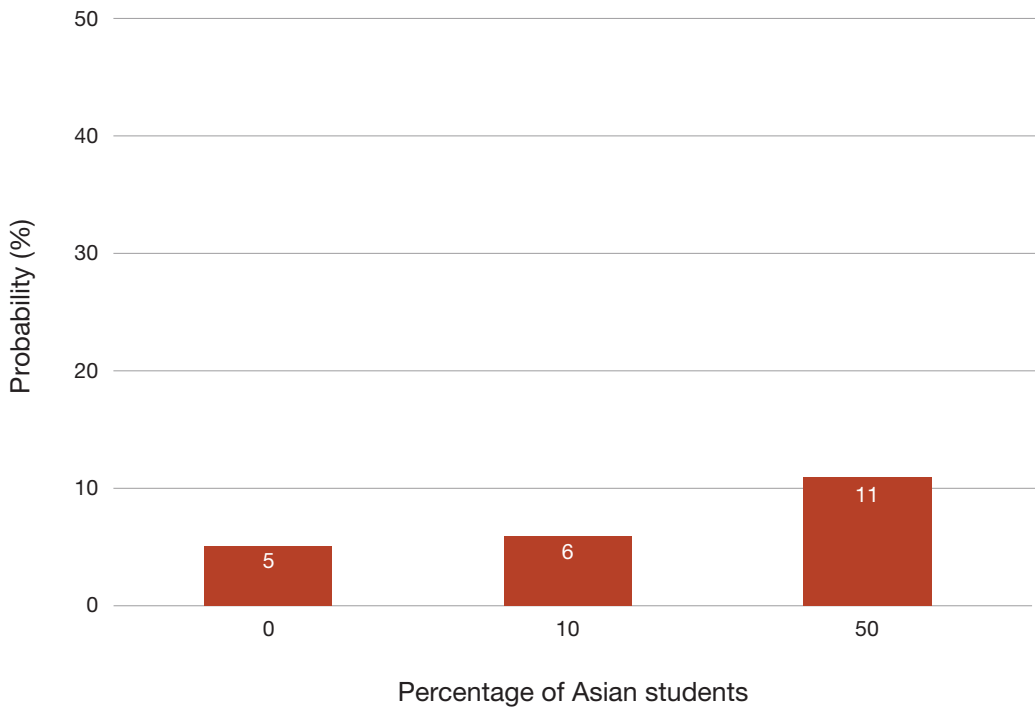


Figure 3.5 shows that recruiters are less likely to report access restrictions at schools with a high proportion of students receiving a free or reduced-price lunch than they are at other schools. The differences here, however, are small. For example, while our model predicts a 5 percent probability of access restrictions for a school where all students receive a free or reduced-price lunch, it predicts only a 7 percent probability for a school where no students receive such a lunch.

FIGURE 3.5
Probability of Recruiter Access Restrictions, by Percentage of Students Participating in Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Program

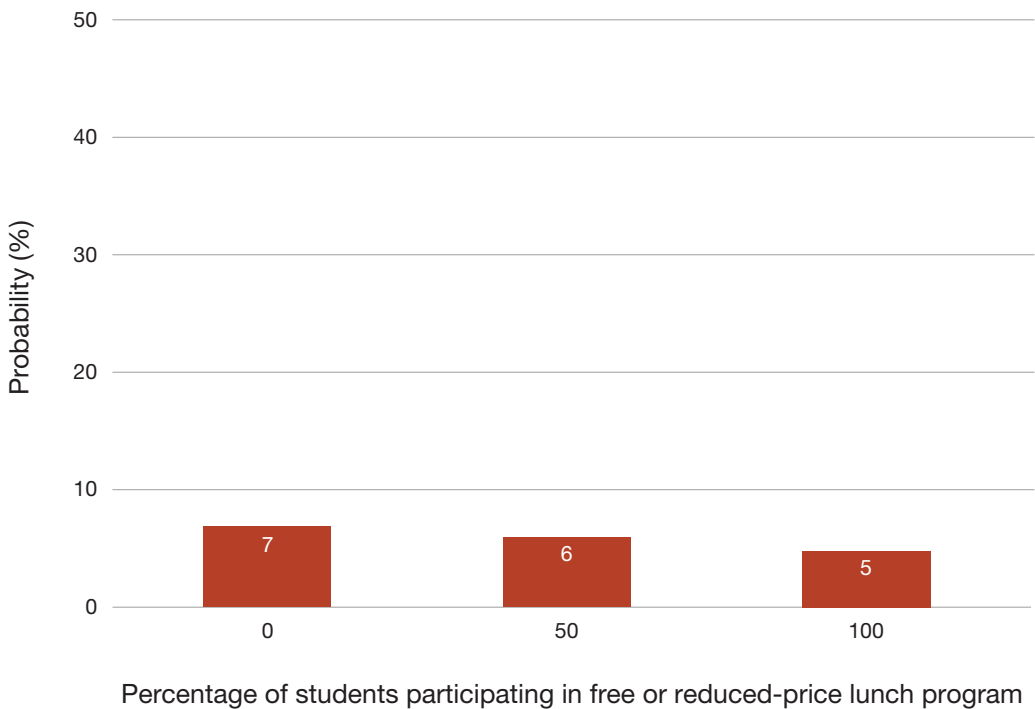


Figure 3.6 shows the probability that a recruiter will report access problems at a school by region. Controlling for all other characteristics, we find little difference by region. Schools in the Midwest have the lowest probability of having access restrictions, but there is virtually no difference among schools in the other three regions.

FIGURE 3.6

Probability of Recruiter Access Restrictions, by Region of School

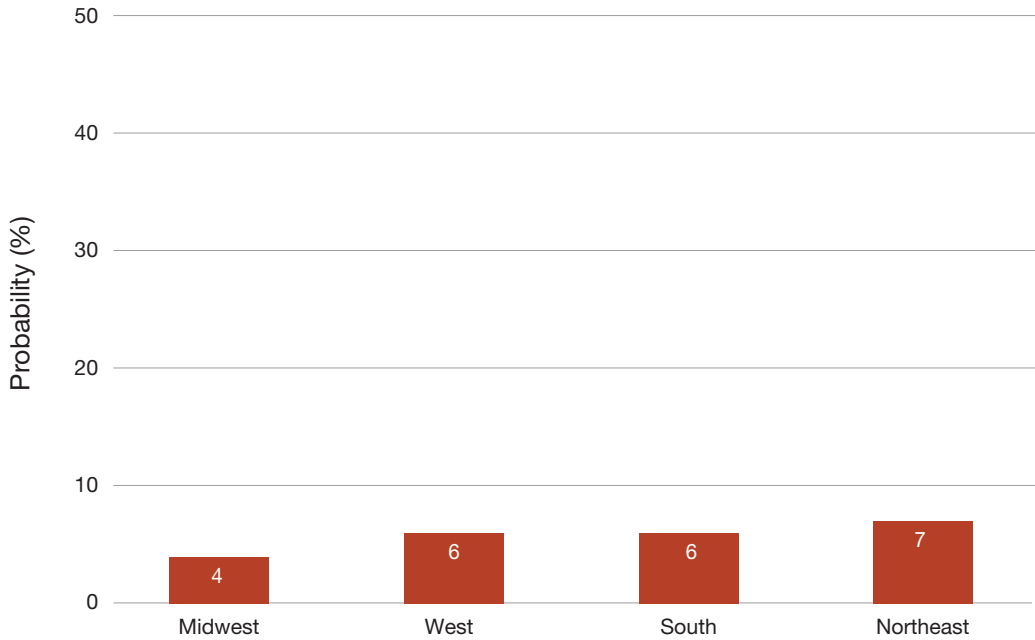
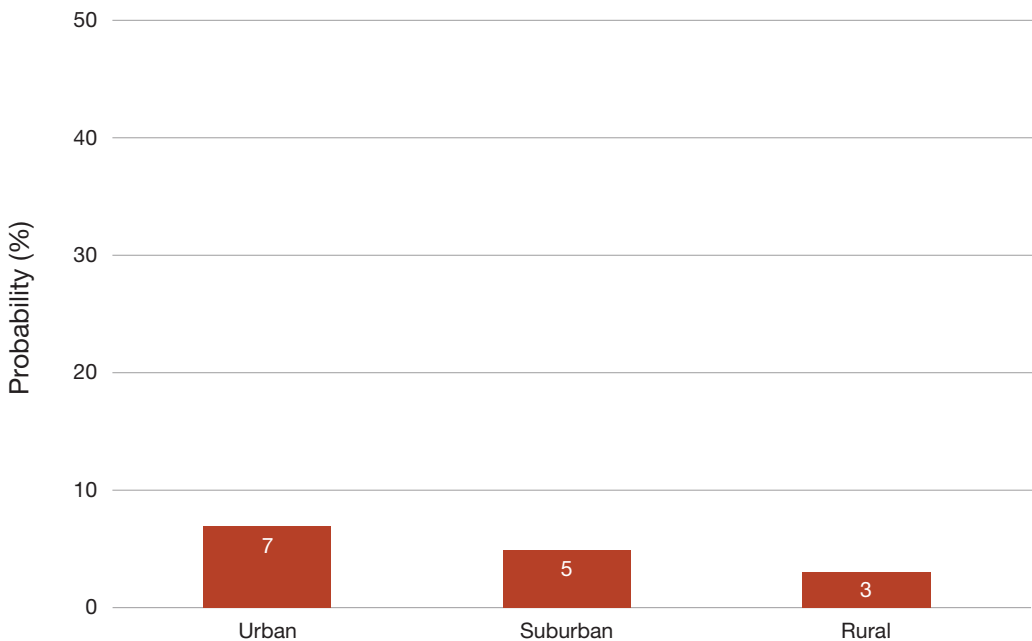


Figure 3.7 shows the probability that a recruiter will encounter an access problem is about twice as great at an urban school as at a rural school. This matches what we saw in descriptive data on recruiter access but contrasts with other findings showing that JROTC programs are more prevalent in urban areas than in rural ones.

