

WE'RE NOT EVEN SPENDING ENOUGH TO EDUCATE OUR SERVICE MEMBERS' CHILDREN

Between 2002 and 2008, USAID spent \$408 million on schools in Afghanistan. A significant chunk of \$857 went to Iraqi education in the first several years after invasion.

Yet as American service men and women have been overseas protecting these school building projects, their own children's schools have been neglected.

The Pentagon has placed 39 percent of its 194 schools in the worst category of "failing," which means it costs more to renovate than replace them, reports to Congress show . Another 37 percent are classified in "poor" physical shape, which could require either replacement or expensive renovations to meet standards. (See the full list of poor and failing schools here)

Schools run by public systems on Army installations don't fare much better: 39 percent fall in the failing or poor categories, according to a 2010 Army report .

A Defense Department task force is evaluating the 159 military base schools operated by local public systems.

Not surprisingly, the school conditions—as well as the special needs that arise from having parents gone for extended periods—has contributed to declining performance.

At specific schools, principals said the impact on academic performance is unmistakable. Vern Steffens, who heads Fort Riley's Jefferson Elementary School, which already has a "poor" rating for its

deterioration, said he worried about low test scores as well. He noted that as the proportion of students with a deployed parent rose over the last two years, from 23 percent to 41 percent, reading test proficiency rates plummeted 23 percentage points.

Because of that drop, in 2010, Jefferson did not make what's known as "adequate yearly progress," a measurement of how well schools are meeting standards required under the No Child Left Behind Act. At the time of state testing, 2,800 soldiers in the post's Combat Aviation Brigade were in the process of deploying – including 175 parents at a school with 349 students.

"They were focused on their dads leaving," said Steffens, not on tests.

DOD knows this is a problem. But Congress has not funded DOD's plan to fix it (to say nothing of funding the public schools that serve bases but are funded locally).

Over the past decade, as the nation waged two wars, annual military spending skyrocketed 150 percent to \$729 billion while money for the military's schools has risen less quickly – about 50 percent, to \$1.9 billion. Money for school construction has amounted to even less, an average \$81 million annually from 2001 to 2010 – barely the cost of a RQ-4 Global Hawk reconnaissance vehicle, the latest "drone" used by the U.S. Air Force. That's only enough money to replace two of the more than 130 substandard schools each year. At that rate, it would take 67 years to replace or renovate all 134 poor and failing schools. By then, of course, there'd be more of them.

Last August, the Defense Department's education agency unveiled a plan that could take up to seven years to replace or renovate its failing and poor schoolhouses – at \$3.7 billion. "Military personnel already

make a lot of sacrifices,” said Fitzgerald, the acting director, explaining the Defense Department’s “good news” investment. “What the department is trying to do is to make sure their children are not sacrificed as well.”

But Congress has committed only \$484 million for the current fiscal year, enough to repair or replace 10 schools.

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Meanwhile, the government each year spends another relatively small amount, \$30 million, on “impact aid” for public schools with students whose parents work in the military.

It’s bad enough that we’re not even taking care of these kids while their parents serve. It’s bad enough that we’re not making a special effort for the kids struggling with their parents’ multiple deployments.

But the military remains one of the few remaining routes through which working class families can break into the middle class. Yet if, by joining the military, service members consign their kids to inadequate schooling, even military service won’t help their kids achieve a middle class lifestyle.

At some point, funding our empire over funding our country will become unsustainable, even for those policing our empire.