



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Barriers to Recruitment of Military Personnel and Spouses to Serve in K-12 Positions

2019

Authorizing legislation: [HB 1139](#)

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Executive Summary

The 2019 Legislature tasked the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) to examine and make recommendations on the recruitment of military personnel and their spouses into educator positions within school districts. Under a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with PESB, the Military to Education Career-Transition (MEC-T)/Troops to Teachers (TTT) program within the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) took responsibility for the forming and the facilitation of this workgroup.

The workgroup identified 28 barriers that impact the ability of military members and their spouses to become educators, obtain academic credit for prior learning, and overcome financial hardships that obstruct their pursuit. The primary and most significant barrier to military members and veterans entering K–12 education is the time and cost for certification, especially related to unpaid student teaching. It is estimated that close to 90% of those who contact TTT ultimately do not go into teaching as a second career, primarily due to these interrelated barriers.

Other significant barriers include:

- Frequent moves while pursuing certification and challenges relating to state reciprocity, especially for military spouses.
- Inconsistency between institutions in granting credit for prior learning.

The workgroup found many of the barriers extremely complex, requiring integrated solutions and cross-sector collaboration. Due to this complexity, the workgroup recommends the Legislature extend the workgroup to develop a comprehensive and detailed strategic plan to be presented to the 2021 Legislature. This strategic plan will address and propose mitigations to maximize efficiency and effectiveness in addressing each identified barrier.

Background

In 2017, the Department of Defense (DoD) awarded the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) a grant to create Washington Troops to Teachers (TTT). Troops to Teachers helps military members and veterans transition into K–12 public school teaching positions. However, military spouses and educational staff associates (ESAs) such as school counselors, nurses, psychologists, and other related positions are not funded under the TTT grant. In 2018, OSPI recognized this shortfall and created a Military to Education Career Transition (MEC-T) program within OSPI.

The MEC-T program allows OSPI to better serve military members, veterans, and their spouses in their transition to the multiple roles school districts are seeking, while still serving as Washington State and Alaska Troops to Teachers representatives. This model allows OSPI to support the TTT grant while providing flexibility to serve an expanded clientele base and assist in filling diverse positions needed by school districts.

The 2019 Legislature directed the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) to convene a workgroup to examine and make recommendations on the recruitment of military personnel and their spouses into educator positions within school districts ([House Bill \[HB\] 1139, Sec. 108](#)). As OSPI/MEC-T/TTT is the subject matter expert in this area, PESB and OSPI developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) tasking the MEC-T program within OSPI to create and facilitate the workgroup. Appendix A includes workgroup membership.

As part of their work, the MEC-T/TTT program regularly observes trends and develops systems of supports to address barriers military members and spouses face as they explore and attempt to transition into educational roles, especially teaching. It is important to note that each of MEC-T/TTT's clients (more than 500) have their own stories, backgrounds, needs, and challenges.

OSPI worked closely with the state Department of Veteran Affairs, the state military department of defense and other vested stakeholders identified in the legislation, to identify potential workgroup members who have experience in and knowledge of systems impacting military personnel who enter the educator profession. Members worked closely with the MEC-T program to discuss and develop a list of common barriers and recommendations moving forward.

Demographics

For the purpose of this report, the term "military members" includes those who are Active Duty, Reserve/National Guard, and Veterans. Each of these categories of military personnel can experience unique barriers and outcomes related to recruitment into educator positions. The vast majority of military personnel who contact MEC-T/TTT for support in this category are senior enlisted (E-6 and above) and senior officers (O-4 and above). Once reaching these paygrades (with some exceptions), a military member can serve at least 20 years and earn a military retirement. As most who reach this milestone join at age 18 (for enlisted) and age 22 (for officers after their commissioning source) and serve for 20–30 years, an estimated 90% in this category who retire from the military are between 38 and 52 years of age.

Within this demographic, many retirees who plan to stay in the state of Washington desire to live close to the base they are retiring from. Reasons for this can include:

- They own/are buying a home in that area
- They have children in school
- They are familiar with the community and have access to base services

Retirees will receive a military pension and various benefits, including medical, but often seek or require a second job due to mortgages, children in school, spouse not well established in a career (due to frequent moves), and others.

For the purpose of this report, the personnel of interest are divided into three major categories. They are:

- 1) Active Duty, Reserve/National Guard, and Veterans who have/are separating or retiring from the military.
- 2) Spouses seeking Washington State Teaching/Education Staff Associate (ESA) certification from another state as part of a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) or separation/retirement. Please note, a spouse may fall into the aforementioned category as he/she may be a member of the Reserve Component/National Guard or is a veteran.
- 3) Service members and veterans seeking academic credit for prior learning and experience in the military.

Barriers

The primary and most significant barrier preventing military personnel and their spouses from entering K–12 educator roles is the time and cost for certification, especially related to unpaid student teaching. It is estimated that close to 90% of those who contact TTT ultimately do not go into teaching as a second career, primarily due to these reasons. For the sake of this report, the workgroup identified some of the common barriers for three key areas: Transitions, barriers for spouses specifically, and academic credit for prior learning.

Transitions

Initial Investments and Planning

- Continued education to meet certification requirements are costly and come with no guarantee of a job.
- Many military members, by choice, enter non-teachable majors in the fields of criminal justice, or public administration, therefore continued education in an endorsement area is often required.
- Military members may have used all of their GI Bill benefits; either on their prior education or transferred to dependents (with no expectation of needing to further their education).
- A need for early planning (ideally 2–3 years prior to retirement).