Surprisingly, after controlling for all other variables, we did not find that neighborhood characteristics, such as percentage of veterans and military in the area, political leaning, and closeness of recruiter stations to high schools, influenced recruiter access. We had assumed that such characteristics might make communities and schools more familiar with or supportive of the military and therefore more supportive of military recruitment efforts. In fact, this finding contradicts the qualitative findings we present later in this report, which suggest that high schools that are close to military installations have a better understanding of the military and the potential benefits that the military can provide to students and thus are amenable to military recruiter efforts.

While our analysis identified certain structural characteristics that may affect recruiter access to high schools, there are many more that we could not observe. We could not, for example, quantify recruiting processes and relationships between recruiters and high schools or include more-nuanced characteristics of geographic areas in which high schools are located that may make them more challenging to access. In the next chapter, we discuss our findings from interviews on such characteristics.

FIGURE 3.7
Probability of Recruiter Access Restrictions, by Urbanicity of School



Experiences of Recruiters and School Representatives That Influence Recruiter Access to High Schools

To augment our quantitative analysis and assess the level of access for recruiters, including policies affecting it, we conducted in-depth interviews with school administrators, guidance counselors, and military recruiters and supervisors.¹ As noted earlier, we identified high schools with challenges using 2017 data, whereas we conducted our interviews in 2022 and 2023. The challenges recruiters have with high schools might have changed between the time of the survey and the interviews, for several reasons. This may explain why we did not find stark differences in our interviews based on the level of school access challenges reported in the 2017 survey. Recruiters in our interviews reported a range of access to schools, from significantly limited access to nearly open access. We organize our interview findings by four key areas: (1) the process for initial recruiter contact with high schools, (2) recruiting activities that take place in high schools, (3) barriers and facilitators to recruiter access, and (4) relationship-building between military recruiters and high schools.

Recruiters' Procedures for Gaining Access

We asked interviewees how recruiters typically initiate contact with high schools. More specifically, we asked recruiters about their process for reaching out to schools and planning visits, and we asked school representatives how recruiters typically reached out to plan a visit. These initial contacts are intended to plan future school visits during which recruiters can engage with students.

¹ We conducted 19 interviews with school or district representatives across the four states that were the focus of this qualitative data collection. We also conducted 23 interviews with military recruiters or recruiter supervisors across the DoD military services: 6 Air Force interviews, 7 Army interviews, 4 Navy interviews, and 6 Marine Corps interviews. For more information about our sample characteristics, see Appendix C.

There Is No Standard Process for Recruiters to Contact High Schools

Recruiters often start by reaching out to a school principal or assistant principal, who may refer them to a guidance counselor for coordinating a visit. One recruiter explained,

I usually start by talking with the assistant principal over the summer. They would direct me to the guidance counselors—and we'd go from there. Some schools, I may need to call or email to arrange a visit.

Other times, recruiters approach school administrative staff (e.g., a front office administrative assistant) as a first contact. Often, however, recruiters find that going directly to guidance counselors is the best approach, as they are often viewed as the “gatekeepers,” and principals or assistant principals can be difficult to reach. Recruiters sometimes use guidance counselors to connect with faculty or other school personnel they wish to engage with. One recruiter said,

When it comes to initiating things, guidance counselors are the gatekeepers. . . . I ask them if they know any teachers who are interested in learning more about [the] Air Force—going into career classes in particular. In some cases, I'll send mass emails to all of the teachers in the building.

Recruiters also described some experiences with being bounced around to different individuals at a school and not having a clear go-to point of contact for scheduling visits. In some cases, establishing that initial contact was very difficult. One recruiter noted,

When I do reach out, it can be hard to get in touch with the school. School staff we call are always “busy” and can't return our calls and emails.

Recruiters described some school personnel as consistently not replying to emails, saying they were too busy to speak when recruiters tried to reach them by phone or in person, or generally being unavailable to the recruiter's efforts to make contact. In these cases, the recruiter could not access the school because initial contact could not be made. It was unclear whether these experiences were related to limitations on school staff time in understaffed schools or simply a lack of desire on the part of school representatives to engage with military recruiters.

Some school representatives expressed frustration that recruiters sometimes did not reach out to the appropriate point of contact that should be handling recruiter visits. One school representative explained,

Our policy is “everything is allowed”—but the military needs to know who to contact at the school. The relationship with [the] school is managed through our college advisor . . . and I can get frustrated when the wrong point of contact at the school hears from recruiters.

Occasionally, schools will have a designated military liaison, which makes determining the best point of contact for recruiters clear and appears to facilitate more streamlined engagement. A few schools have written “codes of conduct” or “ground rules” for recruiter visits that they share with recruiters when contacted so that the process for scheduling visits, the type of visits that are permitted, and other relevant information is laid out clearly from the start.

Regarding method of contact, many school representatives stressed that they prefer a call or email to schedule any initial meetings. School representatives prefer that recruiters not just drop by the school in person unannounced, as these visits may conflict with school representatives’ schedules. A school representative said,

Some recruiters are courteous and call or email and set up an appointment before ever coming to campus. On occasion, people may just show up on campus—I hate that.

Overall, while processes for initial contacts with schools varied, contacting schools by their preferred method and in a manner that meets their expectations appeared essential to recruiter access and facilitating engagement with students.

Recruiters’ Access to School Lists Is Inconsistent

Among the first steps recruiters take to engage with high schools is to obtain lists with student contact information. As noted earlier, schools receiving federal funding are obliged to provide such lists. Recruiters told us that many public schools do provide these lists, and most school representatives we interviewed acknowledged the requirement to do so. Nevertheless, recruiters reported varying levels of ease in getting this information. Some schools provide these lists automatically or as soon as requested. For others, recruiters must repeatedly ask for the lists, which can take a long time to receive. One reason for the delays in receiving lists are the long periods some schools give parents to opt out of providing their child’s contact information on these lists.

Typically, recruiters must ask schools for these lists, although one school representative told us that their school district shares lists directly with recruiters. Notably, a few schools that had not been identified as posing challenges to access in the quantitative dataset did not seem clear about the requirement to provide contact lists. While the law allows for parents to opt out of such lists, a few recruiters shared instances in which schools shared the student contact information only of those students whose parents had “opted in.” One recruiter stated,

Schools are also being more difficult with school lists—giving only military interested rather than entire school lists.

Recruiters told us that it is difficult to enforce the federal mandate for providing such lists. A few school representatives also explicitly told us they do not provide student contact information to recruiters. As one told us,

We never share student contact information with any military recruiters, even though they try [to get that information] all the time.

A representative of a different school, who did not seem aware of the federal mandate, stated,

I've only seen it if there's an interest where [the student] provides that information [to the recruiter]. It's a gray area [for us] to provide that. If it did come to that, I would call a parent before providing that information.

Recruiters also expressed confusion about whether charter schools are subject to the same federal mandates as traditional public schools regarding recruiter access and contact lists.

Recruiter Activities in Schools

We asked interviewees about the type of recruiting activities that recruiters undertake in high schools.

Career Fairs

Both recruiters and school representatives relayed that recruiters participate in school-sponsored career fairs alongside college and university representatives and other employers, and that such fairs were the most common recruiting activity. Describing typical recruiter engagement at these fairs, a school representative said,

When recruiters speak to students [at career fairs], they often speak a lot to the educational benefits prospective recruits could receive, the requirements for joining, and how the military could meet their career goals.

Some interviewees also noted that career events specifically focused on military opportunities, although these are not common. One school representative described this type of event:

We have a Military Opportunity Day, which gives each branch 8 minutes to share the unique opportunities that exist within that branch. All juniors and seniors attend. That event we have for students we run once again in the evening for parents. We do that in the spirit of transparency—so parents have an idea of how their students are being engaged. Following that is a Q&A with parents so they can get any questions they might have

answered. Students who miss the initial assembly are welcome to return to the event in the evening.

Lunch Period Table Setups

Recruiters also frequently mentioned conducting table setups during students' lunch periods. This involves recruiters setting up a table in or near the student cafeteria to engage with students. Some recruiters bring items (e.g., pens, key chains) to give away to the students or offer activities, such as a pull-up bar challenge, to engage students and attract them to their table. The logistics of these table setups vary by school. At some schools, recruiters can move freely through the lunchroom to engage with students. At others, recruiters are restricted to a designated area at their table and wait for students to approach them, in accordance with school visitor policies. One recruiter said,

When I do a lunchroom visit, only one school lets me freely roam and talk to students—otherwise, the schools don't want us leaving the table.

Where recruiters can set up tables also varies by school, with some schools designating more high-traffic areas for student engagement than others. One recruiter noted,

Some schools will only allow you to do lunchroom setups and will put you in a place where none of the students would be.

Another said,

We have a school here which tapes a box onto the floor which we cannot leave—it is very restrictive.

Classroom Presentations

Less frequently, recruiters may make classroom presentations at schools. Recruiters often found these to be very beneficial, as they had a "captive audience" for a focused presentation. As one recruiter said,

The most effective way to recruit is through classroom presentations. We are able to use those to collect students' contact information, interests, etc. Classroom presentations give us a space to talk directly about our [military] service with students. On the other hand, lunchroom tabling only really attracts those who are already interested in the military.

