

Improving Performance and Efficiency in the Total Army School System

As part of its ongoing efforts to enhance unit readiness while reducing infrastructure and costs, the U.S. Army has taken steps to consolidate its complex system of schools and training centers and to improve training standards. A major objective of this educational reform process is to establish a Total Army School System (TASS) with fully accredited and integrated schools that provide standard, high-quality training and education for all components of the Army, both active (AC) and reserve (RC). Given the magnitude of the changes implied in this restructuring initiative, the Army asked RAND's Arroyo Center to assess the performance and efficiency of the existing Army school system, including a prototype regional system of RC schools. The results of this assessment are presented in *The Total Army School System: Recommendations for Future Policy*.¹ Arroyo researchers conclude that while the Army is moving in the right direction with the new RC prototype, even greater improvements can be achieved in the performance and efficiency of the Army school system as a whole.

MEETING TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

To achieve maximum readiness levels, Army units should be fully manned with properly trained individuals. But the reality is that many positions in RC units are either vacant or held by individuals not qualified for the specific duty position. Moreover, there is a large gap between the number of personnel requiring training and the available training seats (see Figure 1). It is troublesome, then, that many of these valuable training slots actually go unused. In fact, during the Arroyo Center's two-year assessment, the RC school system was not using about a third of the

allotted training seats. So to improve the Army school system's ability to meet its deployability goals, this study recommends that the Army address the problem from both the demand (requirements) and supply (capacity) sides.

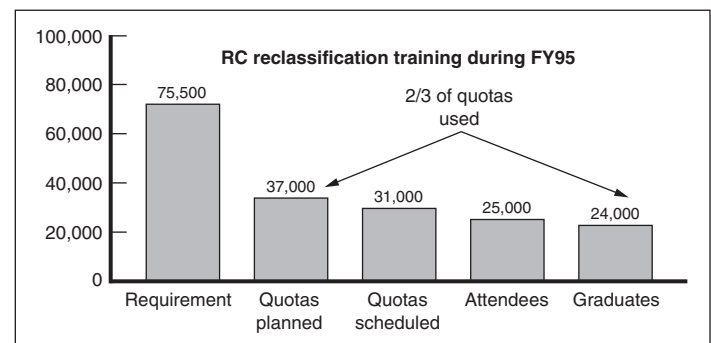


Figure 1—Available Quotas Are Not Fully Utilized

Reduce Demand for Training

The Army could begin by reducing “personnel churn”—through which, mainly for individual reasons, qualified soldiers leave a position for which they are qualified to assume another position for which they are not. Reducing such churn could cut training demand sharply. Indeed, the study demonstrated that modest “stay-in-place” incentives could reduce duty MOS qualification (DMOSQ) training requirements by nearly 21,000 soldiers and raise DMOSQ rates from 74.8 percent to 80.4 percent. By similar logic, reducing attrition would also reduce the need to train replacement personnel.

In addition, the Army could prioritize its training requirements to try to reduce the overall demand for training. Training slots might be assigned first, for example, to soldiers in selected “shortage” military occupational specialties (MOSs). Remaining soldiers could receive in-school training as resources are available, or they might be qualified through other means, such as structured on-the-job training.

¹ That report summarizes key findings and recommendations that are presented in greater detail in a series of companion reports published by RAND: John D. Winkler et al., *Assessing the Performance of the Army Reserve Components School System*, MR-590-A, 1996; John D. Winkler et al., *Training Requirements and Training Delivery in the Total Army School System*, MR-928-A, 1999; and Michael G. Shanley, John D. Winkler, and Paul S. Steinberg, *Resources, Costs, and Efficiency of Training in the Total Army School System*, MR-844-A, 1997.

Make Better Use of Available Training Seats

Available training seats are going unused for a number of reasons. First, the people who make and monitor training reservations are still not fully proficient in using the Army's reservation system, and the training system does not ensure that a sufficient number of qualified instructors are available to conduct scheduled courses. Seats are also lost simply because soldiers who make reservations do not show up.

The Army might improve the use of available training seats if Army commands would place more emphasis on the importance of soldiers' making and keeping—or, if necessary, formally changing—reservations, and design incentives to reward commanders who increase the DMOSQ rate in their unit. Quota-management policies could also be instrumental in this regard, such as the use of selective overbooking to ensure that classes are operating at full capacity, or earlier reassignment of quotas—from units that are not filling their allotted training seats to others that could. Improved forecasting methods that use personnel management databases to examine short-term training demand and then adjust allocations and redirect resources accordingly would also be useful. Finally, current efforts by responsible Army agencies to provide additional training and assistance in using the Army Training Requirements and Resources System (ATRRS) should be maintained and expanded.

USING RESOURCES EFFICIENTLY

The Arroyo Center's analysis has demonstrated that Army school manpower resources (staff and students) dominate the cost of training, meaning that reorganizing the school system will result in only very modest dollar savings. Therefore, the key issue is the efficient use of manpower to deliver training. The researchers have identified several strategies that, undertaken separately or in combination, can substantially increase school efficiency. Those strategies are outlined in Figure 2.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TRAINING

An important impetus for restructuring the TASS was a widespread perception that the quality of training in RC schools was highly variable. According to Arroyo Center survey results from regionally selected RC school com-

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| Step 1 | ⇨ Train more students |
| Step 2 | ⇨ Improve match between instructors and teaching requirements |
| Step 3 | ⇨ Have the right numbers and types of instructors on hand when classes begin <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule training courses in most appropriate locations to meet student needs• Improve means for identifying, recruiting, and training qualified instructors• Institute system of accurate and timely forecasting |
| Step 4 | ⇨ Review school staff composition continuously |
| Step 5 | ⇨ Have sufficient supplemental staff and instructor support to adapt to regional changes in the demand for training |
| Step 6 | ⇨ Consolidate Annual Training locations, but not weekend mode training |

Figure 2—Manpower Strategies for Achieving Efficiency in Army RC Schools

manders and instructors, the greatest quality problems concern courseware rather than training support or instructor qualifications. The most frequent complaint of instructors was that courseware was "incomplete" or "outdated."

An important way to improve training quality is through adequate, up-to-date courseware that is efficiently (i.e., electronically) distributed. The Army has begun this process by developing Total Army Training System Courseware, which creates programs of instruction with the same tasks and standards for both AC and RC personnel. The Army is also trying to improve the distribution of courseware and instruction by using new educational technologies and techniques, such as distance learning. The Army should ensure that adequate resources are available to continue these efforts.

IMPLEMENTING A MONITORING SYSTEM

To achieve continuous improvement in the RC school system, decisionmakers must be able to continually measure performance and efficiency. Thus, as the school system expands to other regions, the Arroyo Center's final recommendation is that the Army implement a quantitative monitoring system to benchmark current performance and efficiency, set goals and objectives, and regularly measure progress. This will facilitate oversight, help focus attention on problems encountered in meeting objectives, and identify appropriate solutions.

RAND research briefs summarize research that has been more fully documented elsewhere. The research summarized in this brief was carried out in the RAND Arroyo Center; it is documented in The Total Army School System: Recommendations for Future Policy, by John D. Winkler et al., MR-955-A, 1999, 48 pp., \$7.50, ISBN: 0-8330-2710-7. Available from RAND Distribution Services (Telephone: toll free 877-584-8642; FAX: 310-451-6915; or Internet: order@rand.org). Abstracts of all RAND documents may be viewed on the World Wide Web (<http://www.rand.org>). Arroyo Center URL: <http://www.rand.org/organization/lard/>. Publications are distributed to the trade by NBN. RAND® is a registered trademark. RAND is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis; its publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of its research sponsors.

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