



August 2023

# K-12 EDUCATION

## DOD Should Assess Whether Troops-to- Teachers is Meeting Program Goals

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105992](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Originally authorized in 1992, the Troops-to-Teachers program was transferred from Education to DOD in 2013. In 2020, DOD canceled the program due to the realignment of agency resources. In December 2021 federal law directed DOD to reinstate the program, with a sunset date of July 1, 2025. Senate Report 117-39 included a provision for GAO to assess the program.

This report examines (1) the numbers and characteristics of program participants, (2) what is known about participant employment, and (3) how DOD assesses the program's effectiveness and implements its MOA with Education.

GAO analyzed data on program participants for fiscal year 2014 through fiscal year 2020. GAO interviewed officials from DOD and Education. GAO also interviewed officials from three state grantees with active grant agreements and relatively high numbers of veterans, program participants, and reported hires, and school districts within them having relatively high numbers of high-need schools, among other factors. GAO also reviewed relevant agency documentation and federal laws.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, that DOD: use performance data to assess program effectiveness; establish a mechanism for reporting data; and fulfill its responsibilities in the MOA with Education. DOD did not concur with two and partially concurred with one of the recommendations. GAO continues to believe the recommendations are warranted as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-23-105992](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (202) 512-7215 or [nowickij@gao.gov](mailto:nowickij@gao.gov).

August 2023

## K-12 EDUCATION

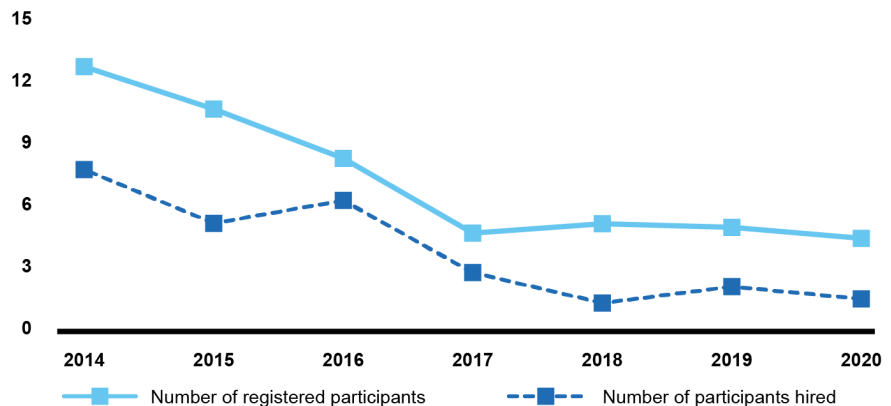
### DOD Should Assess Whether Troops-to-Teachers is Meeting Program Goals

## What GAO Found

Participation in Troops-to-Teachers—a Department of Defense (DOD) program that makes grants to states to help military personnel become teachers—generally declined from fiscal years 2014 through 2020. Reported program hires also dropped from 7,718 to 1,450 during this time (see figure). The program had higher representation of groups typically underrepresented in the K-12 teacher workforce: 72 percent of participants were men and 42 percent were non-White.

**Troops-to-Teachers Program Participants and Hires, Fiscal Years 2014-20**

Number (in thousands)



Source: GAO analysis of Troops-to-Teachers program data. | GAO-23-105992

DOD established a program goal of reducing critical teacher shortages in areas with high-need schools (e.g., those enrolling a higher percentage of low-income students) and in key subjects such as math, science, and special education. However, DOD does not have complete data on the schools and subjects program participants teach because it lost access to the data when it canceled the program in 2020 and shut down its data management system in 2021. However, the program's prior annual reports show, for example, in fiscal year 2017, at least 273 participants taught in a high-need school. In addition, for fiscal year 2018 through fiscal year 2020, a total of at least 155 participants taught science, math, special education, or foreign language in a high-need school.

DOD has collected standardized performance data from grantees through their required annual performance reports since 2019, but has not evaluated the program's effectiveness in the past 5 years. In the absence of a mechanism to report data that will help assess the program's overall performance across grantees, DOD will be limited in its ability to determine if the program is fully achieving its stated goals. Although a statutorily required memorandum of agreement (MOA) states that DOD should meet with and provide program information to the Department of Education (Education), DOD does not currently do either. DOD officials said that reestablishing this relationship would be helpful. Doing so would better position DOD to identify opportunities to enhance the program's potential.

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## Abbreviations

DANTES	Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support
DOD	Department of Defense
Education	Department of Education
MOA	memorandum of agreement
NASSP	National Association of Secondary School Principals

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August 1, 2023

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman  
The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Chairman  
The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

About 102,000 of the approximately 4.6 million primary and secondary school teachers in the United States were veterans as of 2019, the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics. Originally authorized by Congress in 1992, the Troops-to-Teachers program provides financial assistance and counseling to help military personnel obtain their teaching certifications—especially in priority subject areas such as math and science—and to help them find employment in eligible schools. The Department of Defense (DOD) makes grants to Troops-to-Teachers’ state placement assistance offices, which recruit participants, help them get certified to teach, and assist them in finding employment as teachers—especially in high-need schools.<sup>1</sup> DOD oversees the Troops-to-Teachers program through its Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES)—a DOD unit that provides members of the military with services such as education-related counseling and distance learning courses.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 transferred oversight responsibility for the Troops-to-Teachers program from the Department of Education (Education) to DOD. The Act also required DOD to enter into a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with Education, under which DOD agreed to share Troops-to-Teachers performance information

<sup>1</sup>States or consortia (groups of states working under one placement assistance office) are authorized to receive grants of no more than \$5 million per year to operate placement assistance offices. 10 U.S.C. § 1154(h)(2)(B).

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with Education, and to meet with the agency at least annually to discuss issues related to the program.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this MOA is to facilitate, among other things, sharing of information, such as annual performance reports, between DOD and Education. DOD canceled the Troops-to-Teachers program on October 1, 2020, and informed its state placement assistance offices to shut down.<sup>3</sup> DOD's reasons for canceling the program included "realign[ing]...resources to higher priority programs more closely aligned to the National Defense Strategy." In December 2021, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 required DOD to reinstate the program with a sunset date of July 1, 2025.

Senate Report 117-39 includes a provision for us to assess the Troops-to-Teachers program.<sup>4</sup> This report examines (1) the numbers and characteristics of program participants; (2) what is known about participant employment in high-need schools, participant performance, and school districts' satisfaction with the program; and (3) how DOD assesses the program's effectiveness and implements its MOA with Education.

To address the information on program participants, we analyzed Troops-to-Teachers program data on the numbers and characteristics of program participants from fiscal year 2014 through fiscal year 2020 (the first and last full fiscal years in which DOD had responsibility for the program before canceling it). Data included the number of participants who were registered in the program and were hired as teachers in each state. We also analyzed demographic information about Troops-to-Teachers participants such as their gender, race/ethnicity, military branch, and military pay grade, as well as the types of financial assistance participants received. We assessed the reliability of these data by reviewing DOD documentation and information about the data, and performed manual testing on reported data elements. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for our purposes.

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<sup>2</sup>Pub. L. No. 112-239, § 541(a)(2), 126 Stat. 1632, 1729. The MOA was established on June 26, 2013 and remains in effect for the duration of the program.