Classroom presentations are typically at the discretion of the teacher, and recruiters must engage with teachers individually to arrange them. Our interviewees indicated that some teachers hesitate to yield class time that they could otherwise use to teach their curriculum.

Recruiters, however, may tailor their presentations to align with course content. For example, recruiters may provide a class presentation on military history for an American history class or on the culinary specialist military career field for a career and technical education class on the culinary arts. A school representative noted,

When recruiters visit classes, they'll share more about their duties. It may not directly be for a "recruiting" purpose. They have perspectives on technology, history, science, and other areas that they can guest lecture about.

Some school representatives expressed caution about recruiters providing classroom presentations that included information about military opportunities. One commented,

We are more conservative about allowing recruiters in the classroom. . . . Recruiters used time in classrooms to recruit rather than teach . . . so it made our district nervous.

Classroom presentations can also educate teachers about opportunities the military has to offer students. Another way a few recruiters tried to educate teachers about military opportunities was by bringing in lunch for the faculty and talking to them during their lunch break, although opportunities to do so were reportedly infrequent.

Other Activities and Limitations

Other activities recruiters participated in included graduating ceremonies to honor graduating seniors who will be joining the military and displaying posters at schools with information about military careers.

When recruiters identify students who are interested in military opportunities, they often work with guidance offices to schedule one-on-one sessions with these students to discuss pursuing military career opportunities. Interviewees reported that, in some cases, schools require students to express interest in learning about military opportunities and to sign up in advance to meet with a recruiter. If no students sign up, then schools tell the recruiter that there is no interest and no need to visit the school.

Even when recruiters were able to access schools and engage in recruiting activities, the frequency of recruiter activities varied by school, which recruiters reported can adversely affect the success of their recruitment efforts.

Some schools limited the number of times a recruiter may visit the school per month or per year. One recruiter told us of schools that would allow only two recruiter visits per school year. Recruiters also noted some schools that required parents' permission prior to them speaking with any students, which greatly limited access to students. Some schools only permitted recruiters access to students who had proactively signed up for a meeting with a recruiter and did not allow recruiters to engage with students in a broader manner. As a recruiter explained,

[Schools] give me access but it's very controlled. Meaning they will say, "We have a website, and you can log on and tell us when you plan to be here and for how long." So, I reserve a time and they have students sign up for those slots, and if no students sign up, then they tell me not to come. So, they control my access that way.

Additionally, the number of times a recruiter may conduct a lunch table setup varies by school. Some schools stagger the lunch table setups of recruiters from different branches of service on different days, while others prefer all recruiters to visit on the same day. Some schools limit the number of times per month or quarter a recruiter can do a lunch table setup, while others host these events more frequently. A representative of a school that encourages recruiters to host table setups during student lunch periods more frequently said,

We have "Military Thursdays" when recruiters come to campus. . . . Every Thursday all branches are invited to table at lunch. It's great to have their presence given the size of our school.

Often, recruiters tended to focus efforts on schools that presented fewer limitations to their recruiting activities rather than pursuing access at schools that were uncooperative or overly restrictive.

Barriers and Facilitators to Recruiter Access

Recruiters reported varied levels of access to schools, with some schools not providing access but others providing nearly unlimited access for recruiters. We asked recruiters and school representatives about barriers to access, why they might exist, and what could facilitate recruiter access to high schools.

Recruiter Interactions and Understanding of the School and Local Community

Both recruiters and school representatives commented that a school's negative past experience with a recruiter could result in limitations to access. Recruiters relayed that this negative experience often was with a recruiter from a different branch of service than their own, but that schools would often limit all military recruiters' access after such an experience, even if the recruiter who caused the negative experience had moved to another assignment. Essentially, recruiters felt they often "paid the price" for another recruiter's past actions, regardless of their branch of service.

Schools reported negative experiences with past recruiters, including recruiters being too aggressive and not respecting personal boundaries. Such incidents included a recruiter contacting a school principal on his personal social media accounts, as well as more serious allegations, such as inappropriate behavior with students. A school representative stated,

I had issues with recruiters respecting boundaries. At times, we were uncomfortable with the individual attention being paid to female students [by male recruiters]. That was a serious issue we had.

Another school representative said that on more than one occasion a recruiter had forged signatures of the school counselor and an administrative staff member on letters verifying student graduation dates. This representative added,

There were some situations that took place that caused me to pull back significantly with processes with the military. We will do everything to support students and their options, but we're going to protect them. . . . Things happened here that made me impose more restrictions.

School representatives were also concerned about recruiters not understanding the high school environment, including school policies and the school board's political leaning (whether liberal or conservative) before engaging in recruiting activities. One representative said,

One problem recruiters have is that they don't always know about the schools they are going into. They need to connect and understand the attitudes and policies of school boards, superintendents, and staff.

Such lack of awareness resulted in what schools considered recruiter misconduct, such as recruiters showing up unannounced during teaching planning time, pulling a student out of class without permission, or approaching a student during lunch time or in the hallway to talk about joining the military. Many schools require any adult who is not part of the school staff, including recruiters, to get approval from school administration before talking to individual students. Such conduct limited recruiter access, according to recruiters and school representatives.

Some schools that experienced inappropriate recruiter behavior raised concerns with recruiter supervisors. Reported responses ranged from one supervisor swiftly removing the recruiter who had been assigned to the school to another supervisor essentially claiming that "boys will be boys" and maintaining that the behavior did not cause alarm. Not only did school representatives receive mixed responses when reporting inappropriate recruiter behavior and sometimes found supervisor responses inadequate, schools were also not always clear about their recourse in such situations. This lack of transparency regarding accountability for recruiters sometimes caused schools to broadly limit recruiter access to prevent future problems.

Interviewees also noted that negative perceptions of the military can cause schools to limit recruiter access. Interviewees said political bias or "anti-military" sentiments in a community can result in schools limiting access. Participants noted that school communities may perceive recruiters as "poaching" students from colleges and might even view them as "prey-

ing” on communities of lower socioeconomic status. Interviewees indicated that recruiters need to have better messaging targeting such communities. One school representative said,

There was pushback initially in inviting military in due to social justice concerns. Our population of students was vulnerable, and we didn’t want to exploit students.

Another school representative indicated,

Because [the school] serves a higher percentage of low-income and undocumented families and the board tends to be liberal, they voice their complaints to the high school. . . . The issue they [the school board] have is that they believe for this specific population the military is targeting them to be front liners and not as an opportunity to provide them with skills and further education through the GI Bill. There is a messaging issue here that military can strengthen.

School representatives also told us that parents who do not support the military or trust recruiters’ intentions may resist recruiter presence in schools. One school representative said,

I have had parents reach out to me that a recruiter was in the classroom, and they don’t support it and don’t want their child to be in that position again. I don’t question the preference of a family.

School representatives sometimes view the military as a “last resort” option and do not recognize military opportunities for educational benefits as a sufficient pathway to developing a wide range of skills. Recruiters found that socioeconomic status can serve as a barrier in another way: Those schools where students have more resources tend to not be as interested in military opportunities because they do not need the educational benefits. Some recruiters perceived that school counselors and other school personnel have greater incentives to send students to college and hence improve school rankings and therefore limit recruiter access to schools to discourage students from pursuing military opportunities.

Capacity

According to interviewees, school access is highly dependent on the connection between an individual recruiter and school staff. But recruiters typically rotate every three years, and high schools have high leadership and staff turnover. As interviewees described, one reason why school access may be vulnerable to personnel turnover is that the tasks for accessing schools fall to specific individuals, and when they leave their position or assume different roles, this access can languish.

Recruiters also noted the high workload associated with the role and that it can be difficult to put the time in to build relationships and address barriers to access. Recruiters discussed working up to 60 hours a week, and sometimes 80 hours a week, and often having to put time in 7 days a week. Some recruiters relayed that they prioritized schools where they

were provided easier access rather than spend their limited time at schools with barriers to access, as these barriers can be time-consuming to overcome. Additionally, recruiters noted that they are typically evaluated on metrics associated with the number of leads they identify and, most importantly, the number of new recruits they bring onboard. More-informal activities that build relationships with schools and address barriers to access are not typically rewarded if they do not result in immediate and direct results toward meeting their recruiting goals.

Local School Policies

We asked school representatives about their school or district policies regarding recruiter access to their schools. While the limited number of district representatives we spoke with did cite district level policies on recruiter access, school representatives shared that they have limited input from their district about recruiter access policies. In fact, when we asked school representatives for a district contact who could discuss district policies regarding recruiters with us, most were not aware of any individual responsible for setting these types of policies. Recruiter access policies were typically established by the administration of the individual school. As one school representative explained,

No one from the district communicated with me during my principalship tenure what kind of access I needed to provide recruiters. I know that when we take federal dollars, we have to give them access to the schools. I have never seen information regarding that from the district but have been administrating for 22 years in high schools, so I understood that.

Similarly, a guidance counselor who was interviewed stated,

We don't have a formal district policy—it really is a conversation driven between me and the principal.

Because these policies are set by individual schools, there is great variation in policies for recruiter access by school. Such policies can change when there are personnel changes in the administration or guidance office.

Some schools reported not having any policies related to recruiter access. Others had written policies and practices they shared with recruiters. Still others simply used their standard school visitor policies for recruiters.

