

2020-2021 JROTC and the COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*DURING EVEN THE DARKEST DAYS,
JROTC CADETS STILL ADAPT, IMPROVISE & OVERCOME!*



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COVID CAN'T STOP JROTC...OR A JROTC CADET!

JROTC has been a fixture in high schools now for over 100 years. Mandated by Congress, the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps is in 3,500 high schools with a mission that could not be more timely or crucial - "To motivate young people to be better citizens." Beyond a structure that provides discipline and esprit de corps, it is a collection of individuals who come together to create a unit. And as different as they all may be, as a group they are a family.

There is no high school group more skilled at coming together to achieve a common goal. Whether it's an internal one such as training for a drill team competition or a community initiative like cleaning up a park or working with a veterans group, they have boundless energy and determination which in many ways caused these cadets to be so uniquely crippled by the Covid-19 pandemic. At first many programs took the experience in stride, their cadets being the steadfast Americans that they are. But when weeks turned into months and classrooms of peers turned into stay-at-home orders, some programs no longer felt like the family these cadets had relied upon. For those students living with a bleak or unsupportive home life, it was that much worse. The camaraderie they had grown to depend on in the school was taken away and replaced with the physical, mental and emotional strain from being isolated at home, oftentimes with parents who themselves were struggling with the psychological impact of the pandemic.

Sports Network International (SNI) believes that beyond the tragic impact of losing a beloved grandparent or family friend which has affected a smaller percentage of students, the pandemic has left our entire nation emotionally scarred by the stress, regardless of whether you or someone you knew has ever been sick. Even blissfully tuned-out teens can't avoid the impact this virus has made. Never has it been more critically important to assure students that they are seen, heard and mostly, *cared for*, by their Junior ROTC family, even if it is a family at a distance and wearing masks. The lessons learned in JROTC have never been more important than they are today. Perseverance, teamwork, goal setting, and structure are critical, along with building for the future good of the program - and more! These cornerstones can be the foundation for not only rebuilding your program, but building back up each and every cadet.

One could make the argument that the Covid-19 virus has been the most impactful and life-altering incident since World War II. Without question for JROTC cadets, the impact has been unparalleled and has been a detriment that has the potential to negatively carry forward through their entire lives in ways few could have imagined just 15 months ago. Most everyone has read the studies, according to Stanford University psychologists, school closures and enforced social distancing have cut off many teens from major means of psychological support, putting them at higher risk of developing anxiety and depression. Add in the worry from financial, emotional, medical and even physical problems manifesting at home and one can easily understand why some teens are filled with a sense of dread and hopelessness just by turning on the news or watching the endless barrage on social media.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 is deadliest among older populations. In fact, through February 17, 2021, 93 percent of COVID-19 deaths nationwide have occurred among those ages 55 or older. Only 0.1 percent were high school aged or younger. And of that one in one thousand figure, 38% of those deaths occurred among young people with moderate to serious

preexisting medical conditions. So one of the few positive aspects of this virus is that young people are highly unlikely to have their physical health be severely harmed by Covid. It is much more damaging to them psychologically and socially.

With this knowledge, the medical establishment began to put forth guidance that schools should be open for in-person education with proper safeguards. State governors began studying this last summer, looking carefully at the scientific data and listening to experts on school issues. SNI believes the science has clearly shown that for most normal, healthy high school students and younger, the virus is showing only modestly higher rates than previous year Influenza death rates. And just as importantly, these same children do not seem to carry and transmit the virus as easily to other teens **OR teachers and school staff!**

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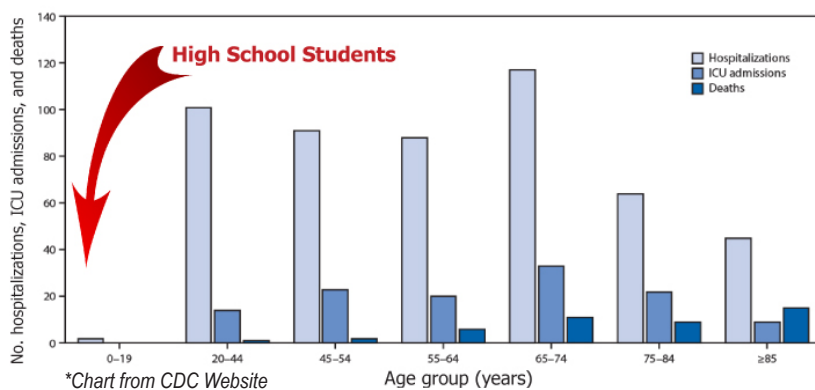
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will be back to normal soon. Caution them to wash their hands, wear a mask indoors and when necessary outdoors, keep reaching out to your friends and stay connected to the program. It can help to ground them in whatever wisdom instructors can share and remind them that “This too, shall pass.”

