

Joint Oversight Hearing on the Troops to Teachers Program
Subcommittee on Benefits, Committee on Veterans' Affairs and
Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness, Committee on
Education and the Workforce

Wednesday, April 9, 2003

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The School District of Greenville County (S.C.)

Distinguished members of the committee, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak today about my experience with the Troops to Teachers Program.

As a point of reference, I serve as the superintendent of The School District of Greenville County in South Carolina, our state's largest and the 63rd largest school district in the Nation with 62,000 students. I have served almost three years as superintendent after serving 20 years in the United States Army.

I am honored to be considered a "torchbearer" within the Army ranks by the Troops to Teachers community as I was selected two years ago to appear with First Lady Laura Bush in the national kickoff supporting Troops to Teachers.

My interest in wanting to make a difference in public education began during a tour on the faculty at West Point, and subsequently reading about retired Army Major General John Stanford, who in 1994 became the superintendent of the Seattle School system.

Using the Tuition Assistance program provided by my Veterans Benefits, I enrolled in my first of three graduate-level education leadership programs. At the time I was serving on the Joint Staff in Yongsan, Korea. Without those education benefits, I would not be sitting here today, nor serving the students of Greenville County. I am deeply appreciative to my country and the Army for those opportunities.

Upon my return to the States from Korea, I was appointed as a basic training infantry battalion commander at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. While in command, I "burnt" the candle at both ends --- infantry officer by day and student by night. During that time, I earned another master's degree in educational supervision, a requirement to become a principal in South Carolina. Later, I earned a Ph.D. in educational leadership and supervision.

However, even with a master's degree in education, I needed a teaching certificate before I could become the leader of a public school. Like most states, the South Carolina Teacher Certification regulations provide no flexibility for folks like me, who want to bring a full career of experience, knowledge, and abilities to the public school classroom.

At that point, I sought the counsel of the South Carolina Troops to Teachers staff. I ended up going out of state to find a certification process that would accept my time on the US Military Academy faculty, then transferred that teaching certificate to South Carolina. It was the support of the Troops to Teacher staff that pointed me in the right direction. As a result, the day after I retired from the military, I was walking the halls of Hilton Head High School as principal.

My two-year service as principal later led to my selection as a non-traditional superintendent to serve the Greenville community. I am a non-traditional superintendent in the sense that I did not follow the standard process for moving up the ranks in a public school system --- beginning as a teacher and then moving up to assistant principal, principal, district administrator, and finally to superintendent. We need to break that paradigm if we truly are genuine in our desire to Leave No Child Left Behind.

My time is brief and I want to leave you with several important points.

First, thank you for your support of the Troops to Teachers program. Alternative certification routes are important to sustain a qualified teaching workforce. There are thousands who leave the military each year who want to continue to serve and who have much to offer the young people of our Nation. Thank you for supporting the initiative in South Carolina and providing additional opportunities for retired veterans to serve their community.

Second, I want to support Secretary Paige and the American Board for Teacher Certification of Teaching Excellence, whose mission is to certify subject matter experts, experienced professionals and military veterans as public school teachers. Quality teachers can come from all walks of life, as you know from the many successes made possible by the Troops to Teachers program.

Third, a key component of our National Security is the quality of our public education system. Decades ago, the Father of the Nuclear Navy, Admiral Rickover appeared before Congress asking our Nation's leaders at that time to raise the bar of the public education system. He saw our country's need for future engineers and understood the importance of the first Elementary and Secondary Schools Act of 1963 as the means to meet that need.

In our knowledge-based economy, public education plays an even more important role. In support of our Nation's latest effort to improve our public schools, we must continue to press forward in the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act and seek other avenues where military veterans can contribute to the Act's success.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. This has been a great honor for me, my Board of Trustees, and everyone that I represent in The School District of Greenville County.