



Troops to Teachers

A Model Pathway to a Second Tour of Duty

CIVIC VENTURES POLICY SERIES

David Bank



The Civic Ventures Policy Series, focusing on older adults and civic engagement, is made possible through generous support from The UPS Foundation.

Civic Ventures is a think tank and program incubator helping society achieve the greatest return on experience.

Introduction

Ideas are flying about how to honor the more than 1.5 million U.S. military men and women who have served in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some have suggested a \$20 million day of celebration to commemorate the two operations. Others have proposed a \$1,000 bonus to the troops who faced imminent danger “as a thanks for a job well done.”

Such gestures may be appropriate for past contributions, but they don’t represent an investment in the future of returning—and retiring—veterans and in the future of our country.

Troops to Teachers does. A small federal program, Troops to Teachers helps those with at least 10 years of military service transition to careers in public school teaching and administration. In the 13 years since its inception, the program has helped train and place 9,500 veterans in public school classrooms where they are most needed.

As you’ll see in this paper, written by David Bank, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter who is now a Civic Ventures colleague, Troops to Teachers is a classic win-win, honoring veterans’ continuing aspirations, while improving schools and ensuring our nation’s security. It deserves commendation, full funding, and a raft of imitators.

Particularly now. When half of urban high school students drop out. When the national teacher shortage continues unabated, and high-need schools waste time and money training teachers who won’t last the year. When millions of baby boomers approach the traditional retirement age with no thoughts of traditional retirement.

Troops to Teachers serves as a model program, demonstrating how to match untapped resources—in this case, experienced military vets—with unmet needs—in this case, for teachers and role models in underserved communities.

And Troops to Teachers serves as a model pathway, demonstrating how to get from a midlife career in any field to an encore career in public service.

I salute it, and I think you will, too.



John S. Gomperts
*President, Civic Ventures and
CEO, Experience Corps*

ABOUT THE SERIES

The Civic Ventures Policy Series seeks to provoke discussion and prompt new policy initiatives that will help America transform the aging of the baby boom generation from a crisis into an opportunity. The series is funded by The UPS Foundation.

Troops to Teachers: A Model Pathway to a Second Tour of Duty

David Bank

Today's lesson is acceleration—velocity equals acceleration multiplied by time. At Woodbridge High School in Washington, D.C.'s Virginia suburbs, physics teacher and Navy veteran John Paulson passes out balloons and encourages his 29 students to create their own experiments. One teenager tapes a balloon to a plastic bottle, which whizzes across the table. Another launches a paper airplane, which spirals and crashes. To empathize, Paulson puts on a video blooper reel that shows a \$10 million Trident missile crashing nearly as quickly as the paper airplane. "I used to be in charge of all of that," he says quietly.

Paulson's 30-year Navy career might have come straight out of a Tom Clancy novel. He patrolled the Middle East in the Navy's first ballistic missile submarine during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. He commanded his own fast-attack sub. He served as second-in-command of the Navy's nuclear attack submarines in the Mediterranean in the tense final days of the Cold War.

That perspective invests his teaching with real-world significance. "If you don't know the basic equation for acceleration," he tells his class, "you'll end up in a place you don't think you are. The real world will let you know."

Paulson's 16- and 17-year-old students respond to his background, his passion for teaching, and the creative chaos he fosters in the classroom. With thinning gray hair, yellow short-sleeved shirt and blue tie, Paulson is hardly cool. But today happens to be his 57th birthday and in the middle of class, three students burst into his classroom with a colorful banner declaring, "Happy Birthday to the Hottest Teacher Ever!"

Paulson is one of approximately 9,500 military veterans who have become public school teachers and administrators over the past dozen years through a little-known but highly successful federal program called Troops to Teachers. The federal government isn't known as a hotbed of innovation, but with 77 million baby boomers beginning to reach traditional retirement age, Troops to Teachers stands as a model of the kind of program that can help them transition from midlife careers in any field to encore careers in public service, and help America transform the aging of the baby boom generation from a crisis to an opportunity.

Troops to Teachers, part of the Department of Education but run by the Pentagon, helps eligible military personnel begin new careers as educators in underserved public schools where their skills, knowledge and experience are most needed. It serves two key goals: It helps veterans with at least 10 years of service who retire from the military prepare for rewarding careers in public service—second tours of duty helping schoolchildren succeed. And it helps meet

the critical need for K-12 teachers in the United States; estimates now put the number of new teachers needed each year at 200,000.

