

**Statement of U.S. Department of Education
Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Is Transition Assistance on Track?**

Hearing Date: December 15, 2015, 2:30 p.m.

The U.S. Department of Education (ED), along with our federal agency partners, is committed to supporting our nation's transitioning service members. Since 2012, in collaboration with the Departments of Defense (DoD), Veterans Affairs (VA), and Labor (DOL), the Small Business Administration (SBA), and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), ED has supported efforts to redesign the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in accordance with the VOW to Hire Heroes Act.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) executed in 2014 details specific roles and responsibilities for ED and our federal agency partners regarding interagency coordination to implement the redesigned TAP. Although ED does not administer any specific part of the redesigned TAP, ED plays a key role in the implementation of TAP as a consultative agency. ED is a member of the TAP Executive Council (EC), and the TAP Senior Steering Group (SSG). Additionally, ED participates in a number of working groups focused on issues such as performance management, data sharing, participant assessments, strategic communication, and curriculum evaluation. ED provides expertise in areas such as postsecondary access and affordability, Federal financial aid, and adult learning strategies. ED also participates in TAP training site assistance visits to provide subject-matter expertise and recommendations for enhancing curriculum content and instruction.

A critical component of the redesigned TAP is the Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success) curriculum, designed to ensure that transitioning service members meet career-readiness standards. ED has contributed to the development and evaluation of components of Transition GPS, including DoD's Accessing Higher Education (AHE) and VA's Career Technical Training (CTTT) programs. Of the five components of the Transition GPS curriculum, the DOL Employment Workshop and VA Benefits briefings are required by law for the roughly 250,000 service members (including members of the Guard and Reserve) who transition out of the military each year.

The supplemental Accessing Higher Education (AHE) track supports the Administration's goal to address college access, affordability, quality, and completion for our service members. Because many transitioning service members will enroll at America's colleges and universities, ED believes that it is important that all transitioning service members be encouraged to participate in training that will prepare them to be informed educational consumers. Through AHE, transitioning service members receive tools and resources such as an overview of the postsecondary landscape and the various financial aid options available to them; an understanding of how to protect themselves from the actions of some predatory for-profit colleges; and how to prepare for meeting the application deadlines and securing funding for many colleges and universities. Considering the significant impact that obtaining a college education has on employment and earning potential, all service members who document interest in educational outcomes are required to meet the related educational career readiness

standards. Individualized attention and counseling, combined with educational instruction, resources and services, are used to build the skills necessary for each service member to meet these standards and their post-military education goals. Recognizing that some service members will not express an interest in the education track at the time of transition but will later have a need to attend college either to change careers or expand their skills, ED will continue to work with its agency partners to address that population and ensure that they make sound educational choices.

In addition to supporting the development and implementation of TAP, ED is also working with the VA on updates to the GI Bill Comparison Tool, which draws on ED postsecondary data to provide potential students with estimates on costs of attendance and available post-9/11 GI Benefits, overall and veteran-specific data on retention and graduation rates, and information on average salaries and loan default rates at institutions of higher education. ED's Federal Student Aid Awareness and Outreach Group has continually participated with DoD and its partners to heighten the military community's awareness of federal funding programs.

To improve veterans' transition into postsecondary institutions and to foster success for veterans on campus, ED, VA, and DoD have encouraged colleges and universities to affirm support for the "8 Keys to Veterans' Success" (8 Keys) — a voluntary effort to promote best practices that foster postsecondary environments that support veterans' success, and help ensure that veterans have access to the information they need to make informed decisions concerning their Federal educational benefits. As of December 8, 2015, ED has facilitated the registration of 1,963 schools affirming support for the 8 Keys. We believe that veterans are benefitting, and are more likely to be successful, when colleges and universities provide the supports outlined in 8 Keys.

As part of our outreach efforts, in collaboration with the private and nonprofit sectors, ED has conducted several 8 Keys presentations at national and regional conferences, including: California Community College Veterans Summit (12/5/14); Student Veterans of America National Conference (1/8/15); Council of College and Military Educators (1/27/15); American Legion Credentialing Summit (4/28/15); and the Western Association of Veterans Education Specialists Annual Conference (7/27/15). ED maintains ongoing communication with these and other veteran service organizations in order to increase our awareness and understanding of the veteran student experience on our nation's campuses.

As service members and their families transition to civilian life, successful reintegration is paramount. We remain committed to doing all that we can to support our service men and women as they navigate postsecondary education, find jobs, or start businesses. ED will continue to work with our agency partners to strengthen ladders of opportunity, so that all our veterans and service members can reach their educational and career goals.