



Troops to Teachers: A Profile of Education in Action

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For almost a decade now the nation has been struggling to devise new systems and strategies for recruiting and retaining high-quality educators for our understaffed public schools. And we have come a long way. State departments of education, institutions of higher education, and regional school districts are starting to think outside the box to attract what we might call nontraditional teacher candidates—often already employed, successful businesspeople in the private sector—whose knowledge and skills can be put to use in classrooms around the nation. About eight years ago, the sector of the population I now represent thought it might have something to offer in the campaign to put a qualified teacher in every classroom. Let me try to pitch the idea to you the way it might have sounded then.

Ready for a Challenge

What if I told you that I represented an industry that was downsizing and could offer thousands of well-trained, highly skilled, educated professionals ready to make a midlife career change? What if I told you that these individuals were self-motivated, reliable, brave, and adventurous people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds who were used to working within the system and always ready for a challenge? If you represented a school district with teaching vacancies to fill, I am sure you would want to learn more about what people in this group had to offer and how we could encourage them to explore public school teaching as a profession.

These are the types of individuals the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program helps make the transition from military positions to certified classroom teachers. The program has been phenomenally successful and is now an integral part

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of state teacher recruitment efforts in 20 states. As the project director for the Washington state office of TTT, I am proud to be able to share both basic information about the origins and goals of this fast-growing program and recently published data about the in-the-field performance of TTT educators.

A New Kind of Service

The Troops to Teachers program was established as a response to military downsizing by the 1993 Defense Authorization Bill and is managed by the Department of Defense's Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Support (DANTES) agency. Our primary purpose is to provide referral and placement assistance to military and civilian personnel affected by the military reductions, and we have established support offices in 24 states and an Internet referral system to meet this goal. Placement Assistance Offices originally existed in only 16 states, which were selected based on the number of military installations they housed. Currently, we have Placement Assistance Offices in 20 states, and new legislation will give us access to several more. Nationwide, we have supplied more than 4,000 new educators since the program's inception in January 1994.

Although we believe that educators placed through Troops to Teachers are strong candidates who are well received and rank among the highest-quality teachers in the field, the program did have to confront some early misconceptions about military personnel. Instructional programs in the armed forces are at first glance very different from civilian preparatory institutions, and we all know that people are typically skeptical of what is unfamiliar or not understood. I recently attended a graduation ceremony for the college of education at the Bangor submarine base in Bangor, Washington. There were about 40 sailors there, and another two dozen or so were receiving their degrees in absentia because they were on active duty. Obviously, this is not something that a civilian institution has to deal with, but for the navy, this is a typical class. And yet, their graduates are just as high achieving in their studies. In this particular class, the grade point average was 3.18. In fact, the school at the Bangor submarine base has received Northwest accreditation, and they proudly display their accreditation plaque in the same glass case that holds artifacts and memorabilia from their service in World War II.

So, yes, in some ways military preparation can seem like another world. I think that what people were most afraid of when it came to supporting the Troops to Teachers program was that military personnel would have a hard time transitioning from their regimented, adult world to civilian life and interaction with schoolchildren. And to answer this concern, I think it's important to share an anecdote from my experience. A sergeant major once said to me, "I get irritated when people ask me how I like civilian life. My children





are civilians, my wife is a civilian, we go to a civilian church, we live in a civilian community, and I drive to work each day and do my job. So I consider myself very much a civilian!" The people TTT puts into classrooms may have experienced things in their military careers that we cannot relate to or even comprehend, but they are not isolated from the realities of everyday life. If anything, we believe they have the opportunity to make excellent use of their life experience and unique worldviews to engage, inspire, and educate the nation's youth.

Early Indicators Are Positive

From the beginning, anecdotal evidence has demonstrated that Troops to Teachers has been a huge success in bringing dedicated, mature, and experienced individuals into the classroom who have proven not only to be effective teachers but also excellent role models for students. In 1995, more than 60 percent of administrators in schools where Troops to Teachers candidates have been placed rated them "among the best" (26 percent), "well above average," (28 percent), or "above average" (17 percent) when compared to other first-year teachers (Gantz, 1999). In a recent study conducted in Texas, 89 percent of administrators rated 497 TTT candidates "outstanding or above average" (Kettler, Raffeld & Webber, 2001). When TTT respondents in the same study were asked if they were satisfied with their decision to become a teacher, 83 percent responded positively; their retention in the classroom currently stands at 87 percent.