Other school policies that limit recruiter access are more general ones that address security. These policies became more restrictive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruiters reported attempting to overcome such barriers by being persistent and transparent and by trying to develop relationships with individuals who serve as gatekeepers at a school. As one recruiter said,

I think much of what is limiting me are valid security concerns—which is why I’m so open and transparent about why I am visiting. I’ll try and bring coffee and food to humanize myself to schools as much as possible. I tell them this isn’t about me or you—it’s about the students and opportunities for them. To work through challenges—that is why I do as much as I can.

Accountability Mechanisms for School Compliance Are Often Unclear

As noted in Chapter 1, federal law mandates that schools receiving public funding provide a level of access to military recruiters similar to the level they provide to college recruiters. We asked recruiters whether there were accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that schools complied with the federal mandate and what actions, if any, they would take if a school did not provide access to students or school lists.

Representatives from the Army and Navy told us of a civilian position, often a veteran who is a former military recruiter, that served in a tailored role called the *education services specialist* or *education specialist*. Recruiters report any school noncompliance issues to the individual serving in this role. This individual will then engage with the school or elevate the issue as needed to resolve access issues.²

Representatives from the Marine Corps and Air Force reported that they do not appear to have a specific civilian role that serves this function. These recruiters, however, said that they will report noncompliance up their leadership chain, to individuals who engage with the school and at higher levels, such as the superintendent or school board, as necessary. Specifically, Marine Corps recruiters reportedly reach out to their executive officer regarding non-compliant schools, and Air Force recruiters reportedly reach out to their flight chief.

Recruiters with whom we spoke were not clear about what next steps would be taken if issues could not be resolved by their leadership or education specialist at the superintendent or school board level. Some did note that if a school was limiting access, recruiters and their supervisors would document this in their recruiting tracking system or through a memorandum for the record, often resulting in lowering the priority of the school. This priority level determines the frequency of school visits the recruiter should be making, so lowering the priority level reduces the number of visits a recruiter should be attempting to make at that school. Despite these noted actions, recruiters were often not aware of official compliance mechanisms, beyond sharing information with their supervisors, for schools that were not providing access. Notably, DoD’s Accession Policy Directorate reported sharing guidance on compliance criteria and reporting mechanisms with the services, but this lack of knowledge remains.

² It was beyond the scope of the study to speak with education services specialists or education specialists about their role. The information presented about these roles was obtained through interviews with recruiters and recruiter supervisors.

Recruiter Training and Support to Improve Access

Because recruiter training can equip recruiters with the skills to address barriers to school access, we asked recruiters about their training experiences. Recruiters typically receive initial recruiting training before reporting to their recruiting station. Recruiters told us that this initial training focused on fundamentals, such as recruiting policies related to qualifications, waivers, how to process new recruits, and how to use recruiting data systems. This training reportedly could also include generic sales techniques, but recruiters said that these were not tailored to the recruiting environment or location so were of limited value in their assignment. Some recruiters also felt that some techniques, such as cold calling, were dated, and that training did not adequately address more modern means of connection, such as social media.

Recruiters said that training lacked information on how to address barriers to access and instead focused more on on-one-on engagement with individuals once contact had already been established. As one recruiter said,

The big thing they teach you is sales techniques—which I don't necessarily agree with. Besides that, it is mostly paperwork. It is mostly training on what to do when you get in front of an applicant—not how to get in front of an applicant.

Another recruiter commented,

I would love for it to be more “realistic”—everyone is going to say “no” in their own way, and [the training] didn't really provide strategies on what to do when people say no. As far as training on getting access to schools and students, they didn't cover anything.

Overall, recruiters found they learned the most useful information once they were at their recruiting station. While initial training may technically “qualify” recruiters to perform their job, they may not be truly qualified until they have learned on the job.

Recruiters reported mixed experiences in the support they received at their assignments. Some recruiters experienced a “warm handoff” with the departing recruiter whose assignment they were taking over. This departing recruiter often introduced the new recruiter to school staff and provided a “lay of the land” regarding strategies that were working well with certain schools. Other recruiters did not have the opportunity to engage with the departing recruiter and were left largely on their own to assess the recruiting environment of their location. As one recruiter said,

As far as how to actually recruit, nah, they don't teach us that. When I got to my station, training was not existent.

Recruiters also noted varying levels of “hands-on” support from their supervisors. Supervisors can often be busy with their own administrative work, preventing much support of recruiters in the field. Nevertheless, some recruiters said they received consistent support

from supervisors, including introductions to school representatives and joining them on high school visits. One recruiter said,

My supervisor is amazing. She will help us with anything we need help with. She'll go to schools with us, give classroom presentations for us, and sets manageable expectations for us.

Some supervisors told us of routinely accompanying new recruiters on their school visits to make introductions, demonstrate classroom presentations, and later to observe the new recruiters' presentations so as to tailor support to recruiter needs. Recruiters, however, said that such support was inconsistent across supervisors. A small number of supervisors also noted that the education services specialist or education specialist could serve as a resource to recruiters, including with school engagement strategies. They added that integration between recruiters and these specialists was lacking. Recruiters did not note this resource in their interviews with us.

Overall, recruiters and supervisors felt that training can only do so much. Getting hands-on, on-the-job experience is essential for recruiters. Regardless of training and experience, personality and natural ability come into play. Some individuals may excel at recruiting and overcoming barriers to access, while others may not.

Facilitating Greater Access

Our interviewees noted several conditions or actions that could facilitate recruiter access to schools, discussed here in no particular order. Favorable community perceptions of the military could facilitate access. Such perceptions may be more prevalent in areas close to military installations. One school representative commented,

The military has a strong presence on campus. Given our school is not too far from San Diego—and given we have bases nearby—we have more military families in our area. For that reason, we have a military tilt in our community.

In other areas, individual school representatives' exposure to military service can facilitate access. For example, if a school administrator or guidance counselor is a veteran or has family members who served in the military, they are more likely to facilitate recruiter access and have positive attitudes toward military service. Not surprisingly, interviewees noted that having military-related programs or efforts at schools also facilitates recruiter access. For example, schools with a JROTC program are typically friendly to recruiters and allow access to students with fewer barriers. Schools that offer the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) to students also may be more likely to facilitate recruiter access. Recruiters have also found that educating school personnel on the broader purpose of the ASVAB as a career exploration program to help students determine their career interests and strengths,

regardless of their interest in military service, can encourage schools to participate. One principal summarized these issues as follows,

In my opinion, factors that helps or impede recruiter access are whether the board is liberal or not, whether the principal has a military background or a good perception of the military, whether the schools do the ASVAB, and whether they have JROTC.

Participants noted that alumni of the school who were now in the military were given more access to students, as schools are typically more lenient with access for alumni and viewed recruiting by alumni more informally. Recruiters also reported that schools having a designated military liaison also facilitated access, as they had a clear point of contact who was accustomed to working with recruiters. Schools can further facilitate recruiter access to students by promoting recruiter visits and reaching out to recruiters when a student has indicated interest in the military.

Relationship-Building Between Recruiters and High Schools

We asked interviewees how best to build relationships between recruiters and educators that would benefit students.

A few recruiters invested early on in activities to cultivate high school support and buy-in. Recruiters discussed conducting formal “initial visits” at the start of each school year. During these meetings, recruiters met with key school personnel and worked together to set goals and expectations for the school year regarding recruiters’ engagement with students. Both recruiters and school representatives seemed to find these meetings beneficial for planning recruiter engagement for the school year and ensuring buy-in of the process. One recruiter described how he conducted these initial visits with schools:

Typically, we have an initial school visit—I have a date, I call the guidance counselor and say, “I’m going to come in,” and typically I already know them from working with them before. I show up and talk to them about how the summer was, what are the goals for the new school year, is there anything I can help with, any frustrations they have. This is in person. I have a phone call first. I give them calendars as a gift. They usually want a calendar/planner. And I give them pencils and pens. RADs [Recruiting Advertising Materials]—I make sure we have literature there at the school for the kids. I try to see if there are any new staff I should meet. If they do have new staff, I introduce myself. Then after all of that, I talk about scheduling a school visit.

Both recruiters and school representatives emphasized that education is key to building these relationships. Specifically, educating school administrators, faculty, and staff on opportunities the military can offer students would help build understanding of their common goal of assisting students in developing strong career paths after graduation. This education would help to dispel myths held by some school representatives about the military that might

cause them to limit recruiter access to students. For instance, school representatives may see the military as seeking to take students away from college opportunities rather than offering them potentially affordable pathways to higher education. Additionally, school representatives may associate the military solely with combat and may not be aware of the opportunities to develop skills in a vast range of career fields that can translate well to future civilian careers. One school representative said,

I would recommend they get the word out on the benefits. . . . Enlisting can be scary. I would make people aware of how it can help pay for college, the abundant opportunities and [career] specialties within the military.

This messaging is important for school representatives to understand to address access barriers, but it also needs to be passed on to students. As one school representative said,

One of the issues is that recruiters do not do a good job of linking the military to continued education and future career paths. For example, they need to have a poster that explains [that] enlisting is one step for great benefits that include continuing education, such as with the GI Bill that pays for college education. They need to have a poster explaining that all over the high school and in career guidance offices. When the marines come in, they focus on raiding and guns, but kids are different now, and they want to know what is in it for them.