<sup>3</sup>After announcing the program's cancellation in Oct. 2020 DOD provided guidance to state placement offices on how they should shut down the program, which DOD scheduled to sunset on Sept. 30, 2021.

<sup>4</sup>S. Rep. No. 117-39, at 160 (2021).

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To address what is known about the employment of participants in high-need schools and the satisfaction of school districts that employ these participants, we conducted interviews with officials from DOD, 3 of 15 grantees (Arizona, Florida, and the Northwest Consortium administered in Montana), and two to three school districts within each of those states regarding the placement of participants in high-need schools.<sup>5</sup>

We selected these grantees primarily because they had active grant agreements for the current performance period (2021 through 2023). We determined that, given the 2021 restart of the program, such grantees were most likely to have knowledge of and experience with the program. To refine our grantee selection, we also considered total veteran population in fiscal year 2021; numbers of new participants and hires in fiscal year 2019-20; and the prevalence of high-need schools in the 2019-20 school year.<sup>6</sup> We then selected eight school districts in these states (three in Arizona, three in Florida, and two in Montana) primarily because they had a higher than average number of participants hired, and a relatively high percentage of high-need schools compared with other districts in the state.

In our semi-structured interviews with school district officials, we asked about the extent to which the Troops-to-Teachers program has placed teachers in high-need schools, what is known about participant performance, and the level of satisfaction that these school districts had with the program. This information, while not generalizable, provided illustrative examples about the implementation of the program in high-need schools.

To address how DOD assesses the program's effectiveness, we assessed the extent to which the selected grantees reported required performance information to DOD. We also asked DOD officials whether they had conducted any evaluations of the program. Further, we reviewed

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<sup>5</sup>Each state or consortium grantee supports a local Troops-to-Teachers program office that is responsible for day-to-day administration of the program. The 15 grantees we considered for site selection were grantees that remained active after the cancellation of the program. DOD did not originally identify North Carolina as a grantee that received a no-cost extension from May 15, 2022, to May 14, 2023, and therefore we did not consider it for site selection. In Sept. 2022, DOD identified North Carolina as an active grantee, bringing the total to 16 grantees.

<sup>6</sup>We used Education's 2019-20 school year free or reduced-price lunch eligibility data to identify school districts with higher concentrations of students from low-income families.

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a 2017 DOD Office of Inspector General report on the Troops-to-Teachers program and assessed the status of any recommendations made.<sup>7</sup> We also interviewed officials from the program office and from DOD's Office of Inspector General. We assessed the extent to which DOD has implemented its responsibilities under the 2013 MOA by interviewing Education officials, reviewing the information Education received from DOD, and reviewing what information Education provided to DOD.

Our site visits to state grantees and schools districts informed all aspects of our work, as did our interviews with DOD officials. We also reviewed relevant federal agency documentation and federal laws. In addition, we interviewed representatives from the American Legion because of their knowledge of veterans who have benefitted from the program.<sup>8</sup>

We conducted this performance audit from April 2022 to August 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

Members and former members of the armed services are eligible to participate in the Troops-to-Teachers program if they meet certain eligibility requirements, including if they are retired or separated from service for physical disability.<sup>9</sup> Participants must also meet certain educational requirements for the teaching position they seek to hold, and must apply to participate in the program within 3 years of leaving military service. In addition, to be eligible for financial assistance, participants must agree to meet the necessary teacher certification or licensing

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<sup>7</sup>For the 2017 DOD Office of Inspector General report, we analyzed all five of the recommendations that remained open.

<sup>8</sup>The American Legion is a federally chartered corporation. The corporation's purpose is to preserve democracy, to foster the ties and comradeship of military service, and to devote the efforts of its members to mutual helpfulness and service to the United States.

<sup>9</sup>See 10 U.S.C. § 1154(d)(1).



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### Troops-to-Teachers Definition of a High-Need School

#### A high-need school is defined as:

- an elementary or secondary school in which at least 50 percent of the enrolled students are children from low-income families;
- a high school in which at least 40 percent of the enrolled students are children from low-income families; or
- a school located in a local educational agency that is eligible for funding under the Small, Rural School Achievement Program.

Source: GAO analysis of 10 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(3). | GAO-23-105992

Note: The purpose of the Small, Rural School Achievement program is to provide rural local educational agencies with financial assistance to fund initiatives aimed at improving student academic achievement.

requirements and accept an offer of full-time employment as a teacher at an eligible school for not less than 3 school years.<sup>10</sup>

In selecting program participants, DOD must prioritize those with experience in science, mathematics, special education, foreign language, or career or technical subjects, and who agree to seek employment in those areas at elementary and secondary schools.<sup>11</sup> DOD also may prioritize participants who agree to seek employment in a high-need school (see sidebar).<sup>12</sup>

The Troops-to-Teachers program's authorizing legislation also permits participants to receive stipends and bonuses in certain circumstances (see text box). However, DOD officials said that Troops-to-Teachers participants generally have been ineligible to receive program stipends since 2017. That year, DOD found that nearly all participants were eligible for educational benefits under the Post-9/11 GI Bill, making them ineligible for the Troops-to-Teachers program stipends.<sup>13</sup> DOD terminated all stipends and bonus payments when it canceled the program in 2020.

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<sup>10</sup>10 U.S.C. § 1154(e)(1). An eligible school is defined as a public school, including a charter school, at which at least 30 percent of the students enrolled in the school are from families with incomes below 185 percent of poverty level or at least 13 percent of the students enrolled in the school qualify for assistance under part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The definition of eligible school also includes schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. 10 U.S.C. § 1154(a)(2).

<sup>11</sup>10 U.S.C. § 1154(d)(4)(A).

<sup>12</sup>10 U.S.C. § 1154(d)(4)(B).

<sup>13</sup>See 10 U.S.C. § 1154(e)(3)(C)(iii). Generally, under 38 U.S.C. § 3311, individuals who served an aggregate of at least 36 months on active duty after Sept. 11, 2001, and were honorably discharged or retired are eligible for these educational benefits.

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### **Financial assistance available through the Troops-to-Teachers program**

Eligible program participants may receive some combination of the following financial assistance:

- a stipend of up to \$5,000,
- a bonus of up to \$5,000 if they agree to teach in an eligible school for not less than 3 school years, and
- a bonus of up to \$10,000 if they agree to teach in a high-need school.

The total payment to any one participant may not exceed \$10,000, which includes any stipend and/or bonus payments. If a participant fails to meet the requirements necessary to become a teacher, or fails to obtain employment, the participant must reimburse the Department of Defense. Individuals can receive program counseling and referral services even when they are not eligible to receive a stipend or bonus.

Source: GAO analysis of 10 U.S.C. § 1154(c), (e)(3). | GAO-23-105992

The Troops-to-Teachers program also has undergone a number of other administrative changes including the mechanism through which DANTES awarded program funds to grantees.

