

Military OneSource Podcast — DANTES Troops to Teachers

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody.

We're going to talk about the Troops to Teachers program today. This is a program that is going to be a pathway to a new career for those who are either separating or retiring, but let's get into the particulars with the program's director, Dr. Taheesha Quarells. Taheesha, welcome to the program.

Taheesha Quarells:

Thank you for having me, Bruce. It's great to be here.

Bruce:

I retired some 15 years ago, and that program was going strong back then. And it is really a thrill to see this program still motoring along. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, why don't you tell us, what is the Troops to Teachers program?

Taheesha:

The Troops to Teachers program has been helping military members and veterans transition into careers as teachers since 1994. So yes, we have been around for a while. In fact, we've helped more than 100,000 veterans be placed as K-through-12 teachers in classrooms all across America, and that includes U.S. territories as well. So, we help military members and veterans transition to teaching everything from elementary school to high school. And an example of someone that we had go through the program recently, we had a participant featured on a major national news network around Veterans Day. His name is John Altman. And after more than 20 years in the Navy, he swapped his months at sea for days in the classroom to continue his legacy of service to his country as a teacher through the Troops to Teachers program.

Bruce:

So, who's eligible to get into the Troops to Teachers program?

Taheesha:

The program is designed to help active-duty, reserve and Guard military members, as well as honorably discharged or retired veterans with a process of becoming certified as a K-through-12 teacher. So, we have service members and veterans of all ranks and all branches of service become participants.

Bruce:

In talking with people who are in the program or familiar with it, oftentimes what I would hear is that the people who go from serving in uniform to serving in the classroom, bring with them a background, a skill and a work ethic that are very much in demand in the classroom. And can you talk about what it is that a service member has that they may not even really be aware of?

Taheesha:

Well, one of the biggest things that school districts are looking to military members and veterans for is their leadership, because teaching is a career of continued leadership. Teachers not only lead in the classrooms, but they're also shaping the future by the work that they do.

Teaching requires a diverse skill set, and military members bring a wealth of knowledge of just the way the world works. So, just a different perspective than what you would get from just a typical teacher who went through a traditional program because many of our military members are world travel. Of course, they bring years of leadership experience.

And one thing that's really unique is the creative problem-solving. So being able to overcome challenges in creative ways is another thing that military members bring.

And then finally, military members have a level of discipline and structure that they're used to, and they're able to create that within a classroom environment, which really goes a long way with managing classrooms. And they actually become more effective in the classroom because they're able to create an environment that is structured and disciplined and ripe for learning.

Bruce:

So, some people might be confused. They'd say, I heard that the program went away. And, in fact, it was canceled in 2021, so what has happened since then?

Taheesha:

Well, since then, the program was actually reauthorized at the end of 2021 in December. And we've been in the process of rebuilding the program since it was shut down. And we currently have services up and running in 25 states to assist with the process of becoming a teacher.

Bruce:

OK. So, you mentioned services. What is it that you're referring to?

Taheesha:

The program provides a helping hand to those interested in becoming a teacher. Every state has different requirements to become certified as a teacher. And the Troops to Teachers program provides counseling on state-specific, either traditional or alternative, pathways to becoming a certified teacher. And they also offer referrals to programs that can help participants meet those requirements.

The program also helps participants with preparing for and finding a job. Many of our states offer virtual workshops on how to display your military experience on a resume for teaching, and they conduct mock interviews for those who need to build their interview skills.

The teacher shortage in America is real, and it has been a problem for a while, but one of the things our program does is, it connects our participants with areas that are having those shortages to fill some of those job vacancies.

Bruce:

If somebody is interested in the program, what's the first step? Can they inquire about the program when they're still serving? Or conversely, can they come back to you after some time and being out of the military with an interest in being in the program?

Taheesha:

I'll say "yes" to both. So, while they're on active duty, military members can be working with our state representatives to be getting the things that they need in order to be certified in the state that they're interested in moving to once they leave service. They can start as early as possible in the transition process. It's never too early to start while you're on active-duty Guard or reserve.

