



Q&A WITH CURTIS COY

Veterans Affairs Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity



1.

What level of support is there to extending GI Bill benefits to Veterans' children?

VA education benefits are not limited to Veterans and Servicemembers. There are several programs that provide education benefits to family members. Depending on the Veteran's status, family members may qualify for one of two VA education programs: *Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship* or *Survivors' and Dependents' Education Assistance Program (DEA)*. Last fiscal year, over 2,500 spouses and children took advantage of the Fry Scholarship, and over 91,000 took advantage of DEA. Family members may also qualify for Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits through a Department of Defense (DoD) administered program known as Transfer of Entitlement. Since its inception, approximately 23% of all Post 9/11 GI Bill beneficiaries are spouses and children.

Fry Scholarship is available to children and spouses of Servicemembers who died in the line of duty after September 10, 2001. In 2014, the Choice Act extended the Fry Scholarship to spouses, and the VA began accepting applications for spouses just four months after the President signed the law. The Fry Scholarship is a fairly comprehensive benefit – equivalent to the Post-9/11 GI Bill – that provides eligible beneficiaries with 36 months of coverage for tuition and fees at a public in-state institution, a monthly housing allowance for those attending more than half-time, and a books and supplies stipend. For those using the Fry Scholarship at a private or foreign school, tuition and fees are capped at a maximum amount that is adjusted yearly.

DEA provides 45 months of education benefits to eligible dependents of Veterans who are permanently and totally disabled due to a service-related condition or of Veterans who died while on active duty or as a result of a service-related condition. DEA provides a flat monthly amount based on the student's rate of pursuit.

Transfer of Entitlement provides valuable assistance to dependents of Servicemembers. The transferability option under the Post-9/11 GI Bill allows active duty Servicemembers to transfer all or some unused benefits to their spouse or dependent children. Once DoD approves the transfer, beneficiaries will apply with the VA to utilize those benefits. The benefits are equivalent to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, and the Servicemember determines how many months they wish to transfer.

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2.

Every business is looking for new recruits: new talent to sustain and grow their organization. What may have changed in the type of individual companies look for in today's business environment compared to, say, twenty years ago? What can post-secondary schools do to ensure newest recruits are well prepared to succeed as they enter the workforce?

Today's employer is looking for a mix of particular education, soft skills, and experience as the workplace has evolved to sustain more complex environments and the need to satisfy both the goals of the employer and what the employee is looking for in a job. As the child of a military parent, I think it's important to recognize that by the very nature of living a military life, military-connected children possess many qualities, such as adaptability and resiliency, which make them marketable to employers.

In the information-based economy of today, businesses are looking for individuals with a degree. Throughout the economy, occupations that require a college degree are growing twice as fast as others. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), a non-profit organization that links college career placement offices with employers, reported in 2015 that the type of education does matter and that the three degrees most in demand were business, engineering, and computer and information sciences.

Businesses are also looking for individuals with skills that go beyond degrees, certification, and licensure. They are looking for well-rounded individuals. The most sought out soft skills are communication (at the top of the list), teamwork, taking the initiative, punctuality, critical thinking, social skills, creativity, interpersonal communication, adaptability, and having a friendly personality. Many military-connected children possess or have developed these skills since they have had to constantly adapt to new environments. Employers

are also looking to reduce their training expenses by hiring candidates with relevant experience.

Post-secondary schools can assist students with having a higher chance for success entering the workforce by providing opportunities and encouraging students to gain practical experience through practicums, internships, and extracurricular activities. They can also incorporate problem-based and experiential learning into their curriculum which directly requires students to access, evaluate, and communicate information, use technology, and work effectively in groups.

Many post-secondary schools have Student Veteran Centers that military and Veteran-connected children should be encouraged to access. Student Veteran Centers support student Veterans and/or their family members by coordinating their academic, financial, physical, and social needs. Students should also take advantage of their career centers on campus. Career centers help prepare students for life after graduation by advising on writing resumes, building a network, and developing interviewing skills. Additionally, due to the advances in social media, instruction on using LinkedIn as a marketing tool as well as a way to establish connections, develop relationships, and research companies has become key to preparing students in today's workforce. Ultimately, the best approach is one of team work, where there is collaboration in multiple ways involving the students, schools, and employers to optimally prepare students to succeed.

3.

There is quite a bit of talk about the employment gap for "middle skills" (skills that require specialized training beyond HS and/or an associate's degree — tech jobs in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, tech, IT, etc.). There are LOTS of these jobs available, but not enough qualified people to fill them. What are your thoughts on what post-secondary schools can be doing to address this challenge?