BASIC TRAINING

A handful of school districts have attracted national attention by hiring retired military leaders at the highest levels. The Los Angeles Board of Education recently named a retired Navy vice admiral, David L. Brewer III, as superintendent of the sprawling school system with more than 700,000 students. Brewer, who commanded more than 8,000 people and 120 ships as head the Military Sealift Command, had been looking forward to relaxing with his wife and raising funds for a foundation he had started to help poor minority students. Then a recruiter called. “I looked at this job and I said, ‘Man, if you get this job, it is the ultimate stage for helping disadvantaged youth,’” Brewer told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Troops to Teachers helps those without such high profiles by reimbursing career officers and enlisted personnel up to \$5,000 for the cost of the classes and tests they need to get their teaching certificates. State and regional office help place the teachers, mostly in low-income, high-need schools. A three-year bonus of up to \$10,000 provides an incentive for Troops teachers to stick with it—and defy the national trend in which nearly half of all new teachers quit within the first five years.

Troops to Teachers was the brainchild of J. H. “Jack” Hexter, a Yale history professor who himself demonstrated the value of a second career. After he reached Yale’s mandatory retirement age of 65, Hexter transferred to Washington University in St. Louis, where he taught for another 15 years.

Realizing that the waning of the Cold War and the downsizing of the U.S. military would spur the retirement of thousands of soldiers in their 40s and early 50s, Hexter saw a golden opportunity to fill the chronic need for public school teachers. After six years of effort, Hexter convinced Sen. John Danforth to help secure federal funding for the program in the 1993 defense spending bill—a year before Hexter died.

In addition to a subsidy to cover the costs of classes and testing, the original legislation included a \$50,000 grant—\$10,000 a year for five years—for school districts that agreed to hire former military personnel. The funding was intended to help overcome school officials’ skepticism about the suitability of putting a crusty old sergeant major in front of a classroom. That concern quickly evaporated.

Troops to Teachers stands as a model of the kind of program that’s needed to help America transform the aging of the baby boom generation from a crisis to an opportunity.

“We have people who have been drill sergeants, but these people aren’t dumb. They know they’re not going to take a bunch of kids and shape them up like in basic training,” says John Gantz, who manages Troops to Teachers, a program of the Pentagon’s Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support, or Dantes, in Pensacola, Florida. “We tell administrators: what these people bring is their leadership skills. In a well-run military unit, you don’t have discipline problems, because you have leadership. Now school administrators say, ‘Send me a few more just like him.’”

Or her. Sandra Sessoms-Penny ended her 22-year career in the Air Force as a senior master sergeant in 1995. With help from Troops to Teachers, she earned a master’s degree and became a social studies teacher, then administrator at a nearby middle school. She now serves as assistant principal of a 500-student rural school, Windsor High School in Isle of Wight County, Virginia.

At 51, Sessoms-Penny isn’t even midway through what she says will be a 24-year career in education—two years longer than her military service. She’s now paying her own way through a Ph.D. program and has just submitted her dissertation to George Washington University on Troops to Teachers’ role in filling teacher shortages. Older and more experienced, Troops teachers know what they’re getting into, she says, not only in the classroom but in a chronically underappreciated and underpaid profession.

“In the military, too, you know, you are standing in defense of folks who don’t know you and don’t respect you or what you’re doing,” she says. “And it’s the same thing in the school system. Not everybody supports what you do or how you do it, but you know that it must be done.”

As Sessoms-Penny walks through the halls at Windsor, she says, both her background and her bearing set standards and broaden students’ views. She grew up poor, helping her parents pick fruit in South Florida, and encourages students to expand their horizons. Her military experience helps her keep organized and get things done, she says.

“The military teaches discipline, teamwork, planning, organizing, getting things done in a timely manner, keeping the objectives in mind,” she says. “Military folks, we’re used to being a part of something and making something go. We say, ‘This has got to be done, there’s no way around it, what are your ideas?’ Then we get everybody’s ideas heading in the same direction.”

Such skills have helped other Troops to Teachers become teachers of distinction as well. Greg Powell, a retired Air Force major who teaches sixth grade in Dayton, Ohio, was named the city’s 2005 Teacher of the Year. His program to teach his students about investments and the stock market spurred them to use math to calculate the gains and losses on their hypothetical stock picks and to read the newspaper for reports on their “investments.” Eric Combs, a 20-year Air Force veteran who teaches social studies in a program for at-risk students in Fairborn, was the state’s 2006 Teacher of the Year.