### **Selected changes in the administration of the Troops-to-Teachers program**

- The Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES) previously used memoranda of agreement (MOA) to award program funds to states or consortia of states. For example, in fiscal year 2015, the Department of Defense (DOD) used MOAs to award \$4.4 million to 16 states and consortia of states that collectively represented all 50 states.
- In fiscal year 2016, DANTES did not award program funds to any states or consortia of states. In January 2017, DANTES terminated the use of MOAs to award program funds, which were not consistent with federal law and regulations, according to the DOD Inspector General.
- In fiscal year 2017, DANTES used non-competitive grants to award program funds.
- In fiscal year 2018, DANTES began using competitive grants to award program funds.
- In fiscal year 2020, DANTES obligated about \$4.8 million through 19 grants. This was the last fiscal year the program received funding before the Department scheduled it to sunset. DANTES obligated the funds to 19 grantees representing a total of 31 states.

Source: GAO analysis of DOD documents. | GAO-23-105992

Note: In 2017, the DOD Inspector General used the term “regions” to describe grantees that served multiple states. We use the term “consortia” to describe this arrangement. The MOAs were between DANTES and the states or consortia participating in the program.



Source: Bumble Dee/stock.adobe.com | GAO-23-105992

#### Key dates in the history of the Troops-to-Teachers program

- **1992:** The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 1993 created a program authorizing grants to school districts that employed participants as well as \$5,000 stipends to participants. Department of Defense (DOD) was given responsibility and authority for the operation and administration of the program.
- **1999:** The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2000 reauthorized the program as “Troops-to-Teachers,” and transferred responsibility for funding and oversight from DOD to the Department of Education (Education). Reauthorization eliminated grants to school districts and authorized grants to states or to consortia of states for placement offices.
- **2013:** The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2013 transferred responsibility for funding and oversight from Education back to DOD.
- **2020:** DOD canceled the program.
- **2021:** The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2022 reinstated the program as mandatory.
- **2025:** The program is statutorily required to sunset on July 1.

Source: [GAO-06-265](#) and GAO analysis of DOD documents and federal laws. | GAO-23-105992

After DOD canceled the program (see sidebar), it provided no-cost extensions that allowed grantees to continue providing counseling and referral services to participants until May 2023.<sup>14</sup> When Congress reinstated the Troops-to-Teachers program as mandatory in December 2021, it did not appropriate a specific funding amount for it. This left DOD to determine a funding level for the program.<sup>15</sup> In September 2022, DOD awarded about \$1.38 million for fiscal year 2022 to 12 program grantees, according to DOD officials. In addition, four other grantees will use funds remaining from existing Troops-to-Teachers program awards. Together, these 16 grantees are to provide counseling and referral services across 25 states until May 2023 (see table 1). DOD has not determined the program funding level for fiscal year 2023, as of April 2023.

<sup>14</sup>According to the Office of Management and Budget, to the extent permitted by law, agencies can extend periods of performance for selected expiring grants by up to 1 year.

<sup>15</sup>Previously, the statute authorizing the program stated that “[t]he Secretary of Defense may carry out a Troops-to-Teachers Program,” but the Fiscal Year 2022 NDAA struck the word “may” and inserted the word “shall,” thus requiring DOD to implement this program. The statute also requires the program to sunset on July 1, 2025. Pub. L. No. 117-81, § 551(a), (c) 135 Stat. 1541, 1735.

**Table 1: States Supported Through the Troops-to-Teachers Program**

States	Supported Through a Consortium of States	Requested Funding During Fiscal Year 2022	Active Programs During Fiscal Year 2023
Alabama, Arizona, Connecticut, and Florida (4 states)	No	No	Yes
Colorado, Georgia, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Virginia (12 states)	No	Yes	Yes
Delaware, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming (9 states)	Yes <sup>a</sup>	n/a	Yes

Source: DOD documentation. | GAO-23-105992

Note: States participate in the Troops-to-Teachers program under their own grant agreement with DOD, or they can participate through a consortium of states. Alabama, Arizona, Connecticut, and Florida did not request funding during fiscal year 2022 because they had remaining funds from their existing award to provide the required services, according to DOD officials.

<sup>a</sup>Delaware is supported through New Jersey's grant agreement and Iowa is supported through Missouri's grant agreement. The other seven states are supported through Montana's grant agreement.

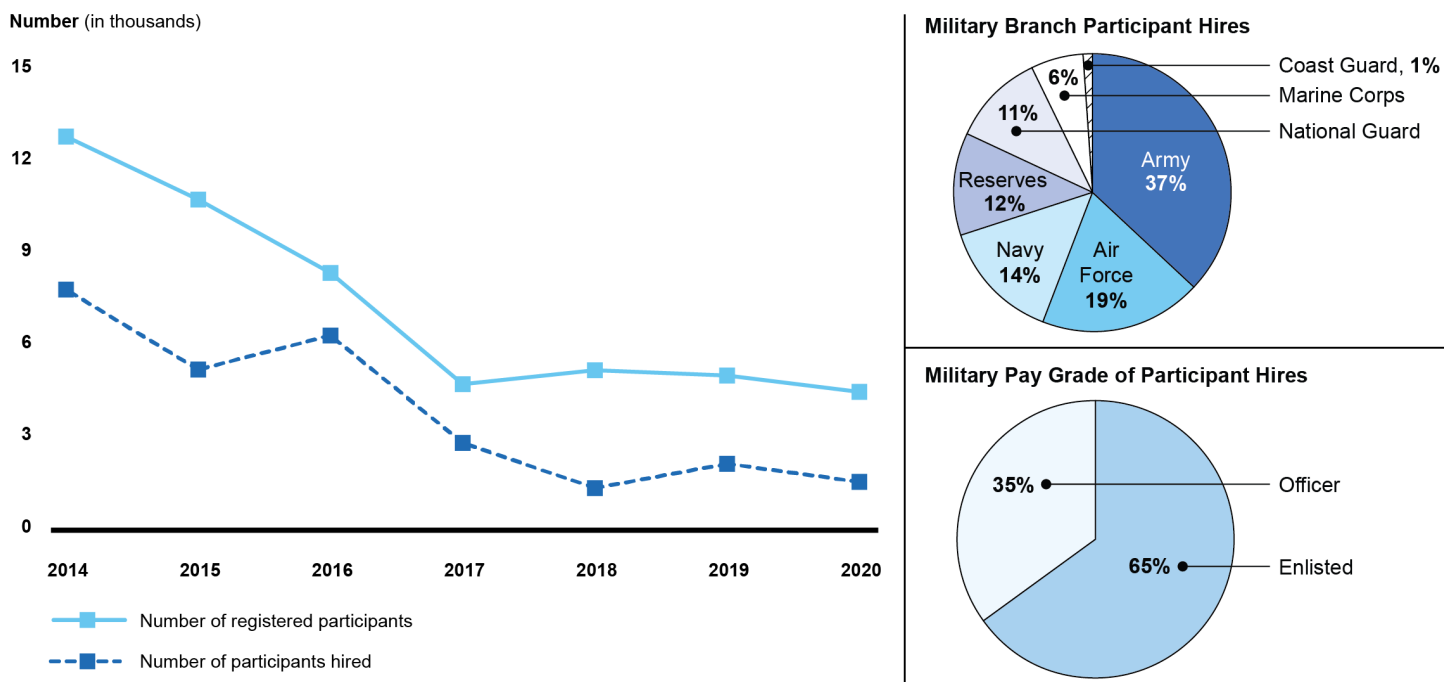
## Troops-to-Teachers Participation Has Declined Substantially, and Information about Program Participants is Limited

