



# POST 9/11 TROOPS TO TEACHERS ENHANCEMENT ACT

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## **The bipartisan Post 9/11 Troops to Teachers Enhancement Act would:**

- Make the Troops to Teachers program more accessible by reducing length of service requirements;
- Expand the number of school districts in which participants can qualify for a stipend towards the costs of becoming a teacher;
- Create an advisory board charged with improving awareness of the program, increasing participation, and ensuring that the program meets the needs of our schools and our veterans.

## **Background:**

Troops to Teachers (TTT) was established in 1994 to help troops transitioning to civilian life become teachers. TTT is funded by the Department of Education at about \$15 million a year and run by a Defense Department agency called the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. It was last reauthorized by Congress as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA, PL 107-110).

TTT helps eligible separated service members obtain teaching credentials and teach in all fields, particularly in priority subject areas, such as math and science. Under the current requirements for the program, eligible participants must be retired from active or reserve service and:

- For those separating from active duty service, they must have six years of continuous service and agree to serve at least three more years in the reserves;
- For those in the reserves, they must have at least 10 years of active or reserve duty, and commit to serve at least three more years.

Participants receive a stipend of up to \$5,000 to help defray the costs of obtaining their teaching certification. To receive the stipend, the participant must agree to teach in a “high need” school district, which is defined as a district with “a poverty rate of at least 20% or at least 10,000 poor children.”

Participants are eligible for a bonus of \$10,000 in assistance in lieu of the stipend if they teach in a high need school within a high need school district, defined as a school where “at least 50% of the students are from low-income families or the school has a large percentage of students who qualify for assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.”

A March 2006 Government Accountability Report (GAO) on the program found that TTT has contributed to the gender and racial diversity of the teaching workforce in addition to helping to increase the number of teachers in priority subject areas such as math, science, special education or vocational education.

The GAO report found that:

- Over 80 percent of TTT participants are male and over 25 percent are African American, compared to 26 and 9 percent of the national new teacher population, respectively;
- 14 percent of TTT participants teach in elementary schools, 19 percent in middle schools and 37 percent in high schools;
- 60 percent of participants reported that they would not have become a teacher without the TTT program;
- About one-third of participants teach in priority subject areas such as math, science, special education and vocational education.

However, GAO also identified key challenges that limit the overall effectiveness of the program and areas for improvement:

- Geographical diversity of participants is limited, with a majority of participants hired to teach in just seven states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Texas and Virginia;
- Funding for the program has declined, from a high of \$29 million in FY03 to about \$15 million annually;
- The “high-need” school criteria established in 2005 has reduced interest and participation in the program, as schools in their regions and communities in which they had hoped to settle were no longer considered eligible for them to receive the stipend or bonus;

#### **What this bill does:**

**Reduces service requirements so make the program more attractive to younger veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.** The bill allows any service member who has served at least 90 days of continuous active duty since September 11, 2001 eligible for participation in TTT. For those who have not served 90 days since 9/11, the bill reduces the active duty service requirement from six years to four. This change would increase the appeal of the TTT program to younger members of the military who may be returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with fewer than six years in the service.

**Allow more participants to qualify for financial assistance for teacher certification and training.** The bill extends the eligibility for the \$5,000 stipend to any participant who agrees to teach three years in any school that is in a district that receives Title I funds. This section would qualify participants teaching in a wider range of school districts for the existing stipend towards teacher certification and training costs, which is currently limited only to those who teach in “high need” districts. According to the GAO, participation in the program has been focused on just seven states. One of the current disincentives to participation is a lack of eligible schools in the area in which a service member lives, or intends to live. By making more schools eligible, it will help increase the incentive for troops to consider participating in the TTT program and become teachers.

**Creates an advisory board to provide direction and improve awareness of the program.** The bill establishes Troops to Teachers Advisory Board to be composed of the DOD director of the program, a representative from the Department of Education, 3 representatives from state TTT offices, 3 representatives from veterans service organizations. This board would develop best practices for improvement recruitment of eligible service members into the program, increase awareness within eligible school systems, and coordinate the goals of the program with other federal, state, and local education needs and programs. The board will also address the need to improve awareness of the program, both to eligible members of the military and to communities with a need for highly skilled teachers in key subject areas. The bill also requires the board to prepare an annual report to Congress on key elements of the program, including the number of participants in the program, what subjects they are teaching, and where. The board would also submit recommendations to Congress on improving recruitment efforts as well as any changes needed to improve the program.