BEYOND INDIVIDUAL SUCCESS

Troops to Teachers doesn’t just turn out good teachers; it turns out school leaders that meet very specific school needs. Four out of five Troops teachers are men, helping balance the overall pool of new teachers, which is nearly three-quarters women. More than one-quarter of the Troops teachers are African Americans, compared to 9 percent among new teachers as a whole. More than 27 percent teach science or math, and 19 percent are in special education—all fields chronically

short of teachers. Black men teaching math and science in high-need schools—Troops to Teachers represents a trifecta of public-policy wins.

It gets better. According to a 2005 survey of more than 1,400 Troops teachers conducted by the National Center for Education Information, more than half of Troops teachers—54 percent—rated themselves “very satisfied” with their jobs overall, compared to 32 percent of all teachers. And despite low pay, they stick it out. Among Troops teachers who started their teaching careers in high-need schools, 90 percent continued for a second year and 75 percent for a third. Fully 85 percent said they expect to be employed in education in five years, compared to 71 percent of all teachers.

School principals say Troops teachers are good teachers. In fact, 90 percent of principals surveyed told researchers at Old Dominion University in Virginia in 2005 that they considered former service members more effective in classroom instruction and management than other teachers with similar years of teaching experience. Nearly as many said Troops teachers boost student achievement more than traditionally trained teachers.

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Fostering such achievement has risen to the level of national security priority. President Bush pledged in his State of the Union speech in February 2006 to bring 30,000 math and science professionals into the classrooms. “If we ensure that America’s children succeed in life,” Bush said, “they will ensure that America succeeds in the world.”

Report after report documents Troops to Teachers’ results: cost-effective recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers. Instead of expanding the program, however, funding has been cut and rules

tightened in recent years, discouraging many potential participants.

Troops to Teachers has a see-saw history. As the Pentagon's force-reduction ran its course in the late 1990s, support for Troops to Teachers dwindled. By 1999, the program had nearly died after funding expired.

That year, Senators John McCain and Mike DeWine kept the program on life support, winning barely \$3 million dollars for the program. The senators found the money in the budget of the Department of Education, reflecting the program's increasing emphasis on teacher recruitment, rather than military outplacement. The subsidy to school districts to hire Troops teachers was cut from a high of \$50,000 to a \$10,000 annual bonus paid directly to veterans who teach for three years in low-income schools.

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In 2002, Troops to Teachers found new life as part of the No Child Left Behind legislation. First Lady Laura Bush, in particular, became a champion, telling sailors aboard the USS Shiloh, “As you prepare to leave the military, we ask you to turn your attention to the home front... to Uncle Sam's classrooms... where we need your service as teachers.” Total funding increased to \$30 million in fiscal 2003, before falling back to less than \$15 million in each of the last two years.

In 2005, new regulations tightened definitions of the low-income, “high-need” schools that qualified for the stipend and bonus. Many veterans, without a guarantee they will be able to find employment in a qualifying school, have become reluctant to accept a stipend they may have to pay back. The result: Enrollment fell by 9 percent in 2005 and another 33 percent in 2006.

“The out of pocket costs to earn a teacher certification, particularly for enlisted personnel, is more than they can justify,” Gantz says. “They are opting to go with the defense contractors, or other civilian opportunities and we are losing them to public education.”

INVESTING IN HUMAN CAPITAL

Despite flagging financial support, Troops to Teachers has spawned imitators within the federal government. Two years ago, the Pentagon launched Spouses to Teachers, a pilot program in six states to help military wives and husbands gain their certificates and launch or restart their teaching careers.

And the Senate in 2006 approved funding for a pilot Troops to Nurse Teachers program to try to help make up a projected shortage of one million nurses by 2020. Under the program, Army and Navy medical corpsmen and women would be recruited as nurse-educators. The legislation would provide tuition, stipends and placement assistance of up to \$30,000 for service members in return for three years of teaching at a nursing school. The funding didn't make into the final bill, but Congress directed a study of the proposal. (Not all military career-transition programs work: a Troops to Cops program fizzled and funding ran out in 1999.)

The declining investment in Troops to Teachers is an exception to the national trend to invest more heavily in teacher recruitment and retention, including efforts to help boomers enter the education profession. Based on other teacher-recruitment efforts that place the value of each high-quality recruit much higher, the “market price” for training and placing good teachers may be two to three times the level currently set by the Troops to Teachers program.

For example, IBM Corp. launched its Transition to Teaching program in 2005 to help retiring IBM scientists and engineers with certification, student teaching opportunities and subsidies. In addition to grants of up to \$15,000 per employee to defray the costs of schooling, IBM provides employees up to four months of paid time off to fulfill their student teaching requirements.