Program Reach Declined Substantially from 2014 to 2020 but Program Continued Attracting Underrepresented Groups to the Teaching Workforce

Participation in the Troops-to-Teachers program generally declined during the period between fiscal years 2014 through 2020. During this period, the program registered approximately 50,000 participants, and, of those,

26,505 were hired.<sup>16</sup> Program hires were more than 70 percent lower in fiscal year 2020 compared with fiscal year 2014—dropping from 7,718 to 1,450 hires (see fig. 1). DOD noted several reasons for the declines in overall participation and program hires. For example, from fiscal years 2014 to 2020, the program’s primary method of recruiting participants changed, and it reached fewer servicemembers during their transition out of the military. In addition, as previously discussed, DOD made a number of structural changes in how it administered state grants during this time period, and the program’s reach declined from 54 states and territories in fiscal year 2014 to 31 states in fiscal year 2018.

**Figure 1: Number of Troops-to-Teachers Registered Participants, Participants Hired, Military Branch Participants Hired, and Military Pay Grades Hired, Fiscal Years 2014-2020**

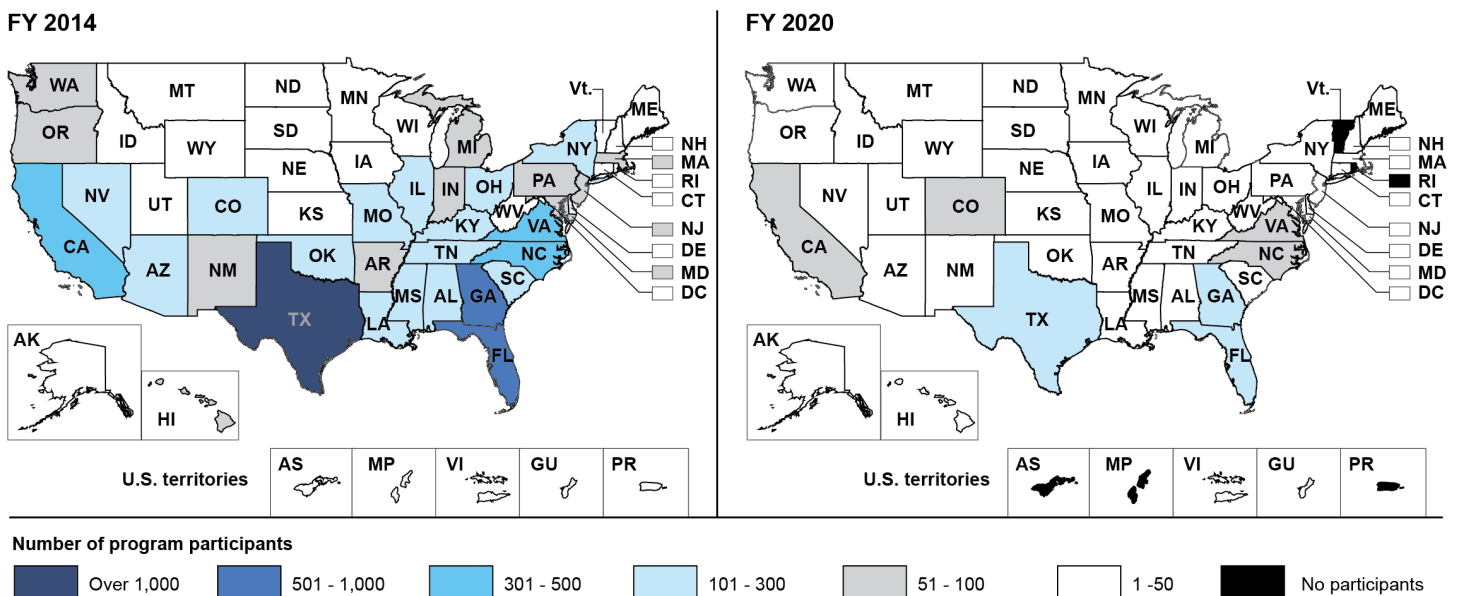


Source: GAO analysis of Troops-to-Teachers program data. | GAO-23-105992

<sup>16</sup>DOD’s program certification and hiring information is self-reported data from participants, unless a participant received financial assistance, and therefore may be incomplete and underreported. DOD also noted that the incentives for participants to self-report hiring information to state personnel or to the Troops-to-Teachers program office declined from fiscal years 2014 to 2020 as funding for financial incentives decreased. According to DOD, financial incentives decreased from about \$4.2 million in 2014 to \$2.4 million in 2020.

Program participants have been geographically concentrated in a few mostly southern states. Specifically, from fiscal year 2014 through fiscal year 2020, more than 50 percent of hires occurred in six states: California, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia (see fig. 2). DOD data also show that, more recently, five of these six states had the highest numbers of servicemembers or veterans who expressed an interest in teaching. For example, through July of fiscal year 2022, more than 40 percent of the interest forms submitted to the Troops-to-Teachers program office were from servicemembers or veterans from California, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Virginia.

**Figure 2: Troops-to-Teachers Participants Hired, by State or Territory, During Fiscal Years 2014 and 2020<sup>a</sup>**



Source: GAO analysis of Troops-to-Teachers program data. | GAO-23-105992

<sup>a</sup>The fiscal year 2014 map does not reflect Armed Forces Europe and Armed Forces Pacific, which had 14 and 42 program hires, respectively. In addition, there were three program hires in which the state/territory was unknown in fiscal year 2014, and 37 in fiscal year 2020.

Although Troops-to-Teachers program participants comprise less than 1 percent of the national teacher workforce, many participants are from groups that typically are underrepresented in teaching. Nationally, about 80 percent of K-12 teachers are women and 20 percent are a race other than non-Hispanic White, according to Education’s most recent National

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Teacher and Principal Survey.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, from fiscal years 2014 through 2020, almost three-quarters (72 percent) of registered participants in the Troops-to-Teachers program were men, and 42 percent were non-White.<sup>18</sup>

The Troops-to-Teachers program long has been recognized as having potential to help increase gender balance and racial diversity in classrooms.<sup>19</sup> This is important because, as we reported in October 2022, studies show that students, particularly students of color, benefit from having teachers who look like them. These benefits include improved communication, heightened academic performance, fewer absences, and higher high-school graduation and college enrollment rates. For example, researchers have found that when Black students were randomly assigned to at least one Black classroom teacher in grade K-3, the students were more likely to complete high school and enroll in college.<sup>20</sup>

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### Available Information about Participants is Limited Because DOD Retired the Program's Data Management System in 2021

DOD officials said that after retiring the program's data management system when DOD sunsetted the program in 2021, they no longer have certain data on Troops-to-Teachers participants, such as highest level of education, the specific race/ethnicity of each program participant, or the academic subject areas taught by participants. According to DOD officials, DOD archived data in accordance with DOD policy, which focuses on financial data records retention, and did not download other program participant data before retiring the data management system. As

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<sup>17</sup>Taie, S., and Lewis, L. (2022). *Characteristics of 2020–21 Public and Private K–12 School Teachers in the United States: Results from the National Teacher and Principal Survey* (NCES 2022-113). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved on May 2, 2023 from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2022113>.

