

Joint Oversight Hearing of the Troops to Teachers Program
held by
U.S. House of Representatives Veterans' Affairs Committee,
Subcommittee on Benefits
and
U.S. House of Representatives Education and the Workforce Committee,
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness

Testimony by
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Chairmen and members of both Committees, good morning. I am Deno Curris, President of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU). The Association, which is based here in Washington D.C., is comprised of more than 425 public four-year colleges and universities and university systems located throughout the United States and its territories. On behalf of our member institutions, I am grateful for your invitation and pleased to be with you today.

I come before you to discuss the Troops to Teachers program specifically, and more generally, the national teacher challenge. By the national teacher challenge, I mean the laudable goal that Congress and the Administration has placed before the entire education community, not just the K-12 schools, to ensure that no child is left behind and that every child has a highly qualified teacher, a goal that will not be achieved without extraordinary commitment and support.

AASCU is uniquely qualified to discuss these issues for two reasons. The first is our historic and ongoing involvement in teacher preparation. The second is our 30 years of experience educating members of the armed services.

Many of AASCU's member institutions began as "normal schools" or "teachers colleges." In fact, AASCU institutions currently prepare over 50 percent of the nation's newly credentialed teachers each year. AASCU, and its member institutions, take our responsibility to help the nation's school districts meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind law very seriously.

Additionally, AASCU has been the home for the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), since its inception in 1972. SOC is a consortium of more than 1,600 colleges and universities that provide an invaluable service for our nation's men and women in uniform. By working with colleges and universities to seamlessly transfer college credit for active duty service members, SOC helps

students who are serving their country to complete a cohesive educational program in a timely fashion. Since 1972, SOC has aided thousands of service members in their higher education pursuits, demonstrating the importance of strong ties between higher education and the nation's armed forces.

These strong ties are also evident in the Troops to Teachers program. The Troops to Teachers program provides an invaluable service to the nation's K-12 schools, retiring military personnel, and those of us engaged in meeting the national teacher challenge.

Last October, First Lady Laura Bush rightly described the Troops to Teachers participants as bringing "... dedication, commitment and leadership ... to classrooms all across America." Service members entering teaching benefit the nation's schools not only because of their commitment, but also because of their diversity and placement. Specifically, over 40 percent of the Troops to Teachers participants are minority; 80 percent are male; and over two-thirds serve in high poverty school districts. These men and women become important role models for America's children while addressing key workforce shortages.

The profile of the teachers prepared by this program is one reason AASCU supports the Troops to Teachers program. AASCU is concerned about the supply of highly qualified teachers willing to serve in high-need school districts, and the number of educators from underrepresented and nontraditional teaching populations.

The Troops to Teachers program serves retiring military personnel in several ways. The program, which is administered by the Defense Activities for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) office, helps prospective teachers assess their educational background, the specific requirements of the state in which they may wish to teach, and the employment prospects for the teaching position sought. All of this information is used to aid the former service member in selecting the best teacher preparation program for their individual situation.

Many service members select alternative preparation programs, which enable them to earn their teaching credentials while serving in the classroom. These alternative preparation programs are highly valuable to our nation's schools in meeting the highly qualified teacher standard found in the No Child Left Behind law. AASCU supports alternative preparation programs, which are structured according to rigorous state determined standards that are consistent with those applied to traditional teacher preparation programs. From AASCU's perspective these alternative preparation programs provide an opportunity for our institutions to once again serve the men and women of the United States military, and a corresponding opportunity for our military personnel again to serve our society.

However, when discussing alternative preparation programs it is important to recognize both their vital role and their limitations. According to the National

Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report, *Predicting the Need for Newly Hired Teachers in the United States to 2008-2009*, the nation will need between 1.7 and 2.7 million newly hired teachers by the 2008-2009 school year. The economic down turn that most states are currently experiencing may reduce these numbers, because states like California are abandoning class size reduction efforts due to adverse financial situations. The exact number of newly hired teachers can be disputed but the fact that a large number of newly hired teachers will be needed in the near future is clear.

Alternative preparation programs, like Teach for America and those used by the Troops to Teacher program can and do help, but the numbers they produce are not significant enough to meet the nation's needs. Since January of 1994 the Troops to Teachers program have placed roughly 3,000 teachers and the Teach for America program since its inception in 1989 has placed about 8,000 teachers. Combined these two valuable programs, in the last nine and fourteen years, respectively, have prepared less than 1 percent of the newly hired teachers NCES estimates the nation will need in the next five to six years. While the bulk of the nation's demand will be met through traditional programs, every service member going into teaching is needed, and the contribution of Troops to Teacher is greater than numbers per se because of the diversity and placement the program contributes to our schools.

To meet near-term teacher shortages, especially in certain geographic and subject matter areas, it has become clear that states must rely on a combination of traditional and non-traditional teacher preparation programs. Whether traditional or non-traditional in nature, however, AASCU stands firm in its belief that all preparation programs should be held to rigorous standards. Policies that compromise standards in the name of expediency will only weaken the profession, and more importantly, leave millions of children behind.

For the long term, our nation's colleges and universities, working with policymakers, must seriously address the larger issue of how to build a solid pipeline into and through the teaching profession, one that will attract some of our most talented graduates, and one that will not leak a significant portion of new recruits within the first five years of entering the classroom.

To aid in this effort, AASCU is calling on Congress, as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, to provide resources to institutions of higher education to build and strengthen the nation's teaching force. Specifically, AASCU requests that the partnerships established in Title II of the Higher Education Act be modified to require collaboration that includes not only local education agencies and institutions of higher education, but also state and/or local authorities responsible for teacher education program approval and those responsible for establishing K-12 standards. Such collaboration, which is consistent with the professional development activities supported in the No Child

Left Behind law, will promote policy and programmatic alignment throughout the educational curriculum.

Aside from alternative preparation, the Troops to Teachers program has also benefited from distance education. A good example of distance education used for teacher credentialing can be found in South Carolina. Clemson University, The Citadel, the University of South Carolina and South Carolina State University have joined together and created a distance education teacher-credentialing program that has successfully served many Troops to Teacher participants.

Regardless of how an individual earns a teaching credential, the Troops to Teachers program is dedicated to ensuring that all their participants become highly qualified teachers. AASCU's member institutions are likewise dedicated to ensuring that all the teachers we prepare are highly qualified. We just need more. Our nation's children do not deserve less.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you, I and 400 AASCU presidents and chancellors look forward to working with you on these important issues.