Interviewees indicated that current approaches to educating school representatives on military benefits and opportunities are limited. Interviewees suggested thinking creatively to get an audience with school administrators and faculty. For instance, working around school schedules for a convenient meeting time, recruiters could bring lunch for school faculty, providing an incentive for them to meet and hear more about military opportunities and benefits. Other suggestions included recruiters sharing with school administrators and faculty more about recent graduates of their schools who have gone into the military. This would help school administrators and faculty to understand how alumni have flourished in their military careers and what benefits they have received and the skills they have developed through military service.

Both recruiters and school representatives suggested educator workshops, where school representatives can learn more about the military and what it can offer students, as a way to build relationships. These programs, paid by the services, are typically held over several days, with school representatives traveling to boot camp locations to see what recruits are learning and experiencing. School representatives who had participated in these programs found them valuable for increasing their understanding of what the military could offer students. Recruiters told us these programs helped them in building better relationships with schools. Recruiters did note that it can be difficult to get educators to attend these workshops, given constraints on their schedules and the desire to keep their summers free. As one recruiter said,

Programs where school faculty, staff, and administrators can go to boot camp for a couple days—it's a workshop. They see firsthand what the military has to offer and can talk to new recruits. Those programs are very successful but hard to get people to go to—during the school year, the school doesn't want to take them away from the classroom. In the summer, they don't want to go during their time off.

Interactive trailers or similar setups that recruiters brought onto school grounds can also help educate school representatives about military opportunities. Recruiters described these as having interactive features that both students and school representatives can participate in, such as flight simulators and demonstrations in robotics. These display firsthand military career opportunities beyond traditional combat. For example, a recruiter stated,

Those demos are a real connection between recruiters and the school staff—faculty can come out. We had one where they were able to fly the helicopters [via a flight simulator]. Students went first to try it, then school administrators went second. They were saying things like, “We didn't know the Army had helicopters.” So, it was building that bridge for students, faculty, and administrators.

A few recruiters also indicated investing time in school activities not related to their responsibilities in order to become part of the school community. For example, some recruiters attend school sporting events and assist coaches with sports practices. Others provided support to JROTC programs (if present) or helped administer the ASVAB of tests and explained its applicability beyond military service. This approach can make significant inroads in building relationships with schools. Recruiters volunteer at schools and participate in school events to build trust among school representatives, students, and parents. Recruiters noted that putting in the time to develop trust and building relationships can pay off in the long run, even if such activities are not immediately linked to their day-to-day responsibilities. One recruiter said,

Being more involved with a school's functions is something I highly recommend. Helping at school events, sporting events gives you face time with key folks in the administration. I think a problem with our work is that we are incentivized so hard to recruit today, that we are not rewarded for relationship-building activities that are longer term. It takes time to build trust—particularly given the stigma with military recruiters.

School representatives echoed these sentiments. As one said,

Recruiters need to see themselves as a member of the community—not someone here doing a job. We'd love to see them come to community events and just be a member of our community. It goes a long way with parents, students, and community members.

Investing in such activities, however, is not common for most recruiters, who struggle to find the time available to engage to this degree.

Interviewees also said that recruiters who make an effort to understand the culture of the school and local community can build and maintain relationships more easily. Recruiters suggested that assigning recruiters who have ties to the local area can help build an understanding of school and community culture. Understanding school culture also includes making sure recruiters understand how the school functions each day so that they can better integrate their recruiting activities and school presence. An interviewee stated,

When recruiters make an initial contact with a school, they should try and get a sense of the school's attitude about the military. That will enable a much more successful relationship.

Interviewees noted that initial meetings between recruiters and school representatives to establish common goals at the start of each school year can support productive relationships. A school representative commented,

It requires a little extra legwork to understand the culture of the school you are entering. Engaging with key stakeholders about the education landscape would yield big results for recruiters—in targeting efforts, making the most of their visits. The military can get that indigenous knowledge of the school landscape from central offices.

Interviewees commented that having consistency with recruiters or having warm hand-offs when a new recruiter arrives can help sustain relationships.

Finally, recruiters shared that they felt getting assistance from senior leadership and higher levels of authority could help them build relationships with schools. Recruiters noted that station commanders, or even more senior leaders, could help them establish and build relationships with schools by participating in visits, making initial introductions, and assisting with education about federal mandates regarding recruiter access. They also felt that DoD national messaging could help better educate schools and communities about military opportunities, facilitating stronger relationships between recruiters and schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recruiting from the nation's public schools to maintain the military services' strength and effectiveness dates back over a century. Federal policies have sought for decades to regulate the military's ability to recruit students in high schools, with the most recent effort being the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act. While the law makes it mandatory for high schools to provide student contact information to military recruiters, it is less clear about the level of access that recruiters should have at high schools. The law indicates that recruiters should have "equal access to schools as other post-secondary options" (Pub. L. 114-95, 2015), while also allowing parents to opt out of having their children's information shared with military recruiters. The comparative nature of the law (adequacy of military access is defined relative to college access allowed by high schools) has provided school districts and high schools with leeway to develop their own policies regarding access. One school district or high school might allow open access, whereas another might limit the type of activities and extent to which recruiters can interact with students.

We found that levels of recruiter access vary across states, and we identified structural factors that are linked to decreased levels of access, including school urbanicity, size of the student population, and the proportion of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch. However, these factors explained only a small percentage of limited recruiter access to high schools.

Through interviews with school representatives and recruiters and their supervisors, we identified additional factors that contribute to barriers to access, as well as strategies that can facilitate better access to schools. Our interviews revealed that building strong relationships between recruiters and high schools was key for recruiters in gaining higher levels of access to high schools and obtaining student contact lists in a timely manner. Recruiters who integrated themselves into the high school community by supporting needs of the high school, volunteering to participate in school events, and going beyond a narrow focus on recruiting activities were able to develop stronger relationships with high schools. Recruiters who invested in activities to facilitate meetings with school leadership and staff at all levels were often able to increase buy-in from high schools regarding what the military has to offer students.

As noted in our interview findings, most recruiters face challenges in building strong relationships with high schools. Some of these challenges may stem from negative interactions with past recruiters, negative community opinion about the military, or a lack of understand-

ing of the benefits that the military can offer to recruits. Others are due to recruiters' lack of knowledge of high schools and the surrounding communities. In particular, recruiters may not understand school organization, expected conduct, and everyday operations. Among other things, this can lead recruiters to reach out to the wrong school contact. It can be difficult for recruiters to develop such knowledge, because high school policies and procedures are not always readily accessible to recruiters.

Recruiters shared that inadequate recruiter training also affects the extent to which recruiters are prepared to engage with high schools. Recruiters shared that the training is general in nature and does not provide adequate skill development on how to account for nuances of high school context, address barriers to access, and incorporate more updated methods of connecting to high schools. Finally, we found that the services may not systematically track school noncompliance or recruiter misconduct. Recruiter interviews also suggested that recruiters are not aware of what actions DoD takes after they report that a high school is noncompliant. Similarly, interviews with high school representatives indicated that DoD does not clearly communicate to high schools about the outcomes of recruiter misconduct that they report. This lack of systematic tracking of information and communication of outcomes limits the extent to which the military can improve the quality of recruiting practices.

Our findings lead to several recommendations on how to improve military access to high schools. We organize these around the following categories: building stronger relationships with high schools, optimizing structure and capacity, and developing a common infrastructure for reporting and accountability. We conclude by providing a few recommendations on how to improve local policies and recruiter relationships with schools.

Building Stronger Relationships with High Schools

Our interviewees indicated that strong relationships between recruiters and school personnel are critical to recruiters gaining increased levels of access to high schools. We developed the following recommendations for improving partnerships between military recruiters and high schools. We found that some recruiters, regardless of the access barriers they face, are not consistently investing in activities to ensure the support and buy-in of school leadership and guidance counselors, which serves as the foundation of strong partnerships.

High School Contacting Procedures for Military Recruitment Should Be Clear and Made Public for Easy Access

High schools vary in their procedures regarding how recruiters should contact them and vary in the extent to which these procedures are readily available to recruiters. We recognize that some recruiters may be unable to identify a clear point of contact for school access or not receive assistance from school personnel for schools that do not provide this information. Recruiters assigned to such high schools spend time and resources in their attempts to iden-

tify school contact personnel and procedures with varying success. The lack of knowledge of school procedures can preclude efforts to building relationships with high schools. We recommend that DoD and the services advise recruiter supervisors to engage with high schools in the communities they serve to mutually develop and articulate procedures and policies of contact and visitation, as well as to encourage schools to clearly publish school access policies on their websites.

We also recommend that DoD and the services provide guidelines and tools for high school engagement to recruiters and their supervisors.

Develop an Understanding of the High School Environment

We recommend that DoD and the services review their practices for outreach to schools to ensure that they incorporate a thorough understanding of the school environment, including local school policies and school board and community political leaning. Further, we recommend that recruiters, before contacting the high school, spend adequate time understanding community and high school attitudes toward the military. For example, they can familiarize themselves with school or district board membership and the student population being served, including the demographics and socioeconomic status of the community and student population. They can also research whether the high school had reported issues with previous military recruiters. Recruiters should be strategic in developing their communication and marketing so that they are responsive to possible concerns about the military. For example, the messaging for high schools that are located close to military bases, where there is typically understanding and favorable opinions of the military, should be different than the messaging for high schools with boards, staff, or parents who may be critical of the military. By understanding school and community concerns, recruiters can customize their messages and address any concerns early in the process.