With such early indicators of the success of the Troops to Teachers mounting, it was determined that hard data needed to be collected about the program. To help design, conduct, and analyze a national survey of Troops to Teachers participants, the Washington state TTT program contracted with the National Center for Education Information (NCEI), a private nonpartisan research organization in Washington, D.C., specializing in survey research and data analysis.

Previous NCEI studies included three formal national surveys of teachers in 1986, 1990, and 1996 in which program participants were asked such questions as why they entered teaching, what they think about a wide range of teaching-related and other issues in education, how they have been prepared for teaching, how they evaluate their preparation, and what their plans are for the future. Many of the questions asked in those earlier surveys were asked of the TTT participants so that comparisons could be made between TTT staff and traditionally prepared teachers.



NCEI Survey Results

Research results confirmed our earlier information about the potential of former military to become successful teachers. The Troops to Teachers program clearly has been successful in producing quality teachers. Even more important, TTT typically generates high numbers of educators in high-demand areas—more men and minorities; more candidates with experience beneficial to successful teaching in mathematics, science, and special education; and more candidates willing to teach in inner cities and outlying rural areas.

- ▶ Nine out of ten people (90 percent) coming into teaching through TTT are male. This compares with 74 percent of the overall teaching force that is female (Figure 1).
- ▶ Nearly three out of ten TTT teachers (29 percent) are from minority or ethnic groups. This compares with only 10 percent of the general public school teaching force that is from a minority or ethnic group (Figure 1).
- ▶ One in three TTT teachers (29 percent), compared with 13 percent of all teachers, reported they were teaching mathematics. About twice as many TTT teachers as all public school teachers were teaching biology, chemistry, physics, physical sciences, or providing general special education or instruction for teaching emotionally disturbed children (Figure 2).
- ▶ One in four TTT teachers (24 percent) are teaching in an inner-city school. Thirty-nine percent of all TTT teachers said they were willing to teach in an inner city and 68 percent indicated they would be willing to teach in a rural community. This compares with only 16 percent of public school teachers who currently teach in inner cities and 23 percent who teach in rural areas.





Figure 1
Demographic Profile of Troops to Teachers and
Public School Teachers in the United States

	Troops to Teachers 1998	Public School Teachers ¹ 1996
Total Respondents	1,171	1,018
	Percent	Percent
Gender		
Male	90	26
Female	10	74
Race		
Amer. Indian/Alaskan	1	1
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	1
Black	16	7
White	71	89
Hispanic	8	2
Other	3	*
Age		
Average (in years)	41	41
<24	*	3
25-34	5	18
35-44	36	31
45-54	55	39
55-64	5	9
65+	0	0
Community Where Teaching		
Inner city	24	16
Small town, non-rural	24	30
Suburban	27	31
Rural	24	23
Grade Level Taught		
Elementary	20	47
Middle/Junior High	35	26
Senior High	45	27

* < 0.5 percent

¹ National Center for Education Information survey of 1,018 public school K-12 teachers conducted Mar. 11-Apr. 19, 1996.

Source: National Center for Education Information, *Profile of Troops to Teachers*



Figure 2
Subjects Taught by Troops to Teachers and
Public School Teachers in the United States

	Troops to Teachers		Public School Teachers ¹
	1998		1996
	Number	Percent	Percent
Kindergarten	18	2	7
General Elementary	217	18	35
American Indian/ Native American Studies	7	1	*
Art/Music	35	3	8
Basic Skills & Remedial Education	1	0	3
Bilingual Education	34	3	1
Computer Science	88	7	4
Dance/Drama/Theater	5	0	2
English/Language Arts	152	13	15
English as a Second Language	39	3	2
Foreign Language	79	7	5
Gifted	20	2	3
Home Economics	4	0	1
Journalism	10	1	*
Mathematics	338	29	13
Philosophy/Religion	5	0	*
Physical Education/Health	80	7	7
Reading	108	9	11
Social Studies/Social Science/			
History	305	26	15
Biology	99	8	5
Chemistry	35	3	2
Geology/Earth Science/ Space Science	65	5	2
Physical Sciences	91	8	3
Physics	40	3	1
General and Other Sciences	127	11	8
Special Education, General	119	10	5
Emotionally Disturbed	86	7	4
Mentally Impaired	27	2	2
Speech/Language Impaired	15	1	2
Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing	7	1	1
Visually Handicapped	5	0	1
Orthopedically Impaired	6	1	*
Mildly Handicapped	29	2	2
Severely Handicapped	10	1	1
Specific Learning Disabilities	75	6	5
Other Special Education	16	1	1
Vocational Education	180	15	3
All Others	151	13	1

* < 0.5 percent

¹ National Center for Education Information survey of 1,018 public school K-12 teachers conducted Mar. 11-Apr. 19, 1996.

