The Challenges of Supporting Highly Mobile, Military-Connected Children in School Transitions

THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION

CPRL

Columbia University Center for Public Research and Leadership

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About CPRL

The Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) is a partnership of top US professional schools. It brings together graduate students in business, education, law, and policy from across the nation to study and provide high-quality consulting support for, and create a talent stream into, public- and social-sector organizations seeking transformational change in K-12 education.

About the Military Child Education Coalition® (MCEC)

Established in 1998, MCEC is a nonprofit organization that solely exits to help the military-connected child and youth thrive. The MCEC mission is to ensure inclusive educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separations, and transition.

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Forward

Military families know the drill. They know what it means to pack up and move to a different installation, a new house, a new life—often with very little notice. Military family websites and *YouTube* videos abound with moving checklists and how-tos for all types of families and relocations. For parents, however, it is the school transition for their children that can make a permanent change of station (PCS) especially daunting. Indeed, changing schools—educational disruption—is regularly identified by military families as the most difficult of part of moving.[1]

"We had a couple of months' notice, maybe three . . . We were in California for 2 years, then in Florida for 14 months, in Los Angeles for about 2 years, and now here. . . . You have the military coming in to help you move physically, but it still draining and tiring. Then you have to figure out schools and that's what's always hard and sometimes overwhelming." – Parent

At the request of the Military Child Education Coalition® (MCEC) in February 2017, the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University (CPRL) set out to understand the current state of school transitions and military-connected students (Grades K-12). In our report that is informed by a comprehensive literature review, we describe our insights from conducting more than 70 interviews of school personnel, district administrators, parents, students, and other stakeholders.

Summary Findings

Over the past 16 years, efforts to ease the impact of multiple school transitions have seen some success. The adoption of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children by all 50 states as well as the District of Columbia and the growing awareness of its terms have helped reduce some of the inconsistencies and uncertainties faced by school-aged children with parents who are serving in the active duty forces. In some school districts, administrators, counselors, and teachers are particularly attuned to creating processes that can help students transition more easily.

In key areas, significant challenges remain. Course placement and credit transfers continue to present problems that may undermine transitioning military students' opportunities for academic advancement and may add to the difficulties of struggling students. Many schools (and students) struggle to manage the social and emotional impacts of multiple school transitions, particularly when a parent's deployment increases the turbulence. The site-specific processes and culture around special education also complicate transitions for an already fragile population. Across the board, we need more information about these challenges and military students' educational experiences. We need data about how transitions affect these students and

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[1]*Huebner, Alidoosti, Brickel & Wade, 2010; Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudinaraset & Blum, 2010.*

Introduction

Military-connected students, predominately with parents serving active duty, move approximately six to nine times from kindergarten to their high school graduation. This rate is about three times more often than civilian children, and the moves are far more likely to involve longer distances, across state and even national boundaries.[2] There are innumerable anecdotes of children who have enrolled in five schools in six years, or moved among four high schools, or started their senior year in one school only to move in November to a school across the country.

As military children move around the country and even the world, they enter and leave schools that have different cultures, curricula, standards, course offerings, schedules, and graduation requirements. Education is in large part a state and local responsibility, with less than 10% of funding for education coming from the federal government. The structures, curriculum, standards, and priorities for public education remain a very local affair in the United States—and military-connected students experience that variety as well as its complexity at each move. The result for students is that these moves come with a unique set of challenges within and beyond the classroom.

THERE ARE 1.2 MILLION ACTIVE-DUTY, MILITARY CONNECTED CHILDREN.[3]	*APPROXIMATELY 200,000 SCHOOL-AGED, MILTARY CONNECTED CHILDREN MOVE EVERY YEAR.*	*OVER 80% OF MILITARY CONNECTED CHILDREN ARE IN LOCAL U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS.[4]*

In the past 16 years, military students and their families have lived on a continuous war footing—enduring repeated deployments as well as moves from one installation to another. At the same time, students and their families have needed to keep up with increasingly specific academic requirements and testing requirements, complicating the education landscape.

"My kids have done nine deployments. They're tired. I'm tired." – Parent

Indeed, the frequent transitions combined with deployments undoubtedly increase the stress on military-connected students and their families, with oftentimes negative impacts on students' academic experience and achievement.[5] But as all parents and teachers know, the consequences go beyond the academic, and challenges appear in behavioral problems, social-emotional struggles, and reduced social connections.[6] For each student, a school move is contextual, affected by personal developmental, family, situational, and emotional issues. The timing of a move is also a factor, and within the same family, each child will have a unique perspective and capacity to adapt.