Invest in Activities to Promote High School Buy-In

We recommend that recruiters use the customized messages we discuss above and adopt more-proactive approaches to communicating them with school leaders and staff. A proactive plan will allow space for opinions to be expressed and questions to be asked. It will help build trust and support. Proactive efforts could involve recruiter supervisors or other military leaders when engaging the school. We also recommend that recruiters, where possible, schedule meetings with school leaders and staff to gain support. In these meetings, recruiters (and, if needed, their supervisors) and high school staff should discuss expectations and come to an agreement regarding the type of visits, recruiting efforts, frequency of visits, school procedures, and means to ensure recruiter compliance with a code of conduct. Recruiters should also clearly communicate the federal requirement for access, particularly to student lists. We recommend that recruiters conduct these visits at the start of each school year and again if a new recruiter arrives during the school year. We also recommend that

recruiters have a similar meeting at the end of the school year to discuss how the recruiter's activities went and whether there are areas for improvement in the future.

Communicate the Value Proposition of the Military

In the initial meetings with school leaders and staff, recruiters should note the relative advantages of military opportunities compared with other postsecondary or employment opportunities. This is critical now that colleges and large companies are offering high school students substantial tuition assistance benefits and compensation (Brower, 2021). Further, in some states, policies have changed to provide students with free tuition at least for the first two years in community college (Tretina and Hahn, 2022). Recruiters should be familiar with state policies and institutions with which they are competing to clearly craft their message on the advantages of military enlistment. Such messaging and comparison of benefits should be shared with students and included in posters and recruitment materials.

We found in our interviews that many school representatives lack knowledge about the wide range of skills that recruits can develop through military service. School representatives and students often associate the military only with traditional combat skills rather than with cybersecurity, logistics, and other technical skills that are highly transferable to later civilian careers. Messaging from recruiters about the benefits of military service and the marketable skills gained through such service should be shared not only with students, but also with school representatives and the broader school community.

Support High Schools in Nonrecruitment Activities

Strong collaborations are likely to last if they are mutually beneficial. This means that it may not be sufficient for recruiters to just engage in agreed-upon recruitment activities but also provide high schools with support they need that might not be related to recruitment (e.g., volunteering at school events), where allowed. Thus, we recommend that the services review the baseline requirements for recruiters to support engaging with high schools on a more informal basis. By engaging in activities that are meaningful to the high schools, recruiters are building trust and putting in place a structure of continuous communication that is needed for successful recruitment and an ongoing relationship with high schools.

Develop Procedures for Systematically Documenting Activities with High Schools

Recruitment assignments tend to be about three years long, after which recruiters typically move on to a new assignment. High school staff also have high turnover. Transitions between recruiters can threaten access, as can turnover of school leaders and staff. We recommend that the services implement procedures for recruiters to systematically document their effective strategies and activities with each high school. Such documentation should cover strategies with the high schools, goals, objectives, and the activities to meet the objectives. The documentation should also include high school contacts, a summary of discussions, agreed-to activities and their implementation status, and changes to activities. The documentation

would provide new recruiters with key information about ongoing collaboration to ensure continuity and reduce any missteps.

Optimizing Structure and Capacity

Our interviews indicate that recruiter capacity (e.g., capability, workload) could be a barrier to developing relationships with high schools. We provide a few recommendations to overcome such barriers.

Review Recruiter Selection Practices

We recommend that recruiter selection practices pay attention to certain individual recruiter characteristics that could strengthen collaboration with high schools. As part of understanding the local high school landscape and community, the services should consider assigning recruiters with ties to the local area, which can facilitate engagement with the local community and can allow recruiters to potentially tap into existing relationships with school personnel. Additionally, in interviews, recruiter supervisors suggested that recruiter selection could potentially include a probationary or trial period once at the recruiting assignment that would allow for an initial on-the-job assessment of characteristics of strong recruiters. This on-the-job assessment would allow for the selection of recruiters with such characteristics as the ability to lead conversations about opportunities for collaboration with different high school staff. However, permanent change of station (PCS) logistics may limit the feasibility of implementing a probationary or training period at the recruiting assignment, and a limited on-the-job assessment could potentially be integrated into initial training instead. Training could also include instilling in recruiters that they need to understand the high school landscape and the community and be respectful of high school policies and codes of conduct. We recommend that DoD and the services review current recruiter selection methods to assess whether they could accommodate this type of additional screening up front or possibly train and assess on these characteristics in initial recruiting training.

Build Recruiter Capacity

Many recruiters told us that the current initial recruiter training did not provide them with all the skills needed at their recruiting station. The services should review initial recruiter training and ensure that it includes an emphasis on strategies to address barriers to high school access, with a particular focus on developing recruiter communication and facilitative skills, as well as tactics for recruiters to contextualize their messaging, to build and maintain strong relationships with high schools and to build high school buy-in and support. Informal training received at the local recruiting station by supervisors was inconsistent and limited in some cases. The services should ensure more formalized and consistent training once recruiters are in their assignment and provide tailored information and strategies for engagement in the local community. Part of this training and information should include the docu-

mentation of past successful strategies at specific schools in the area. Another area of training should include reporting processes for noncompliant schools. Recruiters interviewed in the study were often not aware of official compliance reporting mechanisms beyond sharing information with their supervisors. However, DoD's Accession Policy Directorate has issued and shared detailed instructions with the services regarding compliance criteria and reporting mechanisms. This information should be included in recruiter training to ensure that recruiters understand school access compliance and improve their knowledge of noncompliance reporting mechanisms in place. Finally, we recommend that recruiters be provided with additional training during their tenure, focusing on specific environment and individual needs identified by their supervisors.

Our interviews also indicate that many recruiters have a high workload and a sense of fatigue about their recruiting duties. This can limit recruiters' activities to those that are routinely monitored and evaluated by their supervisors, as they lack additional time to engage in broader activities beyond those directly linked to their narrow recruiting duties. We recommend that the services review the metrics they use to monitor and evaluate recruiters, which are currently focused on reaching short-term tangible goals, and explore ways to value recruiter activities that support broader relationship-building. Such changes could provide incentives to recruiters to spend time and resources on strategies that support long-term relationships and sustained benefits with schools rather than just limited, short-term gains.

Review Current Infrastructure for Reporting Access Issues

Our interviews indicate that recruiters do have a process to report high schools that do not provide or limit access. Additionally, DoD's Accession Policy Directorate has developed guidance detailing compliance criteria and reporting procedures. Typically, school noncompliance issues are elevated up the leadership chain or handled by a civilian serving in a position to address such issues. Despite these procedures and DoD guidance, recruiters are not clear where this information is documented and whether it is acted on.

We recommend that the services review their current systems and procedures for documenting school noncompliance and ensure that the systems are aligned with DoD guidance on compliance criteria and reporting procedures. As part of the review, it is essential to examine whether tracking systems have the following features to ensure relevancy of information collected and optimize use by DoD leaders, services leaders, supervisors, and recruiters:

1. **Common measures defining access to high schools.** The review should examine whether the measures are clearly defined by the services and are aligned across all service systems.
2. **Timely data and reports.** The tracking systems should also be reviewed on their capacity to provide timely data and reports to identify issues related to school access. Data and reports should be available and customized to decisionmakers at all levels.
3. **User-friendliness.** The systems should be easy to use and accessible.

4. **Accountability features.** The systems should be reviewed to determine whether they define consequences for high school noncompliance and steps that recruiters and supervisors should be taking.
5. **Automated features.** The systems should be assessed on how well they are automated so that data can be entered electronically into a centralized system and the systems can access reports electronically when needed.

Accountability Follow-Up

High schools also report experiences with informally reporting recruiters' inappropriate behavior to recruiter supervisors. While the services require their recruiting commands to maintain data on recruiter misconduct, it is not clear what type of system each service has in place and how they vary. Our interviews revealed that negative experiences with recruiters can drive schools to limit future recruiter access. Some schools also said that they did not feel their complaints about recruiter behavior were taken seriously enough. Thus, we recommend that DoD and the services ensure that adequate policy guidance is in place to address complaints and hold recruiters accountable. Additionally, DoD and the services should ensure that schools have access to information on reporting recruiter misconduct. Recruiter supervisors or other military leaders should ensure that school administrators are aware of the steps they should take to report recruiter misconduct and how it will be dealt with, and school administrators should be notified of actions taken in response to their complaints or concerns. Transparency around accountability for both parties will contribute to building stronger relationships between schools and recruiters, as roles and expectations are made clear.

Implications for Policies

Beyond mandating high schools to provide student lists to military recruiters and allowing them access to high schools, the federal legislation is unclear on what level of recruiter access is adequate. The legislation defines such access relative to the access each high school allows for college and employer recruiters. This is problematic, as it makes the acceptable threshold a "moving target" and expects military recruiting arrangements to be similar to college ones. For example, high schools and colleges are increasingly involved in efforts and activities to improve college access to high school students that go beyond the traditional participation in college fairs. Some of these include building career pathways from high school to colleges and providing college credit-bearing courses to high school students. These structures provide continued college access to high school students but are not replicable by military recruiters. DoD has engaged in efforts with Congress to better define what is considered acceptable military recruiter access. These efforts, however, have not led to any changes in definition.

As long as *military recruiter access* is not well defined in legislation and is relative to non-military recruiting efforts, military recruiters will continue facing challenges in "adequately"

accessing high schools and utilizing activities and tools that are appropriate for their unique mission. New legislation, the Military Service Promotion Act, has been introduced to boost military recruiter access to high schools. This is an opportunity for the federal government to revisit its definition of military recruiter access and develop clearer standards.