JROTC IS UNIQUELY DESIGNED TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF COVID

So why are some school systems open and have been this entire school year and others are still closed? Why are some programs allowed to practice inside and others not. Why, why, why? There are as many reasons for this as there are layers of bureaucracy between the classroom and a Governor’s desk. The best a JROTC program can do is reassure its cadets that everyone in charge is doing what they believe is best for you as a student. Additionally, instructors can stand between their cadets and the media onslaught and reassure them that they will be ok and life

What makes JROTC special is the camaraderie and the ability to identify, adapt and overcome obstacles. These are among many of the life lessons taught within the program. Covid is frankly no different, it is just a BIG obstacle. Herculean, in fact. But the foundation of the program has risen to the challenge. Many cadets have stated when classes became virtual, JROTC instructors were the first of any teachers to reach out. They took the initiative to individually contact each cadet within the program, displaying steadfast vigilance and adaptability to the situation. Many stated their instructors acted as

Mental Health & Well-Being: The Other Casualties of the Covid Pandemic

Living in a world that feels so profoundly changed with most of their social structures dismantled is hard for everyone but especially for teenagers who are the least prepared to cope with these stressors. Natural sadness and understandable frustrations can easily mask a deeper slide into clinical depression. Among external signs, unusual behaviors to watch out for include: crying spells, conflict with family or friends, both insomnia or sleeping too much, changes in appetite with changes in weight, use of mood-altering substances, restlessness, agitation like hand-wringing or an inability to sit still, slowed thinking/speaking or body movements, frequent complaints of unexplained body aches and headaches, poor school performance, less attention to personal hygiene or appearance, angry outbursts, bodily self-harm, and expressing feelings of hopelessness. Internal symptoms might be more subtle and less noticeable to the outside observer, but can be seen through a loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities, and lowered self-esteem.

JROTC instructors have the unique opportunity of knowing their students oftentimes much more than the average teacher. Understanding their home situation can help to navigate your way while reaching out to a student who seems particularly affected. Many mental health professionals stress the importance of “checking in.” Open and frequent dialogue is key, along with making sure students know they are missed and that someone cares. JROTC programs have the benefit of already being a family. Even if your program is featuring remote classes, you can still organize groups of students into smaller Zoom chat sessions, with a trusted and well grounded student leader included in each group so that you have someone to get feedback from should concerns be raised. For the program as a whole, instructors should talk often and point out whatever positive signs they can of the “light at the end of the tunnel.” Get a sense if cadets seem capable of managing challenges by themselves or if they seem overwhelmed.

To help teens through the pandemic, doctors urge adults to help guide them toward favorite hobbies and activities, especially ones that include involvement with their peers, even if done remotely. Helping teens stay physically active during lockdown is another very important pathway to good mental health, providing them with a healthy outlet for managing emotions. Schedule in as much variety and interaction as you can so that their lives will have that sense of continuity within their JROTC family and keep them focused on the fact that they are not alone. Reach out and make sure students know that it is safe to approach you with worries they may have and if necessary you can guide them to another school resource person who can help them further. Help to remove the stigma of needing help when you are feeling overwhelmed. For more information on mental health, contact a crisis hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or visit [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org). If you believe someone is experiencing severe symptoms of depression, seek help right away.

role models of resilience and flexibility and inspired them to have the same resolve during the pandemic. Often instructors are available to the cadets 24/7 giving them a lifeline to caring and involved people they trust during a time of stress. This has proven invaluable.

“So many are in the virtual-from-home learning environment, they are not able to truly experience AFJROTC,” said Donald R. Bailey, HQ AFJROTC Region 3 Director. *“The program is majority hands-on and many are missing out on uniform wear, drill, wellness and other (in person) activities related to curriculum.”* However, despite all the burdens placed on JROTC by this global pandemic, the staff, cadre, and most importantly the cadets are powering through, learning and growing, while also finding innovative ways to stay connected and part of their unit's teams. *“Cadet staffs have proven to be creative and have adapted to the many challenges with mixed models to include virtual learning, in class and hybrid schedules where cadets come to school just for AFJROTC and remain in a virtual environment for all other classes,”* Bailey said.