## From Iraq to Class: Turning Troops into Teachers

After 30 years in the military, Roosevelt Dickerson wasn't looking for a new career challenge. A retired Air Force chief master sergeant, he took some small-time jobs here and there for a few years — nothing too strenuous, nothing too taxing. Then he got a call from his old boss, the Defense Department, asking if he would be interested in trying one of the most strenuous, taxing jobs around: teaching. They wanted to know if he would consider joining the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program, which helps place former military personnel in U.S. classrooms. As Dickerson, 57, recalls, his responses to the offer were, in order, "You gotta be crazy. I can't be a teacher." "No!" and "Oh, no, no, no. Are you kidding?"

Yet soon enough, appeals to his patriotism convinced Dickerson, and for the past three years, he has taught special-education classes at Denver's East High School. He is just one of the thousands of older, second-career military retirees (the average age at first hire is 44) whom the program has channeled into the teaching profession. But as successful as the 15-year-old program has been, supporters say it needs to enlarge its talent pool in order to attract the waves of younger troops returning from hot spots such as Iraq and Afghanistan and making the not-always-easy transition to civilian life. A pair of House members, Connecticut Democrat Joe Courtney and Wisconsin Republican Tom Petri, are getting ready to introduce legislation that would greatly expand the program by opening its doors to tens of thousands of veterans of all ages.

Established in 1994, just as the U.S. military was drawing down forces after the the Cold War ended, TTT is funded by the Department of Education to the tune of about \$14.4 million a year and run by a Defense Department outfit called Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. Essentially a referral and placement service, TTT provides up to \$10,000 for military personnel to obtain their teaching certification; they must be retired or have left their service with at least six years of active duty. Many of the more than 11,000 men and women who have participated in the program are nontraditional first-time teachers, middle-aged former officers, sailors, soldiers and Marines who hope to parlay their skills into a very different kind of service career. And it's not just their unorthodox experience that distinguishes them from the majority of their new colleagues; compared with the rest of the American teaching pool, TTT participants are more diverse in several important ways.

"They are disproportionately male, disproportionately minority and disproportionately teachers of math, science and special education," says Petri, who has regularly sung the program's praises. Those three groups just happen to be the ones most lacking in the teaching profession, and TTT falls at the nexus of former President George W. Bush's call for more science, technology, engineering and math instructors and President Barack Obama's embrace of alternative teacher-certification programs.

Since TTT does not train its teachers — instead simply providing funding for them to be taught in any number of different schools or programs — there is no one pedagogical philosophy that links its teachers other than a military, mission-oriented mind-set. But that common background has translated into effective instruction and classroom management, according to William Owings, a professor of educational leadership at Old Dominion University who has worked on two studies of the program. "Principals and other supervisors have reported that these teachers worked better with problem children, worked better with parents and worked better with colleagues," he says. On the basis of administrators' observations, "the TTT people rated higher in exhibiting behaviors that are associated with increases in student achievement."

It's exactly that kind of success that needs to be replicated in more schools and by more former soldiers, say observers. As the program stands, participants must teach in a high-need district — one with "a poverty rate of at least 20% or at least 10,000 poor children" — in order to receive the \$5,000 cash assistance. And a \$5,000 bonus is available to teachers who land in schools where "at least 50% of the students are from low-income families or the school has a large percentage of students who qualify for assistance under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act."

Courtney, a co-sponsor of the tentatively named Post-9/11 Troops to Teachers Enhancement Act, wants to enlarge the bonus pool to include all Title I schools (those where fewer than 40% of students come from low-income families); that would — theoretically, at least — offer additional opportunities to older military retirees, who are generally settled in one location and would be inclined to teach at nearby schools that are not currently eligible. At the same time, in order to appeal to younger members of the military who may be returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with fewer than six years in the service, the bill proposes reducing the requirement to four years. Of course, none of this really matters if no one knows about the program. "We really need to increase awareness," says Courtney. "When you talk to school administrators and veterans groups about Troops to Teachers, they practically draw a blank. The military is one of the most idealistic, public-spirited segments of this country's population, so why wouldn't we want to have more of them in our classrooms?"

