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DOD's Troops to Teachers Program (TTT)

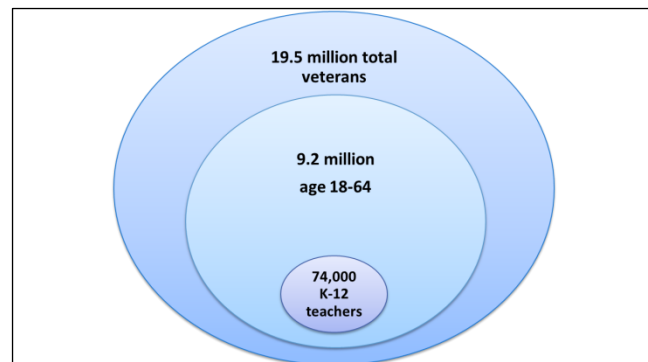
Background

Over the past few decades, Congress has authorized dozens of programs to provide educational assistance, credentialing opportunities, and employment support to service members transitioning to civilian life. One of these programs, Troops to Teachers (TTT), has been a congressionally authorized program since 1993 (see 10 U.S.C. §1154), though various Service-level initiatives preceded it. TTT supports veterans transitioning to careers in education. Congress initially intended the program to meet the dual objectives of (1) providing employment assistance to transitioning veterans and (2) alleviating teacher shortages nationwide, particularly in high-need schools and certain subject areas (i.e., math, science, special education, foreign languages, and career technical education). Associated program goals include, reducing veteran unemployment, increasing the number of male and minority teachers, and improving education qualities.

Population of Veterans as Teachers

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reports approximately 19.5 million living veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. 9.2 million are working-age, accounting for approximately 5% of the U.S. population between the ages of 18-64. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, veterans accounted for about 74,000 (2.1%) of the roughly 5 million primary and secondary school teachers in the U.S. in 2016. The Department of Defense (DOD) reports that TTT has placed over 21,000 veteran teachers in classrooms since the program's start. Teaching jobs often require a bachelor degree and certain certifications or licenses, depending on state laws and regulations. The U.S. census bureau has estimated that approximately 25% of veterans have earned a bachelor's degree or higher.

Figure 1. Estimated Veteran K-12 Teacher Population



Source: CRS graphic derived from National Center for Education Statistics and VA data.

Legislative History and Statutory Authority

What began as military service-level initiatives to provide teacher certification programs for transitioning soldiers in

the late 1980s, was eventually authorized as an official DOD program in the FY1993 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 102-484). The program has alternatively been under statutory control of DOD and the Department of Education (ED). However, for the bulk of the program's history, DOD has administered it through the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES). DANTES maintains strong relationships directly with state education departments. Since 2013, DOD has had statutory responsibility for TTT in coordination with ED for advice and information on teacher preparation programs and academic and geographic areas with critical teacher shortages.

The Current TTT Program

Congress has funded TTT at a level of about \$14 million annually since FY2014. This funding supports three primary activities: (1) providing placement assistance (e.g., counseling and referral services) to service members pursuing employment in education, (2) awarding stipends and bonuses to eligible participants to assist with the costs of education and certification, and (3) providing grants in support of recruiting efforts. The TTT program itself does not operate or manage any traditional or alternative certification programs. Rather, TTT helps participants use existing state and local certification programs.

Eligibility Requirements

In order to receive *counseling and referral services*, service members must register as TTT participants. The FY2013 NDAA expanded the eligibility requirements for counseling and referral services to "all current and former members of the U.S. Armed Forces whose last period of service is characterized as honorable."

Eligibility for financial assistance, a *stipend* or *bonus*, under the TTT program is more restrictive. It depends on a combination of educational qualifications and duration and characterization of military service. To be licensed and employed as an academic subject teacher, participants must hold a bachelor's or advanced degree from an accredited institution. To be licensed and employed as a career-technical instructor, participants must either meet state career-technical teacher requirements or have the equivalent of one year of college with six years of military experience in the vocational or technical field.