Creativity is what Junior ROTC has in FULL SUPPLY! Cadets are not only utilizing the standard Teams and Zoom meeting apps for everything from the Pledge of Allegiance to classroom lessons, they are also coming up with many other creative endeavors that are making the cadets better and the units stronger. Individual cadets are bonding on-line while still practicing drill individually and in small distanced groups where allowed. Physical fitness videos are encouraging cadets and holding them to a high standard. Raider and Fitness teams are still executing much of what they need to excel. Rocketry, cyber-patriot and other co-curricular activities have been especially challenging but also very rewarding. Because isolation is the enemy, JROTC has provided the structure and the collective thinking that has given many cadets a better feeling of belonging and even success than the general student population.

A popular Junior ROTC activity nationally is cadets sharing GoPro and cellphone videos of runs and other physical activities, including individual cadets sharing drill moves with their rifle. The connection they make by sharing videos and receiving feedback can be a lifeline for cadets who are still on lockdown from their school.

Another exceptionally creative initiative are the schools that are putting forth great videos to share with Middle School programs in their district when in-person meetings about the program prove impractical. These younger students see the teamwork and sense of fun and learning even through the hurdles of Covid and are so impressed they are keeping numbers up for next year's incoming class. These videos can be posted and become great recruiting tools that parents can see. Administrators and counselors are also much more motivated to share links like these because they know those connections still need to be made. As cadets are starting to think about high school classes, now is a great time for all programs to create these and have your instructors initiate a conversation with the Middle School principals on the best time and place to show these videos to their students!

ARMY RAIDER WEEKEND KICKS OFF THE LONG FORWARD MARCH TO NORMALCY!

(at Double Interval, MARCH of course!)

With 40 years of holding over 200 national athletic events, SNI has hosted meets through Norovirus, Avian flu and other disease outbreaks. We follow and always exceed state, CDC and WHO guidelines, to provide a safe and effective competition. Never has this been more critical than during the recently completed **U.S. Army Raider Nationals Weekend, 26-27 February in Molena, GA.**

Limiting teams, spacing start times, separate entry/exit at all events, no spectators, mask wearing, temperature checks at event sites, 3-day prior wellness forms, and sanitization of common gear were just a few of the measures put in place so attending teams could build their programs through safely attending this event. So many instructors called in the months prior, thanking us profusely for just TRYING to have the event. To give their cadets something to point to and to hope for. It literally helped save their year. While many had a dream of winning, the goal this year for most was just to compete.

Outlining our experience, detailing the scores of safety protocols to be implemented, then expressing how the safety component was paramount to the event and WOULD do the job was only a piece of the puzzle. The biggest part was understanding WHY it was so essential to have the event, even though so many parts of the country were still limiting themselves to online experiences. In talking to seasoned instructors it was clear that these teams desperately NEEDED this event for unit cohesion and stability and for the mental & physical health and well-being of their cadets. SNI has conducted extensive post-event follow-up and among the 38 schools and 1258 people on site for two days, no cadets or instructors were affected. It is hard to remember a time we were ALL more proud of an event that meant so much to so many. Congrats to those teams who made it happen!

Army JROTC has moved their upcoming National Drill Championships to Florida, hosting the day prior to the venerable **National High School Drill Team Championships** and the **National JROTC Fitness Challenge Championships** in Daytona Beach, Florida all beginning the last day in April. As more vaccines go out across the country, Covid hospital admissions and death rates are plummeting. The CDC just updated its guidelines to only 3' of social distance needed in schools (along with mask use), which is allowing more teams to receive travel permission. SNI is getting calls daily from schools looking to enter to give their cadets SOMETHING TO POINT TO. Again, most teams do not have a driving goal of a winning anything but simply want their cadets to learn and compete, and to have a sense of normalcy! **While spaces are limited, we urge interested schools to call or email to gain your space. Then safely train with a big smile knowing you will travel and compete - because you have earned it!**



JROTC IN THE MEDIA DURING COVID:

The information below will yield an informative Google search for each of these media stories, or for the on-line version of this magazine, simply click the link!