We recommend that DoD and the services work closely with the state departments of education to encourage clear communication to high schools about federal regulations on military recruiter access. In the absence of a clear federal definition of “adequate” level of access, states could provide guidelines to high schools and their districts to inform their access policies. The services should also provide clearer guidance to their recruiters regarding federal regulations. This should include policies regarding access to charter schools, as recruiters expressed confusion on whether these schools are subject to federal regulations regarding recruiter access.

We recommend that representatives from the services, such as education service specialists or education specialists, encourage school districts to take a more active role in reviewing their access policies and practices, as well as any additional school-specific policies, to ensure that they are aligned with federal requirements. The services could have a supportive role in this effort, if school districts wish to engage them.

Document Review Search

This appendix offers additional detail on databases that we searched to identify documents for review.

- **Legislation and government documents:** We accessed documents directly from congressional records (Library of Congress, undated). We scrutinized pertinent legislation, sections of the U.S. Code, and transcripts of congressional hearings. Examples of the search terms used include *military recruitment*, *recruiter access*, *high schools*, and *education policy*.
- **Published histories of youth participation in the military:** We used Google Books. The terms *military recruiting in high schools*, *youth in the military*, and *history of military recruitment* guided these searches.
- **Academic and policy-related material:** Google Scholar served as an essential source for finding DoD and U.S. Department of Education policy, RAND reports on the All-Volunteer Force, legal analyses of relevant policies, and public health and education literature on the impact of military recruitment in schools. We used search terms such as *DoD policy on recruitment*, *military recruitment and public health*, *military recruitment and education policy*, and *impact of military recruitment*.
- **News and commentaries:** We scanned Google News. The use of news and commentaries allowed us to incorporate more-contemporary topics and emerging trends not yet captured in academic or policy literature. Key sources included *Mother Jones*, CBS News, education blogs, National Public Radio, the American Civil Liberties Union, local newspapers, and military publications (e.g., *Army Times*). Examples of search terms include *military recruiters in schools*, *military recruitment policy*, and *high school military access*.
- **State- and local-level policy:** We obtained information from state and local government websites. The search terms used here mirrored those used in the first item in this list.

Quantitative Methodology

This appendix offers additional detail on the student achievement model and findings to supplement the discussion in Chapter 3. We provide description of the datasets utilized, followed by descriptive information on the distribution of high schools limiting recruiter access, the statistical model we selected, and odds ratio results obtained with the model.

Datasets for Examining Access Distribution and Factors Affecting Access

To identify structural factors associated with recruiter access we utilized multiple datasets:

- **2017 DoD List of High Schools with Access Challenges.** DoD surveyed all services regarding the high schools they were having difficulty accessing. The dataset includes high school names and addresses, description of the challenge posed by the high schools as reported by recruiters (e.g., does not provide student list, no access to school), position of the recruiter that completed the survey, and affiliated service. The dataset has 1,376 unique public (including charter) schools.
 - To examine noncompliance and access distribution, we grouped recruiter self-reported challenges into four categories: (1) no student list, (2) no recruiter access, (3) limited access, and (4) a combination of categories 1–3. Each category was assigned to a high school.
 - For the statistical analysis, we grouped all four categories mentioned above into one category, coded 1, to reflect “school poses challenges to recruiter.” There are two reasons for combining the categories. First, high schools that were reported to pose challenges were small in number compared with all public high schools (see DoD Universe of Schools, below). Second, the majority of high schools that posed challenges to recruiters were noncompliant. A very small percentage were reported to limit access (only 4 percent). The rest of the high schools included in the DoD Universe of Schools dataset were then coded as 0 (not posing challenges to recruiters).
- **DoD Universe of Schools.** This dataset was provided by DoD, and it included all eligible public high schools for recruitment, DoDEA high schools, and Bureau of Indian Education schools. The dataset includes 19,430 high schools. The dataset has high school ID

numbers assigned by federal government (on a portion of them), high school name, and address.

- **Recruiter stations.** DoD provided the addresses of recruiter stations nationwide.
- **2016–2017 Common Core of Data.** This dataset, provided by the National Center for Education Statistics, is the U.S. Department of Education’s national data on all public elementary and secondary education in the United States. It is collected annually. For the purposes of this study, we obtained school-level data on each high school regarding student demographics, socioeconomic status, address, and location (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, undated). At the time of the analysis, 2016–2017 was the most recent year on which school information was publicly available.
- **2015 American Community Survey data.** These data are collected by the U.S. Census Bureau every five years on each U.S. neighborhood. Data obtained include information on neighborhood poverty and the extent to which veterans and service members reside in the neighborhood. Information also includes neighborhood zip codes (U.S. Census Bureau, undated).
- **2013 presidential election returns.** The presidential election voting data for each county.

We utilized the DoD Universe of Schools dataset as the base dataset for our analysis. We utilized a combination of latitude/longitude information and geocoding of each high school, as well as National Center for Education Statistics ID numbers, high school names, and addresses, to link the base dataset to the DoD List of High Schools with Access Challenges, Common Core of Data, distances of recruiter stations, and American Community Survey information. Then we utilized Federal Information Processing Series (FIPS) data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to connect high school zip codes to county codes in order to link voting outcomes at the county level. After merging these data, we removed DoDEA high schools and Bureau of Indian Education schools, because these schools are not operated by the states. We also took out any high schools that had no Common Core of Data information available, as we were unable to match few of the high schools in the base dataset with the 2016–2017 Common Core of Data. Our final dataset included 19,184 high schools, of which 1,017 limited recruiter access. Table B.1 lists the variables included in the analytic dataset.

Distribution of High Schools That Were Noncompliant or Limiting Recruiter Access

Table B.2 lists the number and percentage of schools in each state that DoD found in 2017 to be noncompliant in providing information about students or limiting recruiter access.

TABLE B.1
School and Neighborhood Variables in the Analytic Dataset

Category of Variable	Variables
Student population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student enrollment size • Percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch • Percentage of students from specific racial/ethnic backgrounds (e.g., White, Black, Asian, Pacific Islander, other)
School geographic location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urbanicity (rural, urban, suburban) • Region (West, Midwest, South, Northeast, U.S. territories)
School neighborhood factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of veterans • Percentage in the military • Percentage of households with incomes below the federal poverty line
County factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voting in presidential election (Republican or Democrat)
Recruiter stations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one station within 10 miles of a high school

TABLE B.2
Percentage of High Schools That Were Noncompliant or Limited Recruiter Access, by State

State	Percentage of Schools That Were Noncompliant or Limiting Access	Total Number of High Schools
AK	0%	229
ND	0%	165
RI	0%	53
VT	0%	59
SD	1%	157
AL	1%	354
WV	1%	114
IA	1%	335
NE	2%	266
NH	2%	92
MT	2%	167
MN	2%	441
ID	3%	156
KY	3%	227
MO	3%	531
CT	3%	134
NM	3%	178
WY	3%	87
WI	4%	485

Table B.2—Continued

State	Percentage of Schools That Were Noncompliant or Limiting Access	Total Number of High Schools
LA	4%	319
UT	4%	186
IL	4%	714
OR	4%	289
OH	4%	868
GA	4%	438
MI	5%	754
AR	5%	285
NC	5%	555
FL	5%	568
AZ	5%	436
TX	6%	1,537
SC	6%	235
CO	6%	379
MS	7%	236
VA	7%	319
ME	7%	123
KS	7%	339
NJ	8%	377
TN	8%	370
NV	8%	118
IN	8%	396
OK	9%	464
PA	9%	655
CA	9%	1,520
NY	9%	1,219
WA	10%	382
MD	10%	204
MA	10%	338
HI	14%	58
DE	14%	35

SOURCES: Information provided by DoD, in combination with other data described in this appendix.

NOTE: The total number of high schools is based on the analytic dataset.

Table B.3 lists the number of schools in rural areas in each state that DoD found in 2017 to be noncompliant in providing information about students or limiting recruiter access.

TABLE B.3
Distribution of High Schools in Rural Areas That Were Noncompliant or Limited Recruiter Access, by State

State	Number of High Schools That Were Noncompliant or Limiting Access	Total Number of High Schools
AR	2	40
CO	6	47
KS	2	74
MN	1	51
MS	2	49
MT	1	73
NC	1	35
NE	1	111
NM	2	12
OK	1	64
PA	1	12
TX	4	92
UT	1	6
WY	1	13

SOURCE: Information provided by DoD.

NOTE: The total number of high schools is based on the analytic dataset.

Statistical Methods Used to Identify Structural Factors Affecting Access

We used a logistic regression model to examine relationships between school and neighborhood characteristics and the binary outcome (whether schools posed challenges to recruiter access). The logistic regression calculates odds ratios to estimate the strengths of relationships with the outcome of interest. While the number of high schools that limit access is much less than the population of public high schools, we have a sufficient sample in each group to appropriately estimate these associations. Given that the odds ratios are difficult to interpret, we standardized the odds ratios to compare the strengths of associations among the various factors. We also calculated probability margins to estimate the absolute rate of

limiting access or predicted probability of limiting access for each statistically significant factor. Table B.4 lists the outputs of the logistic regression model.

There were a few issues with the data. First, data on students receiving free or reduce-price lunch were missing from the Common Core of Data for all high schools in Massachusetts. To avoid eliminating public high schools in Massachusetts from our analysis, we imputed the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch at the national level so that it can contribute to the estimation of the free or reduced-price lunch coefficient. We also included a dummy code for the state to absorb any differences (on average) between Massachusetts and other states. Second, there was collinearity between the state variable and the region variable of each high school. As a result, we took out the state fixed effects and controlled for them by using the region variable. Finally, for all other missing information, we replaced the missing information by calculating the state average for that specific variable.