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Military personnel transitioning into teaching are doing so for all the “right” reasons.

- ▶ The number one reason Troops to Teachers candidates, as well as all teachers in general, give for going into teaching is “desire to work with young people.” Sixty percent of TTT teachers and 72 percent of all teachers cite this as one of the main reasons they decided to become a teacher.
- ▶ The next most frequently cited reason for teaching is “value or significance of education in society.” This was stated by 54 percent of TTT teachers, compared with 41 percent of all teachers.
- ▶ Seventy-seven percent of both TTT teachers and teachers generally said that a “chance to work with young people/see young people develop” was the most important to them on the job.

Troops to Teachers educators report high levels of satisfaction with nearly all aspects of teaching.

- ▶ Ninety-six percent say that they are satisfied with their relationships with other teachers.
- ▶ Ninety-five percent report satisfaction with their relationships with students.
- ▶ Eighty-four percent are satisfied with their relationships with the parents of students.

Troops to Teachers personnel are overwhelmingly in favor of higher standards for students and stricter graduation requirements. They are considerably more in favor of requiring students to pass standardized, national examinations for promotion from grade to grade than are teachers generally.

- ▶ Seventy-eight percent of TTT teachers and 74 percent of all teachers favor setting higher standards than are now required about what students should know and be able to do in the basic subjects.
- ▶ Forty-three percent of TTT teachers, compared with 28 percent of all public school teachers, favor requiring students in their own communities to pass standardized, national examinations for promotion from grade to grade.



Teachers who have come through TTT differed significantly from public school teachers surveyed in 1996 by NCEI on several issues concerning student learning. Overall, TTT educators are committed to holding high standards for students despite less-than-ideal educational environments.

- ▶ While 70 percent of all teachers agreed that “schools should adjust to the needs, interests and learning styles of individual students, rather than expecting students to meet the norms of the school,” 56 percent of TTT teachers agreed with the statement.
- ▶ Nearly six out of ten TTT teachers, (57 percent) compared with fewer than half (46 percent) of teachers, agreed with the statement, “Socio-economic background does not prevent students from performing at the highest level of achievement.”

The most striking differences between teachers who are entering the profession through the Troops to Teachers program and regular classroom teachers were revealed in their attitudes about how to professionalize teaching and promote respect for educators.

- ▶ Eighty-two percent of TTT teachers, compared with 70 percent of all teachers, think that having upward mobility within the ranks of teaching would improve the profession.
- ▶ Seventy-nine percent of TTT teachers, compared with 68 percent of teachers generally, agreed that paying teachers based on job performance in addition to seniority and level of education would make teaching more professional.
- ▶ More than half of TTT teachers (52 percent) agreed that letting the market determine how much teachers get paid (e.g., paying people more in high-demand areas such as math and science) would make teaching more of a profession. This is in sharp contrast with only 15 percent of all public school teachers who favored market-driven salaries.
- ▶ Troops to Teachers participants show high retention rates and a dedication to the profession.
- ▶ Two-thirds of the TTT respondents (67 percent) reported that they planned to remain in teaching as long as they were able to (45 percent) or until retirement eligibility (22 percent).
- ▶ More than half of the TTT teachers (55 percent) indicated that they expected to be teaching in grades K-12 in five years.





- ▶ Eight percent said they plan to be teaching at the postsecondary level in five years.
- ▶ Eighteen percent reported they expect to be working in some other capacity in public education. Based on survey questions regarding plans for becoming school administrators, it would appear that many of those within the 18 percent are planning to continue their careers in public education as principals or in other administrative capacities.

Leaving No One Behind

The Troops to Teachers program has brought people into education who are mature, responsible, and experienced. The Troops to Teachers candidates serve as excellent role models while entering the high-need academic areas of math, science, and special education, and they are prepared to teach in any social setting from the inner city to rural America. Because of their dedication and the military's credo that no one can be left behind, they have been successful in a very demanding profession in which success is measured by the degree to which all succeed together. Our troops are accustomed to serving their country and protecting the next generation, and their mission in the classroom is really no different. They know that we make our country stronger by ensuring that all students succeed, and through Troops to Teachers, they are able to play an active role in this success.