<sup>18</sup>DOD told us that demographic characteristics of participants such as race/ethnicity and gender are optional self-reported items on the program registration application. In addition, while we include these data for the purpose of comparison, DOD's program participant data cannot be further disaggregated by race/ethnicity in order to make a more specific comparison. The non-White category includes African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American, and Other.

<sup>19</sup>See GAO, *Troops to Teachers: Program Brings More Men and Minorities to the Teaching Workforce, but Education Could Improve Management to Enhance Results*, [GAO-06-265](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 1, 2006), and DOD, *Troops-to-Teachers Program Hiring Officials Information Sheet*, (Updated: Mar. 21, 2016).

<sup>20</sup>GAO, *K-12 Education: Education Should Assess Its Efforts to Address Teacher Shortages*, [GAO-23-105180](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 27, 2022).

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a result, DOD has limited ability to retrieve demographic and participant characteristics data it previously collected.<sup>21</sup>

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## Data on Some Aspects of Participant Employment and School District Satisfaction Are Limited or Unknown

### Serving High-Need Schools is a Key Program Goal, but DOD Does Not Have Data about Participants Employed by These Schools

DOD established a key goal for the Troops-to-Teachers program of reducing critical teacher shortages in areas with high-need schools and in the following subject areas: (1) science, (2) mathematics, (3) special education, (4) foreign language, or (5) career or technical education. To report on its progress in this area, DOD had tracked the number of participants hired by a high-need school, district, or public charter school and any financial assistance they received. However, due to the shutdown of its data management system, DOD cannot currently access this information despite originally having collected it through fiscal year 2020.<sup>22</sup>

DOD's Troops-to-Teachers annual reports and other archived data illustrate how the program was serving high-need schools. For example,

- For fiscal year 2017, 273 participants collectively received nearly \$2 million in financial assistance for teaching in a high-need school.
- In fiscal years 2018 through 2020, 155 participants each received up to \$10,000 in financial assistance for teaching science, math, foreign language and special education in a high-need school, and 856

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<sup>21</sup>DOD officials said they used a module within the DOD Voluntary Education System to maintain data for the Troops-to-Teachers program, and said that they archived program data in accordance with the OSD Record Disposition Schedule, 206-09.1, which governs financial transaction records related to procuring goods and services, paying bills, collecting debts, and accounting.

<sup>22</sup>Officials we spoke with noted that the acquisition process alone for a new data management system could take 18 to 24 months. In addition, DOD stated that both the absence of a specific appropriation of federal funds, and the statutorily required sunset date of July 1, 2025, have made it difficult for it to acquire a new data management system for the program.



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participants each received up to \$10,000 in financial assistance for teaching all other academic and career or technical education subjects in a high-need school.

Officials from all eight of the school districts we visited said they were addressing teacher shortages in all types of schools, including high-need schools. For example, an official from one rural school district in Montana said it is very difficult to fill teacher vacancies, because salaries are too low to be an individual's sole source of income. Officials from a large school district in Arizona said that even after increasing teachers' starting salaries, they still had 150 vacant teaching positions. An official from a large school district in Florida said that while they reduced the total number of vacancies from almost 800 to about 300 teaching positions, they are struggling to fill positions in certain subjects including science, math, reading and special education. These comments are consistent with nationwide trends. Nationwide, teacher shortages have been on the rise: in October 2022, we reported that an estimated 31 percent of principals with vacancies at their schools reported facing teacher shortages during the 2015-16 school year, compared with an estimated 20 percent who faced shortages during the 2011-12 school year.<sup>23</sup>

DOD officials said they rely on grantees to report data about Troops-to-Teachers program hires. All three grantees in Arizona, Florida, and Montana with whom we met said they rely on participants to self-report when a school district hires them. Officials also described different mechanisms for collecting and tracking these data.

Officials from the eight districts we visited also said they did not know how many Troops-to-Teachers participants were employed by their district's high-need schools, and generally did not have a mechanism for reporting these data. For example, none of the three school districts we visited in Arizona had a mechanism for tracking the number of program participants they hired. In addition, officials from two of these school districts said they could not fully verify the number of hires their state placement assistance office reported to DOD. In addition, none of the three school districts we visited in Florida could determine the number of program participants they hired, and did not have a mechanism for tracking these data. Further, officials from one school district in Florida we spoke with said DOD did not ask them to verify the self-reported hiring data. Finally, officials from

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<sup>23</sup>[GAO-23-105180](#). Data from the 2011-12 and 2015-16 school years were the most recent available within the 10-year window we analyzed.

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both of the school districts we visited in Montana did not know how many Troops-to-Teachers program participants they hired.

**Selected School District Experiences on Tracking Participants Hired in Selected States**

**Arizona:** Officials from a school district we visited said that their data system does not include a variable to identify program participants, nor does it track veteran status. They relied on the state's placement assistance office to obtain data about the number of participants hired.

**Florida:** An official from a large school district said that the district has a hiring preference for veterans, but they do not currently track which veterans it hires through the Troops-to-Teachers program.

**Montana (Northwest Troops-to-Teachers program consortium):** Officials from a school district said that they did not currently know the number of participants hired in their schools, but may have had this information previously.

Source: Interviews with school district officials. | GAO-23-105992

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**DOD Does Not Have Information about Participants' Performance as Teachers or School District Satisfaction with the Program**

DOD does not track information about participant performance or about the satisfaction of school districts that hired teachers through the program. In May 2022, a senior DOD official told us that the Department does not require grantees to collect qualitative metrics about participant performance or school district satisfaction.<sup>24</sup> In the absence of collecting such information, DOD identified two outcome-based studies that analyzed participant performance or school district satisfaction.<sup>25</sup> However, the reports analyze data before fiscal year 2014, which was the first full fiscal year DOD was responsible for both the operation and administration of the Troops-to-Teachers program.

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<sup>24</sup>While DOD does not assess the quality of teachers placed through the program, DOD officials said they previously collected information from states about participants' accomplishments, including national awards and recognition they received through its data management system.

<sup>25</sup>The two outcome-based studies DOD identified were: National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Bulletin 93(4), *The Effects of Troops to Teachers on Student Achievement: One State's Study*, (2009) and NASSP Bulletin 1-29, *Troops to Teachers Update: Changing, but Still Pleasing Principals With High Teaching Quality*, (2015).

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**Grantee Perspectives on School District Satisfaction with the Troops-to-Teachers Program**

All three of the grantees we met with in Arizona, Florida, and Montana said they do not collect data about the performance of participants hired, or about the satisfaction of school districts that hired participants through the program.

**Participant performance data:** Arizona program officials said that school districts in their state are not required to share participant performance data with them. Florida state educational agency officials said that the state maintains a teacher evaluation system, and that participants generally received effective or highly effective ratings from their school districts. Officials from all eight of the school districts we visited in Arizona, Florida, and Montana also said they do not distinguish teachers who are veterans from non-veterans when evaluating their performance, and therefore do not have information about the performance of teachers hired through the program.