Requirements for financial assistance include: (1) application within three years of retirement or separation; (2) *honorable* characterization of the last period of service; and (3) meeting one of the following requirements:

- Be eligible, or within one year of eligibility, for retired or retainer pay,
- Be retired or separated due to a service-related physical disability under Chapter 61 of Title 10, United States Code, on or after January 8, 2002,

- Be transitioning from active duty on or after January 8, 2002, and have served four or more years of continuous active duty immediately before separation, and execute a written agreement to serve for three or more years with a Selected Reserve unit, or
- Have completed six or more years of creditable service towards retirement on or after January 8, 2002 and execute a written agreement to serve for three or more years with a Selected Reserve unit.

Stipends and Bonuses

Eligible individuals may receive a stipend of up to \$5,000 to “cover expenses incurred by the participant to obtain the required educational level, certification, or licensing.” Program participants who accept a full-time position in an eligible school may receive an additional bonus of up to \$5,000, and the bonus can be as high as \$10,000 for schools designated as “high need.” High need schools are those at which least 50 percent of enrolled students are from low-income families based as defined in 10 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(3). According to a recent DOD Inspector General (DODIG) report, in 2015, the program paid \$3.7 in stipends and bonuses to 1,347 participants.

Grants

The TTT grant program, also administered by DANTES, provides awards of between \$100,000 to \$400,000 to states or consortia of states to facilitate recruitment and employment of eligible veterans. In 2015, DANTES provided \$4.4 million in grants.

Selected Benefits

Since the establishment of the Troops to Teachers program, many scholars and non-governmental organizations have studied the impact of TTT on transitioning service members and the schools they serve. Much of the research has pointed to positive effects on the education system and program participants. Teachers and school administrators generally perceive TTT as a successful program. Achievements have been noted in attracting traditionally less-represented groups to teaching careers (e.g., men and racial minorities), encouraging service in high-need schools and subjects, offering higher teacher quality (as measured by performance and student achievement), and higher teacher job satisfaction relative to the national teacher workforce. However, given the relatively small population of participants there is no data to suggest that this program has had a significant effect on veteran employment outcomes.

TTT may also offer other potential benefits to DOD. For example, DOD research has found that interactions with veterans have had a strong positive effect on youth propensity to serve. Thus, having a veteran influencer in the classroom may aid in DOD's recruiting efforts.

Recent Program Criticisms

While benefits have been noted, a September 2017 DODIG audit report noted several program management shortcomings by the Department, DANTES, and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS). In particular DODIG found:

- DOD's failure to develop formal implementing policies in accordance with TTT program law,

- Improper payments to individuals who did not meet eligibility requirements,
- Lack of training on requirements and procedures for determining applicant eligibility for stipends and bonuses,
- Failure to withhold federal income tax on payments,
- Failure to establish debt collection processes for those who did not fulfill program requirements, and
- DANTES failure to establish the grant program in accordance with DOD grant regulations.

Figure 2. DODIG Findings

The DODIG found that:

In a sample of 63 payments valued at \$212,000, nearly 40% were improperly paid.

\$381,000 in stipends and bonuses paid to participants who failed to fulfill program requirements remains uncollected.

Source: DODIG, *The Troops-to-Teachers Program*, Report No. DODIG-2017-123, September 28, 2017.

Considerations for Congress

While the TTT program has broadly been considered a success in terms of helping schools and veterans, DODIG findings suggest program funds are not always being used as Congress intended.

Furthermore, as Congress evaluates programs to assist transitioning troops, it may consider the potential for overlap with programs offered by DOD (e.g., Tuition Assistance) and other federal agency programs that support service member education and training (e.g., GI Bill, VA counseling programs, etc.). There may be opportunities to combine or cut duplicative programs.

An option for enhancing TTT might be to explore private or state partnerships. In the House Report to accompany the FY2017 NDAA, the House Armed Services Committee encouraged the Secretary of Defense to,

investigate the establishment of a public-private partnership with a 501c organization capable of leveraging private donations and relationships to improve and expand upon the current Troops to Teachers model.

Finally, most veterans' employment programs are general and do not support a particular industry or occupation. The TTT program could serve as a model for new programs that help other sectors of the economy to use veterans' skills to meet broader workforce goals.

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