But we also help veterans, as well. It is very common for people to transition into a career when they leave military that they went for perhaps the money, they went for the prestige, and when they got there, they didn't like their experience in that career field.

And so, we get a lot of career changers that come to the program that say, OK, I miss making a difference. I miss actually serving. And we're able to help veterans, as well, in the program. And it's simple to get started. A service member or a veteran interested in the program just starts by visiting our website, proudtoserveagain.com, and they complete a short program interest form, and from there they'll be contacted for further assistance.

Bruce:

So, one thing for people who are curious, because you did mention that your website is a dot com, but you're actually part of the military. Can you explain how that works?

Taheesha:

Yeah. We are a dot com, but it redirects to a dot mil website. We are a Defense Department program, and we are one of the education programs that is offered to military members through an organization called DANES, the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support. They actually manage a lot of the programs that military members use while they're on active duty to be able to complete their degrees. And we are just one program, part of many that are available from the DOD.

Bruce:

What would you say would be one of the perks of not merely being a teacher, but being a teacher after having served?

Taheesha:

OK, so this is something I'm super passionate about. One of the things we have to realize that after serving, service members are poised to do absolutely anything they put their minds to. However, choosing to become an educator special, the biggest thing that our participants realize is that as a teacher, they're on the front lines of developing our country's number one resource: our children. And it gives military members and veterans a new assignment within a profession that provides meaning and impact. Teaching is a challenging and a rewarding career field.

To be a teacher is to be a problem solver, a poet, an inventor, a creator, an explorer. You get to experience the possibility of untangling a student's understanding of numbers or awakening curiosities, shifting their life trajectories.

Teaching can also be a career with advancement. So many people don't realize that becoming a teacher can be the first phase of a career with many opportunities. A lot of our participants get promoted, and they become teachers that are master teachers or they transition to become school counselors or instructional specialists or a lot because of that leadership experience, assume administrative roles such as deans and principals and superintendents. So many of our participants go on to achieve lots of rewards as they progress through their career. For example, in 2020, we had Air Force veteran Maureen Stover, who actually won teacher of the year for the state of North Carolina.

Bruce:

So, Taheesha, you're talking about the benefits personally and that sense of accomplishment and engagement, but what about benefits as we normally refer to them when we're looking at a job?

Taheesha:

Teaching is a career that requires a real commitment, but it also comes with real, tangible rewards. The benefits you get on top of a salary are a part of your total

compensation, and teachers tend to get a better package of benefits than most other jobs.

It starts with the standard medical, dental and vision insurance that you expect as a professional in any field, but teachers get compensated with very generous time off, very generous vacations. This is time off during holidays. This is time off in the summers, and this translates into time with family that veterans may have missed during service. And when people talk about concerns about teacher pay, what they don't consider is that teachers get about three months' time off each year if you add it all together throughout the year instead of just two weeks off like the typical civilian job.

And then there's also retirement pay. So, a long-term career with retirement pay. Every school district handles teacher retirement a little bit differently but, in general, instead of a 401(k), teachers can get a 403(b), which is a tax-sheltered annuity that behaves kind of like a 401(k), and they also might be eligible for a pension. There are a lot of benefits that come along with teaching.

Bruce:

All right. Any final words to motivate our listeners into looking into the Troops to Teachers program?

Taheesha:

In the midst of the teacher shortage, the United States is desperately in need of qualified and enthusiastic teachers. Jobs in teaching are readily available and teachers will always be needed, especially male teachers, which the military has. I encourage all listeners to pass the word on about Troops to Teachers to a military member or a veteran that you may know.

Bruce:

Excellent, excellent. So glad that you could join us today.

Taheesha:

It was great to be here. Thank you.

Bruce:

You're welcome. Taheesha Quarells is director of the Troops to Teachers program. Great to be talking to you today.

And I want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website, we're a call center. We're all over social media, and we are now a podcast. So go ahead and subscribe because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families as they navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks for listening. Bye-bye.