For some children, the more frequent the transitions, the more turbulent the transitions become.

"I guess I'm kind of nervous, no matter how many times I do it. I'm always really nervous, because I don't know anybody. I'll probably eat lunch alone, and then, I'll hate that."
– High School Student

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[2]*Clever & Segal, Demographics of Military Families 28, Future of Children.*
[3]*Dept. of Defense Education Activity, Report to Congress 3 (2015) (650,000 school-aged in the US).*
[4]*Government Accountability Office, Education of Military Dependent Students at 11 (2011) (GAO Rep.).*
[5]*Engel, Gallagher & Lyle, 2006; Park, 2011; Phelps, 2010; GAO Rep. 2011.*
[6]*Chandra, Lara-Cinsomo, Jaycox 2009; Perkins and Borden; GAO Rep. 2011.*

Given the frequency of the relocations and deployments experienced by military members and their families, we need to know more about these students' educational experiences as they move from state-to-state and school-to-school. It's not just that transitions can be hard—they can. But there are likely academic stressors, increasing the chances their educational needs as well as strengths will go unrecognized and the stress implications underappreciated as they move among schools. As students move from elementary grades to middle and high school, expectations, access to opportunity, and social pressures increase in complexity and urgency. According to Dr. Ann Masten, "We would also expect the developmental timing to play a significant role in the way military children and families confront and adapt to challenges, just as it does in the broader research on risk and resilience."[7]

Little data exist on these students and their educational experiences and outcomes—or even their transition pathways.[8] The primary purpose of this research, then, was to provide a description of the current environment of school transitions and military-connected children and to deepen the understanding of how these transitions affect the students and their families. We aimed to describe how school policies, practices, processes, programs, and systems currently affect the school transition experience of military-connected children, with a focus on those in Grades 6–12 in public school in the United States. We also sought an overview of the transition challenges identified by these students and their parents. While we discovered a range of promising practices and some persistent challenges, we also began to look at potential solutions.

CPRL's Research Methods

CPRL was tasked with discovering the "as is" environment of military-connected students and school transitions, with a focus on students in public school in Grades 6–12. Our project began in February 2017 with background research to familiarize the team with the general landscape of issues related to the school transition needs of military-connected children. We started with a review of MCEC's two foundation-setting reports: The Secondary Education Transition Study from 2001 (SETS) and the Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century from 2011 (EMC-21).

CPRL's team then reviewed more than 40 peer-reviewed articles and books using three research catalogs—ERIC, CLIO, and Google Scholar. In addition, we reviewed publications and general entries from websites associated with installations, nonprofits, and community groups catering to military families. Our research was divided into three streams—transition literature, literature on military-connected children, and school administration literature. We produced a comprehensive literature review focusing on publications from the last decade, 2008-2017.

In parallel research activities, CPRL conducted background research on a range of military installations affiliated with the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines. We identified 18 school districts around seven key installations throughout the continental United States for outreach.

We conducted more than 70 interviews with a range of participants: superintendents and other district staff; teachers, counselors, principals, and other school-based staff; parents and

[7]Masten, A., "What We Can Learn from Military Families and Children," Future of Children (2013).
[8]Clever & Segal, Demographics of Military Families 28, Future of Children.

students; transition experts and academics; staff and commissioners from the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3); and other stakeholders with experience involving military-connected children and education. We also conducted a two-day site visit to a large school district that serves a major military installation. There we observed some of the practices and processes relating to military students and conducted focus group interviews at middle schools and high schools that serve military-connected children. Most of the interviews and focus groups were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol developed using the findings of the literature review and other desktop research.

We reviewed the interview notes and transcripts and coded the information into categories derived from our desktop research and identified broad recurring themes and challenges.

Our research has important caveats: Our scope was limited to students in Grades 6-12 and the local public schools that serve them. We did not cover schools operated by the Department of Defense (DoDEA schools) either in the United States or internationally. Finally, our access to active-duty military personnel, current school liaisons, and other military civilian employees was limited by Department of Defense practice and policy. The long lead time resulted from requirements to secure permission to survey DoD personnel or their family members.