There is a need to create a smart pipeline of ready talent to fill positions within the middle skills area, which helps create opportunities for military spouses and military children. This means that post-secondary institutions need to establish relationships with communities and employers to foster programs that drive student interest and offer preparation in the way of real life experience.

VA education benefits can not only be used to pursue higher education but also job training opportunities. Programs such

as apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and classwork that are integrated into real life work situations are essential in providing candidates that are ready to fill middle skills jobs. But schools can't do this alone. It requires the commitment of employers to open their organizations to these programs and create incentives for students. It takes active partnerships between schools, communities, and employers to incentivize interest and provide pathways for students to reach those positions.



4.

Military and Veteran-connected children experience transition, mobility, and family separation – what might schools do to ensure these children are properly supported?

Many schools have Student Veteran Centers that provide resources to Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families. Some schools also benefit from programs like VA's **VetSuccess On Campus (VSOC)**, which aims to help Servicemembers, Veterans, and all eligible VA beneficiaries succeed and thrive through a coordinated delivery of on-campus benefits assistance and counseling, leading to completion of their education and preparing them to enter the labor market in viable careers. VSOC Counselors provide community and on-campus outreach, communication with VA beneficiaries to address questions regarding VA education benefits, health services, and general VA benefits, as well as educational and career counseling.

In addition to on-campus resources, the GI Bill website offers tools for all VA education beneficiaries, including spouses and children. The **GI Bill Comparison Tool**, **CareerScope**, **GI Bill Feedback System**, and **Choosing A School Guide** eases the transition and provide Veterans and their family members the tools to make an informed decision about their VA education benefits. We maintain websites specifically tailored to assist schools in better serving the military population. We host webinars providing school certifying officials and other appropriate personnel guidance on how to best serve our beneficiaries.

The **President's Principles of Excellence (POE)** program was designed to ensure that student Veterans, Servicemembers, and family members have information, support, and protections while using federal education benefits. Educational institutions participating in the POE program agree to uphold the following:

- Provide students with a personalized form covering the total cost of an education program.
- Provide educational plans for all military and Veteran education beneficiaries.
- End fraudulent and aggressive recruiting techniques and misrepresentations.
- Accommodate Servicemembers and Reservists absent due to service requirements.
- Designate a point of contact to provide academic and financial advice.
- Ensure accreditation of all new programs prior to enrolling students.
- Align institutional refund policies with those under Title IV, which governs the administration of federal student financial aid programs.

POE status can be verified using our GI Bill Comparison Tool.



5. What do you think is the biggest challenge facing military and Veteran-connected children today? And what do you believe is the best way to address that challenge? What advice would you give these children in facing and dealing with said challenge?

Many military and Veteran-connected children have grown up on or around military installations. Often times they are not exposed to diverse occupations and sectors because much of their life revolves around the military community. Because of this, it's often a bigger challenge for these children to identify what they want to do when they grow up. It is also atypical of most kids to know exactly what type of occupation they want to pursue when they get out of school.

CareerScope on the GI Bill website is a tool that military and Veteran-connected children can use to indicate interests and aptitudes and may help steer them in one particular direction or another. I would encourage children to utilize **CareerScope**

or seek out other tools to measure interest and aptitudes. They should also take advantage of networking opportunities such as career fairs, career websites, and social media to broaden their awareness of various occupations and fields.

Additionally, for those who have an idea of what they would like to pursue, I would encourage them to use their VA education benefits to take advantage of apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities. Apprenticeships and on-the-job training can not only help gauge one's aptitudes and interests for a particular field, but also provide a structured, proven path for obtaining valuable skills that serve as a foundation for a successful career.

6. What important skills and traits do you hope military and Veteran-connected children will gain that will make them college and career ready?

I would argue that military and Veteran-connected children already possess many skills and traits that make them college and career ready. By the very nature of what military and Veteran-connected children go through, such as moving from base to base and transitioning from one community to the next, they become highly adaptable and tend to possess a lot of the soft skills that schools and employers are looking for.

Military kids feel the same sense of mission and accomplishment as their parents, in knowing that they are going to school leveraging the benefits that their mom and dad have so proudly earned. This also gives them a sense of purpose to ensure that they use those benefits.

CURTIS COY

Curtis (Curt) L. Coy was appointed to be the first Deputy Under Secretary for Economic Opportunity in the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on May 9, 2011. In this role, Mr. Coy oversees all education benefits (GI Bill), Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment for wounded warriors and disabled Veterans, Loan Guaranty Service (VA home loans), and strategic initiatives to improve economic outcomes for Veterans and their families. These programs work collectively to assist Veterans in achieving personal and economic success.