JROTC Cadets at Centennial HS in Colorado used the many donated American Flags their unit receives to produce individual personalized awards for veterans in local VA nursing home and presented them in person:

<https://www.koaa.com/news/covering-colorado/jrotc-gives-veterans-in-nursing-home-stars-from-worn-out-american-flags>

Cadets at Ringgold HS in Tennessee kept working hard and gained top finishes at the National HS Drill Team Championships in the 2020 Virtual Competition. Watch this video and think about the time and effort these cadets expended and what it meant to them:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQ-7iFhymeg>

Army & Navy JROTC cadets at Chesnee and Boiling Springs high schools in South Carolina continue the tradition of saying the pledge each morning. The video is posted on the Spartanburg County Facebook page. This sense of normalcy and tradition is an outstanding touchstone:

<https://www.wyff4.com/article/jrotc-cadets-continue-pledge-of-allegiance-despite-no-school-during-covid-19-outbreak-spartanburg-county/31919716>

Marine Corps JROTC cadets at Lynn English JROTC in Massachusetts are excited, finally getting to the drill excellence they have become known for. They are gearing up to compete in the 2021 NHSDTC Virtual event:

<https://www.itemlive.com/2021/03/14/award-winning-english-jrotc-team-gets-back-to-work/>

Navy JROTC cadets from Comeaux HS in Louisiana worked hard just weeks ago to conduct and excel in their impressive Pass & Review Ceremony:

<https://www.klfy.com/lafayette-parish/comeaux-high-navy-jrotc-holds-pass-in-review-ceremony/>

Army JROTC cadets from Española Valley HS in New Mexico train hard and compete via mail with their fledgling rifle team:

<https://nnmindy.com/2021/03/shooting-at-the-high-school-jrotc-rifle-team-on-target>

Army JROTC cadets from Wicomico HS in Maryland learn they are the ONLY JROTC program in the state to earn their slot into the Academic Bowl Championships:

<https://www.wmdt.com/2021/03/wicomico-co-jrotc-team-to-compete-in-academic-bowl/>

Air Force JROTC cadets from Sioux City HS in South Dakota hold a 12-hour vigil to honor the "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier":

<https://siouxlandnews.com/news/local/jrotc-plans-veterans-day-vigil-with-changes-to-accommodate-covid-19>

Army JROTC cadets from Dalton HS in Georgia volunteered to support the Sharing is Caring event to help many:

https://www.dailycitizen.news/news/local_news/dalton-high-school-jrotc-cadets-help-with-sharing-is-caring/article_bd805ab5-536c-57ba-b717-cfa5f6346774.html

From the Federal government downward, school districts are committing to opening their schools safely. And yes, they are opening. *"You can't see the smiles on their faces because of the masks,"* said SgtMaj Kenneth Oswald from Lynn English HS Marine Corps JROTC. *"But you can see their eyes lit up because they're so happy to be back."*

Virtually all schools have substantial Covid mitigation programs. And the ability to limit the spread often starts and ends with responsible cadet actions. Riding in vehicles together without masks is a big problem many high school students are experiencing. These tight quarters and limited air circulation can be problematic. Social creatures that they are, teens must also resist the urge to share drinks or food. Also remind cadets that when necessary, quarantine means just that. If they are exposed, stay home and use a separate bedroom and bathroom if possible. Wear face masks and limit direct contact with others in the house until they are sure they are clear. DO NOT take it as an opportunity to visit friends, etc. Simple measures like this can make all the difference and cadets in JROTC have the discipline & reasoning skills to be leaders in this area and make a positive impact on limiting the spread of the virus.

As schools move closer to normalcy, the issue of safe training comes more to the surface. Teams begin practicing and safety become more important than ever. Failure to practice safely by one cadet on or off the school grounds can shut down the entire team in a minute. As many instructors have repeatedly stated, the biggest casualty in training during Covid has been "stability." With schools hyper-sensitive to who was in class with whom when a positive test pops up, it is critical they use good judgment 24/7. Stay diligent with hand washing and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and keep distance where possible during training. Remind your cadets.... Who is in charge of safety? EVERYONE!

Cadet Commander Weatherly Reeves, from the AFJROTC unit at North Surry HS (NC) commented, *"This is a moment in time that will be looked upon for the rest of our history. During this time we can either give in to despair or learn to dance in the rain. Leading a corps while never getting within six feet of someone is hard, but it's not impossible. Yes, COVID-19 provided us with many obstacles, but it also strengthened our relationships. Knowing that we can weather this storm together proves that we can weather any difficulty that comes our way."*

And finally, Cadet LTC Jacob Smith, Battalion Commander of Leavenworth High School's Army JROTC Department from Leavenworth, Kansas did not allow the pandemic to hold him back. In fact he rose to the challenge, stating, "COVID has taken its toll on JROTC programs nationwide. Many cadets lost the opportunity to fully learn how to be leaders in their communities. As for the Leavenworth JROTC Program, we have risen to the challenge of getting things back to normal and have been pioneers in our school and community in safely running events. Cadets understand the importance of serving the community in these difficult times for many jobless members of the community and have participated in several donation drives. Ultimately, the mission of getting back to normal is the primary task of cadet leadership like myself. This year is an investment for the next generation of cadets. This past year has shown the strength and resilience of each program across the nation. Ultimately, it is very important for JROTC to be able to go back to normal to allow cadets to take full advantage of the many great opportunities normally presented to them. I hope that current cadets do not use this year as their breaking point and choose to continue participating next year when things should be back to normal."



