Re: Sharing Military Enlistment Data with States

November 13, 2023

Lloyd J. Austin III, *Secretary of Defense*
1000 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1000

Kathleen H. Hicks, *Deputy Secretary of Defense*
1010 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-1010

Ashish S. Vazirani, *Acting Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness*
4000 Defense Pentagon, Washington, DC 20301-4000

Dear Armed Forces Leadership,

We the undersigned state chief education officers are writing to urge the Department of Defense (DoD) to work with us to create a standardized agreement and data sharing protocol that would allow states to access accurate, secure, and standardized data on military service.

As state leaders, we are dedicated to ensuring all students leave high school ready for success in college or careers, and we believe that serving our country is one viable pathway a student might choose to pursue. Unfortunately, the lack of standardized and timely data on military enlistment and persistence makes it almost impossible for states to consider military service as a successful post-high school outcome and to confirm if students were successfully prepared to serve.

Let us be clear, our priority is to ensure that all high school graduates in our states are ready for college and career success. When students decide to pursue a career in the military, we hope that — and would like to know if — they are succeeding in that career choice. Our efforts as a state education system are only improved when we know how our students are doing.

We are signing this letter to show our interest and willingness to work with the DoD to find a solution to this data challenge. We have included more details about our initial proposed solution in the attached addendum. The time is right to take the next step forward together in this work. Thank you in advance for your collaboration.

Sincerely,

Randall D. Watson, EdD
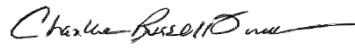Kansas Commissioner of Education

Eric Mackey
Alabama State Superintendent
of Education

Talauega Dr. Samasoni Asaeli
Director | Department of Education
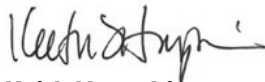American Samoa Government

Thomas C. Horne
Arizona Superintendent of
Public Instruction

Charlene Russell-Tucker
Connecticut Commissioner of Education

Richard Woods
Georgia State School Superintendent

Keith Hayashi
Hawaii Superintendent of Education

Debbie Critchfield
Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction

Tony Sanders
Illinois Superintendent of Education

Dr. Katie Jenner
Indiana Secretary of Education

McKenzie Snow
Director of the Iowa Department of
Education

Robin Fields Kinney
Interim Kentucky Commissioner
of Education

Cade Brumley
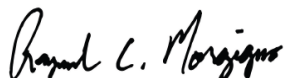Louisiana Superintendent of
Education

Donna Flores
Interim Commissioner of Education |
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana
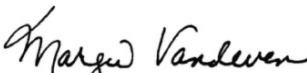Islands Public School System

Dr. Carey Wright
Interim Maryland State
Superintendent of Schools

Michael F. Rice, PH.D.
Michigan Superintendent of
Public Instruction

Dr. Raymond C. Morgigno
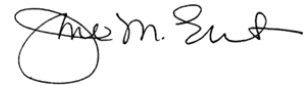Interim Mississippi State
Superintendent of Education

Margie Vandeven
Missouri Commissioner of
Education

Brian L. Maher, Ed.D.
Nebraska Commissioner of
Education

Frank Edelblut
New Hampshire Commissioner of
Education

Jhone Ebert
Nevada Superintendent of
Public Instruction

Catherine Truitt
North Carolina State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

Kirsten Baesler
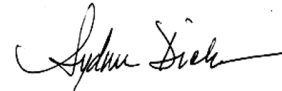North Dakota State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

Jessica Voltolini
Interim Director | Ohio Department
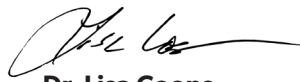of Education and Workforce

Ellen Weaver
South Carolina State
Superintendent of Education

Lizzette Reynolds
Tennessee Commissioner of Education

Sydnee Dickson
Utah Superintendent of
Public Instruction

Dr. Lisa Coons
Virginia Superintendent of
Public Instruction

Michele L. Blatt
West Virginia State Superintendent
of Schools

Chris Reykdal
Washington Superintendent of
Public Instruction

Megan Degenfelder
Wyoming Superintendent of
Public Instruction

ADDENDUM

Sharing Military Enlistment Data with States

The challenge

The three major U.S. military branches are collectively projected to fall 26,000 short of their enlistment goals this year. Even young Americans who would like to serve are often unfit for service due to academic or physical fitness gaps.

As state education leaders, we are working to ensure that all high school graduates are ready for college and career success, and we would like to have the option to include military service as part of the mix. However, we have been unable to obtain accurate information on which students are serving, in what capacity, and for how long. Without easily accessible, accurate information, states have had to rely on less reliable self-reported data or have backed away entirely from including military service in the way they evaluate school and student success.

We believe this is a solvable problem. States have worked to build statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDSs) over the last few decades. These robust, secure data systems maintain strong privacy protections while connecting student-level information with other sectors, including early childhood, postsecondary, and the workforce. With the Department of Defense's (DoD) collaboration, those systems could add military enlistment, persistence, and other military-related information through a secure data sharing protocol.

Our proposed solution

Specifically, we propose the development of a model data sharing agreement enabling any state to partner with DoD to securely add state-specific enlistment and service data into their respective longitudinal data systems. DoD has partnered with the Department of Labor on similar agreements, and we believe a similar partnership with states would be mutually beneficial.

One path to this solution could be a DoD-convened working group composed of military leaders, state education staff, legal experts, and other state and federal data experts responsible for defining what it means for a student to make a successful transition into the military, and for creating a standard process for states to access that data while ensuring data governance policies are developed and student data privacy laws (federal and state) are adhered to. This could include defining the specific outcomes that would apply across all branches of the military, as well as setting a timeframe for which to measure those outcomes.

Allowing state education agencies to connect their data with military enlistment information would open the door for states to consider military service as a successful post-high school outcome. This could lead to an increased number of the 3.7 million high school graduates each year considering the military as a viable career option.