**Satisfaction of school districts:** Grantees said they have anecdotal information about the satisfaction of school districts that hired participants through the program. For example, Arizona, Florida, and Montana officials said while they do not collect this type of information, they do hear anecdotally from school district officials about their satisfaction with the program. In addition, an Arizona official said they would like to collect this information in the future by surveying school district officials.

Source: Interviews with grantee officials. | GAO-23-105992

Although DOD is not required to assess the satisfaction of school districts that employ participants, officials from nearly all eight school districts we visited in Arizona, Florida, and Montana said they generally wanted more information about how the Troops-to-Teachers program could help them hire more teachers.

**Arizona:** All three school districts we visited expressed a desire to receive more information from the state placement assistance office. For example, one school district we met with said they would like more information about how they can recruit transitioning servicemembers at a nearby military base to apply for available teaching positions in the district.

**Florida:** Officials from the three school districts we visited had different perspectives about their satisfaction with the program. For example, an official from one school district said the Florida state placement assistance office could better describe its role to districts, and share information about how districts can better connect with transitioning veterans. In addition, officials from another school district said there has not been any recent direct outreach from the state placement assistance office about the program, and that they would like to learn how they could

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better engage with the office. However, an official from a third school district said there is not another program similar to the Troops-to-Teachers program that helps recruit veterans, and that they are satisfied with the updates the state placement assistance office has provided.

**Montana:** Both of the school districts we visited said they are not currently receiving communications from the state placement assistance office, but that they remained interested in hiring veterans for available teaching positions. In addition, both school districts said they would like to receive more frequent updates about veterans seeking employment opportunities for both certified and non-certified positions.

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## DOD Has Not Fully Assessed Program Performance, and Does Not Comply With Requirement to Provide Program Information to or Meet Annually with Education

DOD Requires States to Submit Performance Reports, but Does Not Use Them to Assess Program Performance, and Some Program Improvement Recommendations Remain Open

Although DOD requires grantees to submit performance reports annually, the agency does not use this information to assess program effectiveness. These reports include information about the extent to which grantees have achieved the objectives in their grant proposals, which may include activities accomplished in support of its six program goals (see sidebar and fig. 3).

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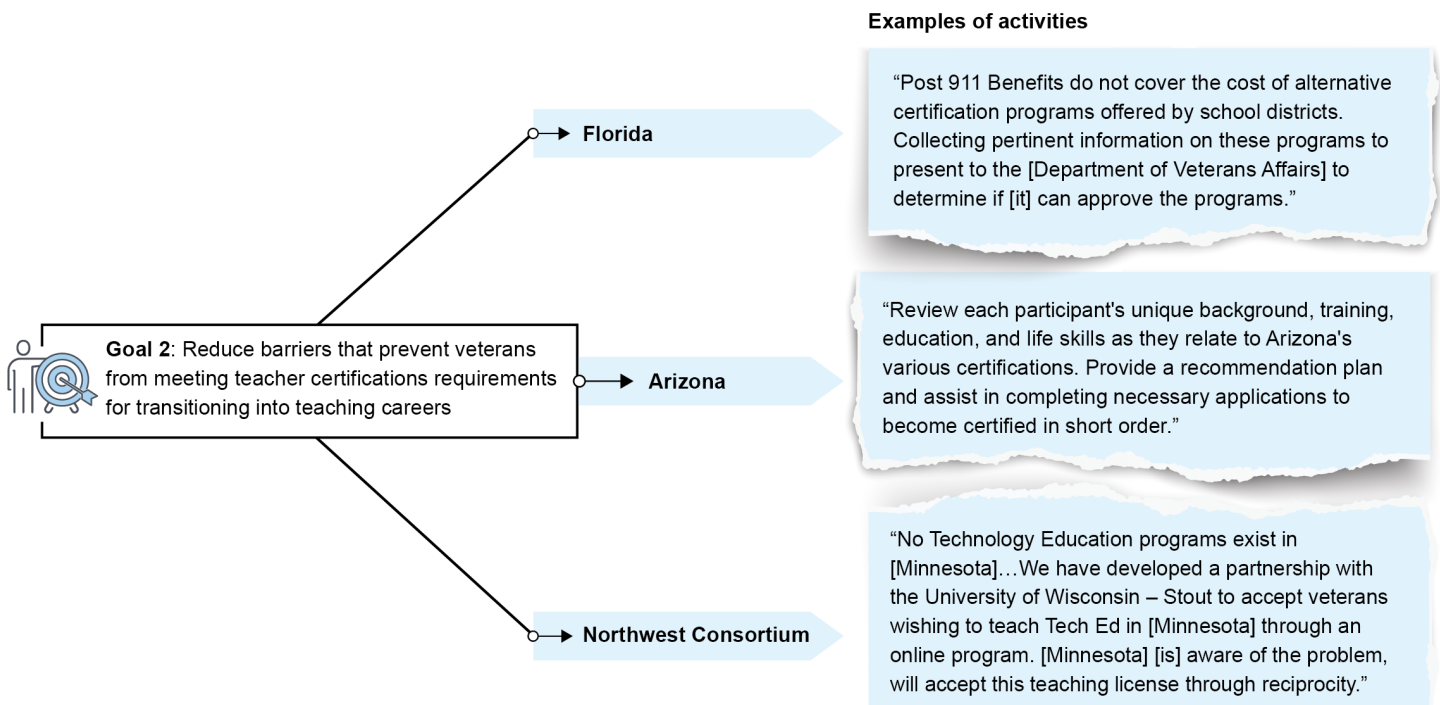
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### **Six Program Goals of the Troops-to-Teachers Program**

- Attract and increase the number of eligible current and former members of the armed forces participating in the Troops-to-Teachers program;
- Reduce barriers that prevent veterans from meeting teacher certifications requirements for transitioning into teaching careers;
- Implement educational models to award academic credit for prior career experience and/or other relevant military training;
- Provide individualized counseling to assist Troops-to-Teachers participants with meeting the educational and certification requirements to transition into a teaching career;
- Support state and local education agencies with hiring motivated, experienced and dedicated eligible members and former members of the armed forces; thereby, increasing the number of veterans employed as teachers; and
- Address geographic areas with critical teacher shortages, especially in high-need schools, in particular the shortage of science, mathematics, special education, foreign language, or career or technical teachers; and in elementary schools or secondary schools, or as career or technical teachers.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense documents. | GAO-23-105992

**Figure 3: Examples of Troops-to-Teachers Grantee Activities to Address a Program Goal**



Source: GAO analysis of grantees' performance reports. GAO (icons). | GAO-23-105992

Prior to 2019, DOD did not require grantees to report standardized information on their programs in these performance reports, according to agency officials. Grantees generally included similar types of information in their performance reports, but the reports generally were narrative and qualitative in nature, and lacked standardized quantitative data that DOD could use to monitor grantees' achievement toward the program's six goals. DOD thus was unable to report comparable information about the extent to which grantees were meeting program goals.

In September 2019, DOD developed and released a standardized annual performance-reporting template for its grantees. DOD developed this template to:

1. establish standardized reporting;
2. demonstrate program expectations to grantees; and
3. gain insight on the program's performance.