TABLE B.4
Logistic Regression Output on Association Between School and Neighborhood Characteristics and Recruiter Access

Recruiter Access (1 = challenges; 0 = none)	Odds Ratio (standardized)	Standard Error	Z	P > z	95% Confidence Interval	
School student enrollment	1.29	0.04	8.29	0.00	1.29	1.37
School % free or reduced-price lunch	0.90	0.04	-2.25	0.02	0.82	0.98
School % White	1.00	0.13	0.01	0.99	0.78	1.28
School % Asian	1.12	0.04	3.27	0.00	1.04	1.20
School % Hispanic	0.96	0.09	-0.46	0.64	0.80	1.15
School % Black	0.99	0.09	-0.01	0.99	0.84	1.19
School geographic location: West	0.85	0.09	-1.51	0.13	0.69	1.05
School geographic location: Midwest	0.60	0.06	-4.86	0.00	0.49	0.74
School geographic location: South	0.84	0.08	-1.80	0.07	0.69	1.10
School geographic location: U.S. territories	0.44	0.23	-1.55	0.12	0.15	1.25
School urbanicity: urban	1.10	0.11	1.02	0.31	0.91	1.36
School urbanicity: rural	0.51	0.11	-3.16	0.00	0.34	0.78
Neighborhood: % active military	1.00	0.34	-0.19	0.85	0.92	1.07
Neighborhood: % veterans	0.91	0.04	-1.90	0.06	0.83	1.00
Neighborhood: % households below the federal poverty level	0.99	0.04	-0.33	0.74	0.90	1.08
County-level presidential voting	0.89	0.08	-1.35	0.18	0.76	1.05
Recruiting stations within 10 miles of school	1.09	0.10	0.98	0.33	0.91	1.31

Qualitative Methodology and Interview Participant Characteristics

In this appendix, we describe the methodology we used for the qualitative interviews with recruiters and school representatives, and we describe the characteristics of our interview sample.

Qualitative Methodology

We conducted qualitative interviews with military recruiters and representatives from high schools to gain insights regarding experiences with recruiter access to high schools, both from the recruiter perspective and from the perspective of high school administrators and staff. Prior to conducting interviews, we received approval from RAND’s Human Subjects Protection Committee and the Office of Management and Budget for interviews with high school representatives, and Report Control Symbol licensing for interviews with military recruiters. We conducted virtual interviews with 17 schools across four states: California, Florida, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. School representatives included administrators (e.g., principals and vice principals) and staff (e.g., guidance counselors). We also conducted interviews with district-level representatives for two schools.¹ We then reached out to military recruiters assigned to recruit in the geographic areas of the 17 schools selected for our interviews. This resulted in 23 interviews with military recruiters or their supervisors across the DoD military services.

In total, we reached out to 296 schools and 63 military recruiters and supervisors, resulting in 42 total interviews. At the beginning of each interview, we reviewed background information about the study and administered informal consent, which emphasized the voluntary

¹ We did not include additional district representatives for several reasons. Appropriate district representatives were difficult to identify. We asked school representatives we interviewed for a district-level contact we should reach out to regarding the study, and most were not able to identify one who could speak about recruiter access policies. Those district representatives we did identify were extremely difficult to connect with and typically did not respond to our contacts. Finally, because we learned through interviews with school representatives that recruiter access policies were typically determined at individual schools rather than by school districts, we did not believe that the effort to identify and recruit additional district-level personnel would yield acceptable benefit to the project.

nature of participation and that interview data collected would be kept confidential. Interviews were 45 to 60 minutes long and were conducted virtually or by phone. One research team member conducted the interview while another research team member took notes during the discussion. See Appendix D for information about the interview protocol questions for each group of participants. Upon completion of the interviews, we used qualitative data-coding software to analyze key themes and trends across interviews.

Interview Participant Characteristics

We conducted interviews with 19 schools or districts. They break down as follows:

- by state:
 - 6 California schools
 - 1 Florida school
 - 4 Ohio schools
 - 6 Pennsylvania schools
- 17 school representatives, 2 district-level representatives.

We conducted 23 recruiter/supervisor interviews. They break down as follows:

- by service: 6 Air Force, 7 Army, 4 Navy, 6 Marine Corps
- by state: 7 Pennsylvania, 6 Ohio, 3 Florida, 7 California
- by supervisor/recruiter: 7 supervisors, 16 recruiters.

Interview Protocols

We used four protocols for our interviews with different stakeholder groups: school representatives (administrators and counselors), school district representatives, military recruiters, and military supervisors of recruiters. These four protocols are included below.

General Questions for School Administrators and Counselors

- Tell me a bit about yourself, how long have you been at the school? What is your job title?
- What policy does your school and district have regarding military recruiters accessing your high school?
- How do recruiters initiate contact with your high school? What steps do the recruiters take to plan for the visit? What type of information do they discuss with you? Are there aspects of the initial contact or planning of the visit that could be improved?
- How do you notify students, school staff, and parents about the visits? In your opinion, how receptive are they to having military recruiters on campus?
- What type of recruiting activities are recruiters allowed to engage in at your school?
 - Display posters
 - Speak in classes
 - Contact students one-on-one
 - Speak to parents
 - Other?
- How many times do recruiters visit the school in a year and how long is each visit?
- Do recruiters ask for more access that you provide? What additional access do they request? What is your position/school position in providing more access and why?
- How do you characterize your relationship with recruiters? What challenges have you experienced in dealing with recruiters and are there areas that could be improved?
- What would you do or change to help build and maintain a productive relationship between recruiters and educators that would benefit students?

General Questions for School District Representatives

- Tell me a bit about yourself, how long have you been at the district? What is your job title?
- What policy does your district have regarding military recruiters accessing the high schools?
- How do recruiters initiate contact with the high schools? What steps do the recruiters take to plan for the visit? What type of information do they discuss with you? Are there aspects of the initial contact or planning of the visit processes that could be improved?
- In your opinion, how receptive are high schools in having military recruiters on campus? Does it vary by high school and why?
- What type of recruiting activities are recruiters allowed to engage in in your high schools?
 - Display posters
 - Speak in classes
 - Contact students one-on-one
 - Speak to parents
 - Other?
- Do recruiters ask for more access than is provided by your district/high schools? What additional access do they request? What is your district's position on providing more access, and why?
- What challenges have the district/high schools experienced in dealing with recruiters and are there areas that could be improved?
- What would you do or change to help build and maintain a productive relationship between recruiters and educators that would benefit students?

General Questions for Recruiters

- Tell me a bit about yourself, how long have you been a recruiter? What made you decide to become a recruiter?
- How many hours do you work as a recruiter per week?
- How many schools did you access last year? What was the length of each visit? Is that adequate?
- What process is in place for contacting the high schools and planning visits for recruiting students into the military?
 - Who do you contact at the school district/high school?
 - What type of information do you share with schools regarding recruiting prior to the visit?
 - How far ahead do you contact the schools?
 - Other?

- What type of information and support do you request from schools prior to visiting the schools? How receptive are they to your requests?
- When you access the schools, what type of recruiting activities do you engage in? Does that vary by type of school? How?
 - Display posters
 - Speak in classes
 - Contact students one-on-one
 - Speak to parents
 - Other?
- How supportive are the schools to your recruiting efforts and in what ways?
- Do schools limit your access to high school students? What type of schools and in what ways?
- Why do you think schools limit your access to high school students? What strategies do you use to deal with schools that restrict your access? How successful are these strategies?
- What would you do or change to help build and maintain a productive relationship between recruiters and educators that would benefit students?
- Before we conclude the interview, I would like to ask a few questions regarding the training you received as a recruiter.
 - What type of training did you attend? How long was the training? What topics did it address and where they relevant to your recruitment efforts?
 - Are there areas of the training you would like to improve? Which areas?
 - What type of support do you receive from your supervisors regarding your recruitment efforts? Are there other supports you would like to see available so you can do your job better?
- Would you like to continue being a recruiter, why or why not?

General Questions for Recruiter Supervisors

- How long have you been in your current position?
- In general, how effective are recruiters in their high school recruitment efforts? Do recruiter skills and capacity vary? In what ways?
- What type of training is provided to recruiters and what topics are addressed?
 - Recruitment strategies
 - Development of collaborative relationships with schools
 - Other?
- What type of monitoring and support do you provide recruiters? Do monitoring and support strategies address varying recruiter capacity? How?

- What challenges do recruiters face in fully accessing high schools? Do you have strategies in place to support recruiters in overcoming such challenges? Why or why not? What are the strategies and are they successful?
- Why do you think schools limit recruiter access to high school students?
- What would you do or change to help build and maintain a productive relationship between recruiters and educators that would benefit students?
- Are there aspects of the working conditions of recruiters you think should be improved so they can do their job better? What are they?

Abbreviations

ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DoDEA	Department of Defense Education Activity
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FY	fiscal year
JROTC	Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

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Graduating high school students are a critical source of new recruits for the U.S. military, and federal statutes require that military recruiters be given the same access to high schools that colleges and employers receive. Despite this, many schools are unclear about their obligations to provide military recruiters access, and enforcement mechanisms are not well understood. As a result, recruiters' access to schools varies widely.

In this report—the first systematic analysis of issues that recruiters face in accessing secondary schools and their students—the authors seek to provide the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) with analysis and recommendations on how to improve recruiters' access to high schools and the process for gaining compliance from noncompliant schools. The authors analyzed public data on high schools and DoD data on the challenges recruiters have faced, and they interviewed recruiters and school representatives.

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