Summer Work for JROTC Excellence!

Even the most locked down school districts nationally have plans to open wide in the 2021-2022 school year! Cadets should be prepared to hit the ground running by working this summer within all safety guidelines. Cadets will be practicing both solo and in small groups for fitness and Raider especially where physicality is a requirement for excellence. But for drill, individual cadets and even small groups will be looking for opportunities to train. And many know right where to find it!

Cadets across the nation have contacted SNI about attending the **Nationals Drill Camp** this July. The NDC turbo-charges cadet skill in building their individual talent as well as measurable team excellence in all facets of military drill. All-service instruction from many of the winningest national drill coaches will take place on the campus of Schreiner University just outside San Antonio, Texas from July 11 to 17.

SNI is all about safety, positivity and getting cadets back into their groove. From dining, training and even sleeping, NDC plans are geared around learning and having fun in a safe environment. Talk to your instructors or parents to make your plans to attend today!



800/327-9311

<https://thenationals.net/camp-main-WEST.htm>

Dear Cadets and Instructors,

As the President of SNI, I have worked with Junior ROTC programs throughout my lifetime. Starting at 18 years old, these past 38 years have been deeply influenced by the character and values I have seen in so many of the cadets I have met and instructors I have known. And like you, this pandemic has affected me and this company in many of the same ways you all have been rocked by it.

SNI did not hold a single event in 2020 except for a Virtual Solo Exhibition competition. We all hunkered down and endured the same uncertainty that all JROTC units were facing. When the lockdown began, as a mother I saw my oldest daughter, a college senior at Tufts University be given 48 hours to pack up and leave Boston. Forever. She graduated and received her degree but with no more fanfare than a 'Congratulations' email. My other children (Sophomore in college and high school Junior) went into lockdown and struggled to stay motivated with both school and their social life.

As so much of this publication has shown, COVID-19 has had profound impacts on society. During the worst of it, all anyone could do was hang on and hope for the best. With so many limits on what you could physically DO, there wasn't even the opportunity to be truly productive. Slowly we have found ourselves moving back towards a state of 'new normalcy' which is to say, not really normal but so much better than it has been. This is the time that your leadership can make the greatest difference your cadets may ever see. A New York Times article compared the devastating effects of Covid-19 to Hurricane Katrina. It displaced over 600,000 people, putting families and children into limbo for years. It has taken a decade of distance to appreciate the impact of that natural disaster. It will take at least that long to see the depth and breadth of the wounds this pandemic has made upon our children. But this pandemic will end, and that day is soon upon us. Never has leadership been of more critical importance. It is your job to shoulder the weight of rebuilding your program, instructors and cadets alike. There aren't destroyed buildings to repair like those left by a hurricane, but there are individuals and programs who need that same strength to rebuild their world. May you all have the strength to be a piercing light in such a dim and dispirited world. Your cadets will take that positive light into their own hands and use it to show them the way into a bright future full of possibility.

*With Great Admiration & Respect,
Samantha SteClaire, President, SNI*



WHY CHOOSE A SENIOR MILITARY COLLEGE (SMC)?



Six Senior Military Colleges (SMC) in our Nation have Army ROTC programs which are part of a Corps of Cadets.

WHY CHOOSE A SENIOR MILITARY COLLEGE?

- Graduates of Senior Military Colleges are Cadets who will be assessed onto Active Duty upon recommendation from their Professor of Military Science, they do not have to compete nationally for Active Duty
- Full Tuition Scholarships are available for those who qualify
- Paid a personal stipend of \$420/Month while attending class
- Paid a Book Allowance of \$1,200 per year
- SMC's are steeped in tradition and offer students an organized lifestyle, enhanced leadership training, and superb training facilities
- Cadets may choose to commission into the Army Reserve or the National Guard through the Guaranteed Reserve Forces Duty option
- Cadets quickly take on leadership roles and experience every level of leadership from top to bottom
- SMC's have many of their own training facilities

For more information, including schools and locations, please visit goarmy.com/drillnation