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A DOD official also said this template helped the agency improve performance management across grantees. As part of the new template, grantees were encouraged to incorporate quantitative metrics into their annual performance reports beginning in the second year of their grant. For example, DOD encouraged grantees to provide participation data, such as the number of participants who received counseling and referral services and the number of participants actively pursuing teaching certification.

However, DOD identified two challenges related to its performance management across the grantees. First, DOD told us that grantees expressed difficulty reporting certain data by the grant year reporting cycle, because the grant year reporting cycle did not align with the academic year reporting cycle under which most grantees were operating. In response, DOD transitioned to federal fiscal year reporting, in order to more closely align with most grantees' academic year reporting cycles. Second, according to DOD, most grantees expressed difficulty obtaining some of the data elements requested in the 2019 template. In response, DOD revised the template in September 2020, which the agency expected grantees to use when developing future annual performance reports. A DOD official told us that the move from grant years to federal fiscal years and the standardized reporting template helped improve their performance management across the grantees. For example, the current template requests that grantees provide quantitative data in a table format, such as the number of contacts and the number of "leads generated," which is the number of servicemembers who expressed interest in becoming a participant of the Troops-to-Teachers program (see table 2).

**Table 2: Sample Grantee Reporting Data on Participant Pipeline**

Grantee	Number of contacts generated this quarter	Number of leads generated this quarter	Number of servicemembers or veterans who applied for Troops-to-Teachers this quarter	Number of participants who received counseling and referral services this quarter
Florida	21,848	430	1,350	1,790
Arizona	75	20	22	19

Source: GAO analysis of grantee performance report template data, 2020. | GAO-23-105992

Note: A “contact” is defined as any servicemember or veteran who receives information about the program at a face-to-face or virtual event. A “lead” is defined as any servicemember or veteran who provides his/her contact information for follow-up and/or provided his/her information during registration for a program-sponsored virtual event/briefing. The Northwest Consortium did not use the same performance-reporting template as Florida and Arizona during this time period. This was during the period of transition from grant years to federal fiscal years, and as a result, some grantees varied in which template they decided to use.

However, despite now having comparable performance data from its grantees, DOD has not used it to evaluate the program’s overall effectiveness in meeting each of its stated goals for the grants most recently awarded in 2018. DOD officials told us that its 2019 and 2020 annual reports assessed and reported on the program’s overall performance. However, our review found that these reports summarize program data, such as the number of servicemembers who became new participants and the number of servicemembers who were hired as teachers, but do not discuss the impact or outcomes of those activities across state grantees, nor assess the extent to which grantees are contributing to the program’s six goals.<sup>26</sup> Without establishing a mechanism that allows it to report comprehensive data about its grantees, DOD cannot fully assess the overall status of the program.

In 2017, the DOD Office of Inspector General issued a report that included 12 recommendations to address several program management weaknesses related to administering the program.<sup>27</sup> As of February 2023, the DOD Office of Inspector General confirmed that five of the 12 recommendations remain open and that they relate to policy for the

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, Department of Defense, Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. *Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2019*. DOD has previously commissioned outcome-based studies about the Troops-to-Teachers program. For example, a study from 2010 compared performance on tests for students of Troops-to-Teachers participants to students of non-program teachers with similar levels of experience. *NASSP Bulletin*, 1-24.

<sup>27</sup>Department of Defense, Inspector General, *The Troops-to-Teachers Program*, DODIG-2017-123 (Alexandria, Virginia: Sept. 28, 2017).



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Troops-to-Teachers program, including the establishment of grant management and oversight requirements. DOD officials acknowledged that these recommendations are relevant to the program, but indicated that, in part, establishing policy for the program is a lengthy process that requires issuance of a DOD Instruction and a review period, and therefore it will not fully address them until fiscal year 2025, during which the program is statutorily required to sunset.

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### DOD Does Not Provide Information to or Meet With Education on Matters Affecting the Program

DOD has not abided by its June 2013 MOA with Education. The MOA states that DOD will share annual performance reports, annual program reports to Congress, and other reports or studies related to the program; as well as meet with Education no less than annually.<sup>28</sup> A program official said that when DOD assumed responsibility for the program in 2013, DOD tasked a policy office with fulfilling the agency's responsibilities under the MOA. The individuals who were responsible for the MOA have since left the agency, and current program officials said they have no knowledge of past meetings or information exchange. DOD officials said that since November 2013, they have not received resources from Education that may be relevant to the Troops-to-Teachers program. However, DOD used Education's publicly available information as needed, such as data to identify high-need schools. DOD officials said that meeting with Education would be helpful and that one of their goals is to reestablish that relationship to help improve its administration of the program. In April 2023, DOD reached out to Education to reestablish that relationship, according to DOD.

Education officials said that from 2013 through 2016, Education and DOD met annually regarding the program, and Education provided DOD with resources, such as information about teacher preparation programs. Education officials also said that during this time, Education transmitted Troops-to-Teachers information to the directors of state educational agency certification/licensure, as part of its responsibilities under the MOA. However, Education officials said after 2016, Education has had limited involvement with the program.

Leveraging information from Education (such as where there are critical teacher shortage areas), and ensuring that Education has relevant information from DOD (such as current program information and grantee announcements to send to state certification/licensing officials), could

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<sup>28</sup>The MOA also states that Education will have responsibilities related to the program, such as helping DOD identify teacher preparation programs for program participants.

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provide opportunities to enhance the potential of the Troops-to-Teachers program.

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## Conclusions

Since 1992, DOD's Troops-to-Teachers program has helped military personnel—notably, those whose characteristics often are underrepresented in the general K-12 teaching population—obtain their teaching certifications and find employment in eligible schools. However, current information about the program's effectiveness is limited. Despite taking steps to standardize the performance information reported by grantees through their annual performance reports, DOD has not used these reports to determine whether the program is meeting each of its stated goals across grantees. Without a mechanism to assess performance data from grantees, DOD cannot fully report on grantee performance, including the extent to which they are serving high-need schools—a key goal of the program. The lack of such a mechanism also hinders a comprehensive assessment of the program. Finally, DOD has not abided by the terms of its June 2013 MOA. By leveraging available support from Education, DOD could help ensure the program is achieving each of its stated goals, including the placement of participants in eligible schools with critical teacher shortages.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making three recommendations to DOD. Specifically:

The Secretary of Defense should ensure DANTES uses the data collected through its annual performance reporting process to assess and report on the effectiveness of the Troops-to-Teachers program in meeting each of its stated goals. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure DANTES establishes a mechanism to report relevant performance information and more fully assess the program's overall performance across grantees. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of Defense should ensure DANTES fulfills its responsibilities regarding the Troops-to-Teachers program in accordance with its June 2013 MOA, including identifying the appropriate personnel. (Recommendation 3)

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOD for its review. In its comments, reproduced in appendix II, DOD did not concur with our first two recommendations and partially concurred with the third. Education also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

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Regarding our first two recommendations, to 1) use the data collected through the annual performance reporting process to assess and report on the effectiveness of the Troops-to-Teachers program, and 2) establish a mechanism to report relevant performance information and more fully assess program performance across grantees, DOD stated that it does not have the resources to support these recommendations, and would face difficulties building such resources and capacity. DOD noted that the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2022 directed the agency to restart the program, but did not include an accompanying appropriation to operate the program through the July 1, 2025 sunset date. DOD said it interpreted Congress' intent to be supporting participants who already were in Troops-to-Teachers prior to DOD canceling the program (in fiscal year 2021) until they complete their teacher certification programs. DOD said it continues to meet that intent.