# The New York Times

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## Troops Finding New Service as Teachers

By BERNIE BECKER

WASHINGTON — In her last job in the Air Force, Tammie Langley gave prospective pilots and navigators an introduction to aeronautics. Four years later, Ms. Langley is in a different sort of classroom, teaching sixth graders in North Carolina everything from reading to math.

The settings may be radically different, but Ms. Langley said the transition from teaching 22-year-olds to teaching 11- or 12-year-olds had been fairly seamless. "Either way, you still have to kind of wipe their noses a bit and kick them in the behind every now and then," said Ms. Langley, who is in her second year at Kannapolis Intermediate School, about 25 miles north of Charlotte.

Ms. Langley, 36, became a schoolteacher in large part because of Troops to Teachers, a federal program that, over 15 years, has helped about 12,000 former service members transition into second careers in the classroom. Now, a bipartisan group in Congress is hoping to expand the program to allow more veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan to sign up, while also increasing the number of places in which they could find employment.

Not all of the veterans who enter the classroom with the help of Troops to Teachers, some of whom are up to a generation older than teachers starting right out of college, share Ms. Langley's background in formal instruction. But the program's supporters and participants say that military service in general provides the sort of discipline and life experiences that translate well to teaching.

"My very first sergeant said, 'Practice doesn't make perfect,'" said Moises Perez, 50, a social studies teacher in Clayton County, Ga., who spent nearly 24 years in the Army, including service in Afghanistan. "He said, 'Perfect practice makes perfect.' That's what I want to teach the kids."

C. Emily Feistritzer, president of the National Center for Education Information, said: “We’re finding that these teachers seem to be able to really manage a classroom from the start, which is the biggest problem a lot of teachers have going in. And they come in thinking all children can learn, without any sort of socioeconomic biases.”

These teachers are also a more diverse group than the general teaching population. Men have accounted for about 80 percent of the program’s participants, while 35 percent or so have been members of minorities. The program, which is run by the Defense Department but financed by the [Education Department](#), also encourages participants to teach math, science and special education, areas in which school districts can have the toughest time filling teaching slots.

William P. McAleer, who runs Troops to Teachers, said teaching math and science was sort of a natural progression for the many veterans who worked highly technical jobs in the service. “They’ve lived this stuff,” he said. “They bring real-life experience to these subjects.”

With all that in mind, supporters on Capitol Hill are pushing to expand the program by letting more service members participate and increasing the number of districts where they can teach. Legislation introduced in the House and Senate in October would allow candidates with four years of service or three months of continuous active duty since the Sept. 11 attacks to participate. As it stands, six years of active duty is needed to sign up.

Two leading sponsors of the House bill — Representatives Tom Petri, Republican of Wisconsin, and Joe Courtney, Democrat of Connecticut — said the program, which was created while the military was downsizing, needed to be updated to account for service members returning from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. (The Senate version of the bill was introduced by Senators [John McCain](#), Republican of Arizona, and [Michael Bennet](#), Democrat of Colorado.)

“We have a large number of returning vets who don’t fit the model of the original program,” Mr. Courtney said. “These are people who have a lot to offer, but just can’t right now.”

The proposed legislation would also allow participants to teach in a larger number of schools. Right now, veterans who sign up with Troops to Teachers receive a stipend of up to \$5,000 to help them obtain a teaching certificate, in exchange for a three-year commitment at high-need schools. Candidates who go to schools with even higher poverty rates receive a maximum of \$10,000.

With the health care debate still front and center, it is uncertain how much attention Congress will give a Troops to Teachers expansion. But the House bill has already collected roughly 75 co-sponsors, while the American Legion and the National Education Association have also endorsed expanding the program.

Back in Kannapolis, Ms. Langley is also quick to sing the program’s praises.

“Without it, I would not have been able to make it financially,” said Ms. Langley, who also flew combat missions in Afghanistan in her nine years in the service. “And a three-year commitment is nothing. My kids are some of the best on the planet.”