Logistics and Support

- Lack of national and statewide coordination around services and opportunities (VA benefits, Troops to Teachers, etc.).
- Traditional quarter/semester start/end dates for certification programs are often not aligned with the service dates or timeline of the military. This can interfere with the candidate's ability to start pursuing their education in their state of choice.
- Licensure challenges; ease of reciprocity for some states/programs.
- Once retired or separated from the system, navigating higher education systems can be challenging.
- Teacher certification programs reported difficulty (in general) in placing student teachers.

Hiring, Recruitment, and Retention

- Some out-of-state, for-profit teacher education programs and systems are not positioned to support the unique needs of military personnel.
- When compared to defense sector opportunities, educator pay can create a disincentive.
- There is a robust economy in highly skilled areas that are more likely to recruit military personnel.
- Cultural challenges moving from the military to public education and a lack of formalized support structures within districts to promote veteran retention.
- Misconceptions or potential bias towards hiring military personnel (possible fear of Reserve/National Guard activation, viewed as temporary employees, lack of information about how military-specific skills can be transferable to a particular position or role).

Spouses

Barriers for military spouses are often related to the frequent moves most military families experience. For example, if the spouse is seeking an initial degree and/or teacher certification, especially in a more traditional brick and mortar college or university, the timing of the move may interfere with the spouse's ability to complete the program or complete the in-state student teaching requirement. The flexibility of the program they are enrolled in is critical.

A spouse who already holds a teaching certificate from another state can also experience difficulties. For example, depending upon the state and the certification program they graduated from, spouses can run into reciprocity problems. Unfamiliarity with Washington's education system and the lack of established connections across institutions of higher education, state agencies, and local school districts can create challenges with all aspects of a job search.

Additional barriers for spouses include:

- Not being aware of services available to them.
- Challenges finding and submitting required documentation in a timely manner.
- Licensure reciprocity issues.
- Timing of Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move (out of hiring cycle).
- Teacher and staff pay, especially related to high cost of living and housing availability.
- Unfamiliarity with Washington state's education structure.

- Spouses may be over educated or over qualified for a job, resulting in a district financial decision.
- Difficulty in becoming vested in the Washington State Retirement System.
- May experience bias against them as a “temporary employee.”
- Availability and affordability of child care.

Academic Credit for Prior Learning

In Washington state, the granting of academic credit for prior learning is determined by the degree granting institution. This can lead to a great deal of inconsistency between institutions due to many factors. For example, the level of familiarity and understanding of the military among higher education transcript evaluators can vary widely. This can be related to the institution’s proximity to a military base and the overall number (or lack thereof) of veterans it serves. Another factor is the lack of expertise in utilizing the tools available through the military. A large portion of prior learning in the military is documented on the Joint Service Transcript (JST) used by the Coast Guard, Army, Marine Corps, and Navy. The he Community College of the Air Force (CCAF) transcript is used by the Air Force. Many evaluators have not had formalized training on the interpretation of these transcripts and the resources available to help them.

In addition, many evaluators and certification program leaders are not familiar with the quality and standards of the various services’ instructor training programs, which can include learning theory, methodology, and curriculum development, among others.

Additional barriers in this area include:

- The institution’s lack of familiarity with veterans and their unique strengths and needs.
- Possible poor quality of veteran support at the institution.
- Higher education evaluators’ potential unawareness related to prior learning and experience through the military.
- Higher education silos requiring additional credit and time (depending upon college and subject area).

Recommendations

The workgroup discussed and identified some systemic and legislative opportunities to better support transitioning service members, veterans, and their spouses by the removal of barriers to K–12 educator roles.

These include:

1) **Extend and expand the workgroup to include additional stakeholders.**

This workgroup is poised to develop recommendations to inform the 2021 Legislature, including mitigations requiring fiscal interventions to include possible paid apprenticeships (student teaching) and extensive marketing of services available to veterans and their and spouses. In order to produce well-researched, quality recommendations, additional time is needed.

2) Require a comprehensive strategic plan be developed by the workgroup.

A strategic plan could better address each of the identified barriers and key stakeholders and include recommendations for an integrated and systemic way forward focusing on both short-term and long-term outcomes. This plan could also include a strategic communication plan addressing the needs around marketing the vast number of services available to military members in transition, veterans, and their spouses.

3) Transfer responsibility, authority, and accountability for the workgroup to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).

The MEC-T program, housed within OSPI, is the subject matter expert in this area and has well established relationships with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense including the transition personnel at all Washington state military bases, the Washington State Military Department, educator preparation programs, school districts, and state educator associations.

Acknowledgements

Staff at OSPI, PESB, and multiple partners with expertise in the area of military transitioning helped promote the opportunity to identify barriers and how to mitigate those barriers referenced in this report. OSPI appreciates the individuals who volunteered their time and efforts to participate as members of the workgroup.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Workgroup Members

- Karen Remy-Anderson: Executive Director of Student Support, North Thurston School District
- Dr. Douglas Asbjornsen, Rear Admiral, USN (Retired): Workgroup Chair, Coordinator, OSPI/MEC-T/Troops to Teachers
- Justin Fox Bailey: President, Pilchuck UniServ Council, Washington Education Association
- David Kinnunen: Director of Professional Certification at OSPI
- Colonel Greg Lynch, USA (Retired): Superintendent, ESD 114
- Sam Mitchell: WorkSource Administrator, Washington State Employment Security Department, Employment Connections
- Tammie Perreault: Northwest Regional Liaison, Department of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy
- Colonel Jeff Sabatine: Chief of Staff, Washington State Military Department
- Dr. Denise Shaw: Director, Alternative Teacher Certification Program, Central Washington University
- First Sergeant Tang Smith, USA (Retired): OSPI/MEC-T/Troops to Teachers
- Kimberly Sullivan: Program Supervisor of Title II, Part A at OSPI
- Mark Sullivan: WSMTC Planning and Strategy Advisor, Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs



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