We continue to believe these recommendations are warranted. The Fiscal Year 2022 NDAA reinstated the Troops-to-Teachers program, leaving DOD to determine funding for it. Agencies need to understand the performance of their programs to operate them effectively and ensure their wise use of scarce federal resources. Even if DOD chooses to support only current participants in the program, it is important for DOD to use the data it collects and determine whether the program is meeting its stated goals, both at the grantee level and across grantees overall.

DOD partially concurred with our third recommendation, which was to ensure DANTESS fulfills its responsibilities regarding the Troops-to-Teachers program in accordance with its June 2013 MOA, including identifying appropriate personnel. In its comments, DOD stated that it concurs with the recommendation only as it relates to the MOA responsibilities and identification of personnel directly related to support current program participants. DOD said it does not have the resources to support this recommendation across future years, and would face difficulties building capacity to do so.

We agree that it is important to fulfill the MOA responsibilities and identify personnel as it relates to supporting participants already in the program. It also is important for the agency to fulfill all of its MOA responsibilities to operate the program effectively while the program is required by law to continue. Fulfilling these responsibilities would provide opportunities to enhance the potential of the program.

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We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Defense, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or [nowickij@gao.gov](mailto:nowickij@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqueline M. Nowicki". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jacqueline M. Nowicki  
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

# Appendix I: Characteristics of State and Consortium Site Visits

State or Consortium of States	Veteran Population (Fiscal year 2021)	New Participants (Fiscal year 2019-2020)	Hires (Fiscal year 2019-2020)	Participants Paid Bonuses (Fiscal year 2019-2020)	Total Amount of Bonuses Paid (Fiscal year 2019-2020)	Percentage of schools that meet the high-need definition (School year 2019-2020)
Florida	1,492,176	981	416	92	\$555,276	61.46%
Arizona	493,453	277	86	12	\$90,000	49.24%
Northwest consortium (10 states):	1,925,701	668	207	29	\$203,333	—
• Montana	—	—	—	—	—	19.78%
• Alaska	—	—	—	—	—	39.79%
• Idaho	—	—	—	—	—	33.67%
• Minnesota	—	—	—	—	—	31.10%
• North Dakota	—	—	—	—	—	22.43%
• South Dakota	—	—	—	—	—	24.35%
• Oregon	—	—	—	—	—	52.70%
• Washington	—	—	—	—	—	47.79%
• Wisconsin	—	—	—	—	—	36.70%
• Wyoming	—	—	—	—	—	19.42%

Legend: — = n/a

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, and Department of Education data using the most recent year of data available. | GAO-23-105992.

Note: For the percentage of high-need schools variable, we used the second most recent year of data available because it was more complete and reliable for our purposes than data from the most recent year.

# Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



HEADQUARTERS  
DEFENSE HUMAN RESOURCES ACTIVITY  
4800 MARK CENTER DRIVE, SUITE 06J25-01  
ALEXANDRIA, VA 22350-4000

Ms. Jacqueline Nowicki  
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington DC 20548

Dear Ms. Nowicki,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report GAO- 23-105992, “ K-12 EDUCATION: DOD Should Assess Whether Troops-to-Teachers is Meeting Program Goals,” dated May 30, 2023 (GAO Code 105992).

Attached is DoD’s response to the subject report. My point of contact is Mr. Michael C. Miller at (571) 481-7132 or via email at michael.c.miller.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

REGISTER,JEFFR  
EY,RAYMOND,104  
6072339

Digitally signed by  
REGISTER,JEFFREY,RAYMON  
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Jeffrey R. Register  
Director

MCTO CAO RESPONSE

GAO DRAFT REPORT DATED MAY 30, 2023  
GAO-23-105992 (GAO CODE 105992)

“K-12 EDUCATION: DOD SHOULD ASSESS WHETHER TROOPS-TO-TEACHERS  
IS MEETING PROGRAM GOALS”

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS  
TO THE GAO RECOMMENDATION

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** The Secretary of Defense should ensure DANTEs uses the data collected through its annual performance reporting process to assess and report on the effectiveness of the Troops-to-Teachers program in meeting each of its stated goals.

**DoD RESPONSE:** NONCONCUR

The Department is not resourced to support this recommendation across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) and would face great difficulties resourcing and building the capacity to do so.

As part of the Defense Wide Review, the Department was forced to sunset the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program along with the supporting operational infrastructure in Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21). Subsequently, the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the Department to restart the TTT program, to be “sunset” on July 1, 2025. However, the NDAA 22 requirement did not include an accompanying appropriation to operate the program.

The Department interpreted Congress’ intent to be continuation of support to eligible participants already in the program prior to the Department’s initial FY21 TTT program termination date. These participants may remain in the program until completion of their respective teacher certification programs. The Department continues to meet that intent.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** The Secretary of Defense should ensure DANTEs establishes a mechanism to report relevant performance information and more fully assess the program’s overall performance across grantees.

**DoD RESPONSE:** NONCONCUR.

The Department is not resourced to support grant continuation nor grant performance assessment across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) and would face great difficulties resourcing and building the capacity to do so.

As part of the Defense Wide Review, the Department was forced to sunset the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program along with the supporting operational infrastructure in Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21). Subsequently, the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the

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**Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense**

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Department to restart the TTT program, to be “sunset” on July 1, 2025. However, the NDAA 22 requirement did not include an accompanying appropriation to operate the program.

The Department interpreted Congress’ intent to be continuation of support to eligible participants already in the program prior to the Department’s initial FY21 TTT program termination date. These participants may remain in the program until completion of their respective teacher certification programs. The Department continues to meet that intent.

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** The Secretary of Defense should ensure DANTES fulfills its responsibilities regarding the Troops-to-Teachers program in accordance with its June 2013 MOA, including identifying the appropriate personnel.

**DoD RESPONSE:** PARTIALLY CONCUR

The Department concurs with Recommendation 3 only as to MOA responsibilities and identification of personnel directly related to support to eligible participants already in the program prior to the Department’s initial FY21 TTT program termination date.

The Department is not resourced to support this recommendation across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) and would face great difficulties resourcing and building the capacity to do so.

As part of the Defense Wide Review, the Department was forced to sunset the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program along with the supporting operational infrastructure in Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21). Subsequently, the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the Department to restart the TTT program, to be “sunset” on July 1, 2025. However, the NDAA 22 requirement did not include an accompanying appropriation to operate the program.

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# Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Jacqueline M. Nowicki, (202) 512-7215 or [nowickij@gao.gov](mailto:nowickij@gao.gov)

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## Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Sara Schibanoff Kelly (Assistant Director), Brian Egger (Analyst in Charge), Perry Chen, Alison Grantham, and Sara Rizik made significant contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were John Mingus, Patricia Powell, James Rebbe, Meg Sommerfeld, and Curtia Taylor.

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