“People aren’t ready for retirement at 52 or 53 years old,” IBM’s average retirement age, says Stan Litow, president of the IBM International Foundation and a former deputy superintendent of New York City’s schools. “People want to use the opportunity of a second career to do something that is meaningful.”

Chicago’s Academy for Urban School Leadership offers an even richer package—a \$30,000 salary for one year, along with a reduced-rate master’s degree program and a laptop computer for those who agree to teach for five years in the city’s schools. The Chicago program explicitly trains teachers to be school change agents, with a 12-month leadership development and teacher-preparation program and a 10-month teaching residency.

Math for America has raised the bidding still higher for high school math teachers in New York City. The organization, funded by Dr. James Simons, president of Renaissance Technologies Corp., offers a \$90,000 bonus, on top of a regular teaching salary, over five years and full tuition for a master’s in education degree. The organization has awarded 91 of such Newton fellowships since 2004 and says it is committed to awarding 250 more by 2011.

The programs offset the bigger bonuses by requiring longer time commitments. Both the Chicago and New York program demand a five-year commitment from new teachers, compared to the three years Troops to Teachers requires for a bonus. That five-year commitment promotes stability and reduces the cost of constant turnover—estimated at more than \$2 billion annually to replace the nearly 175,000 public school teachers who drop out of the profession each year, according to the Alliance for Excellent Education.

Such costs justify significantly higher incentives under the Troops to Teachers program, says Barnett Berry, president of the Center for Teaching Quality in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. “I think \$30,000 is nothing if you could keep them for five years,” he says. Berry also calls for the government to sweeten the offer by allowing veterans to remain on the military payroll for the first six months of their teaching careers. “This is exactly the role for government—providing even more incentives for these folks to go into teaching,” he says.

The high level of investment from the most innovative education programs is also justified by the role talented and committed teachers can play as agents of change within their schools. According to Richard Ingersoll, professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, the lack of such leadership is the biggest cause of the teacher shortage. There are more than enough prospective teachers produced annually, he says, with 220,000 undergraduate or graduate education degrees awarded each year. But large numbers of highly qualified teachers leave the profession after only a few years because of low pay and frustration with the job.

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With their experience and training, Troops teachers have been able to overcome such obstacles. In the Old Dominion survey, Troops teachers said the military prepared them to be not only successful teachers but school leaders, with skills such as organization and time management, personal and student discipline and leadership and motivational skills. To reach its full potential, however, the program will need broad political support and full funding.

Investing in the human capital of service members has a rich and storied history. The original GI Bill, formally called the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, opened the middle-class American Dream to millions of World War II veterans. Many of the more than 1.5 million service members who have served during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are eager to continue to serve in a new way. Enabling every veteran who has the desire and ability to become a school teacher is an opportunity to support our troops, support our schools, and leave no child behind.

About the Author

David Bank is director of Civic Ventures' think tank. A veteran journalist, Bank was a reporter at *The Wall Street Journal* and the *San Jose Mercury News* and a foreign correspondent in Asia. His book, *Breaking Windows: How Bill Gates Fumbled the Future of Microsoft* (Free Press) was named one of the "Best Business Books of 2001" by the *Harvard Business Review*. His work has appeared in *Newsweek*, *Wired*, *Mother Jones*, and *Out*. He has an M.S. in journalism from Columbia University and a B.A. in politics from the University of California at Santa Cruz and was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.

About Civic Ventures

Civic Ventures (www.civicventures.org) is a think tank and incubator, generating ideas and inventing programs to help society achieve the greatest return on experience. Founded in the late 1990s by social entrepreneurs John Gardner and Marc Freedman, Civic Ventures is defining a new stage of life and work between the end of midlife careers and the beginning of true old age—and finding new ways to apply the experience of baby boomers to society's greatest challenges. Civic Ventures runs two major programs, Experience Corps and The Purpose Prize.

About The UPS Foundation

Founded in 1951 and based in Atlanta, The UPS Foundation (www.community.ups.com) identifies specific areas where its support will clearly impact social issues. The UPS Foundation's major initiatives currently include programs that support increased global volunteerism, literacy, and hunger relief. In 2005, The UPS Foundation donated more than \$43.8 million to charitable organizations worldwide.

About Troops to Teachers

Troops to Teachers (www.proudtoserveagain.com) is a U.S. Department of Education and Department of Defense program that helps eligible military personnel begin new careers as teachers in public schools where their skills, knowledge and experience are most needed.



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