Our Report

— BACKGROUND ENVIRONMENT —

An understanding of the current environment of school transitions for military-connected children requires an understanding of how we got here.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a fundamental shift in the awareness of the education-related needs of military-connected students as well as changes in the environments in which they live and go to school. In the late 1990s, the educational experience of many military families was marked by tremendous uncertainty and confusion—and a lack of predictability on almost all fronts—particularly as these families dealt with the repeated school transitions required of their children.[9] The publication of MCEC's Secondary Education Transition Study in 2001 (SETS) and its accompanying Memorandum of Agreement among numerous installations and school districts signified a new culture of awareness and intervention among the institutions that are involved in the educational lives of military-connected children. Indeed, the publication came in tandem with a commitment from the US Army to work on school-installation partnerships by creating the position of school liaison officer or "SLO." Over the course of the next six years, the other branches of the service began similar programs to better connect military families and local public schools.[10] These changes and others were featured in MCEC's follow-up study in 2009, the Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century (EMC-21). This change in culture has also inspired other studies of military mobility.[11] For instance, in two separate studies of public school districts in 2012 (Building Capacity and Welcoming Practices), a team of researchers, including University of Southern California professor Ron Avi Astor, unveiled

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[9]*Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS), Executive Summary (2001)*
[10]*DoDEA Report to Congress (2015) 21-22.*
[11]*The 2013 volume of The Future of Children, Military Families and Children (2013),*
addresses military-related mobility issues and families from multiple academic perspectives.

new findings and initiatives concerning military-connected children in public schools, with an emphasis on transition, including four guides for school administrators, parents, teachers, and military personnel.[12]

Since 2000, the landscape of public education in the United States also changed. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind, the nation's schools moved toward a focus on testing and accountability, with extensive differentiation at the state level. The new requirements of End-Of-Course (EOC) exams and more specific credit requirements added to the complexity for the graduation of students who move frequently.

— WARS AND DEPLOYMENT —

Missing from this chronology is a key change in military life since 2001—the ongoing US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and our military's continuous war footing since the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center. When the SETS report came out, extended and repeated parental deployment was not necessarily a regular part of military family life. Whereas the specific impact of wartime deployments on the education of military-connected students has not been quantified and is beyond the scope of this study, the existence of the wars is a persistent element of upheaval and emotional turmoil in the lives of many of these students and, without doubt, affects their school experience (as well as the experience of the schools they attend).[13]

— THE INTERSTATE COMPACT —

No discussion of the current environment of school transitions and military families would be complete without an overview of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (MIC3 or the Compact). Most broadly, the development and 50-state adoption (plus the District of Columbia) of the Compact from 2006–2015 has brought increasing consistency and stability to the transition process. The Compact, still evolving in its implementation, has created nationwide standards with a goal of increasing uniformity or consistency on targeted transitions issues and in doing so, has added to the institutional awareness of transition issues faced by military-connected children with parents who are serving in active duty.[14]

"It gives permission to our school counselors . . . to be a little more comprehensive in matching credits and courses." – Director of Student Services

"The Compact lets the sending and receiving district talk about conflicts and try to do what's right. . .. There shouldn't be a penalty for the student." – Superintendent

The Compact, still relatively new in regards to the overall education landscape, is an agreement among all 50 states, plus DC, to provide consistency for military-connected students in Grades K–12 on key school transition issues. In 2006, following a growing awareness of the issues faced by students whose parents serve full-time in the military, an initiative launched for an interstate compact, as the result of a partnership between the Secretary of Defense and the Council on State Governments. From the inception, the Compact was a collaborative effort. The Military Child Education Coalition, the Department of Defense Education Activity, other nonprofits, such as the National Military Family Association, and other organizations worked together to design and develop the Compact. In 2008, the Compact was activated after 10 states adopted it;

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[12]*Astor, R.A., Jacobson, Benbenishty, The school administrator's guide for supporting students from military families, Teachers College Press (2012) (also, The teacher's guide for supporting students from military families and The pupil personnel guide for supporting students from military families).*
[13]*Lester & Flake (2013), Richardson et al. (2011), Mesecar & Soifer (2013).*
[14]*Chandra & London, Unlocking valuable data about military families and children at 193, Future of Children (2013).*

ENROLLMENT

- Accept hand-carried records and time limits for the transfer of records.
- Coordinate Kindergarten and first grade entrance age requirements between sending and receiving states.
- Allow 30 days for immunization proof.

PLACEMENT AND ATTENDANCE

- Initially honor course/gifted placements.
- Initially honor special education services plans.
- Allow flexibility relating to application deadlines for special programs.
- Allow flexibility on absences relating to deployment.

ELIGIBILITY FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- Allow waiver of deadlines for tryouts for sports teams and other activities.

GRADUATION

- Allow flexibility in application of testing requirements for graduation.
- Allow waiver of courses required for graduation if similar work has been completed.
- Allow student to receive diploma from sending school if necessary.

The Compact Commission's website is a strong resource: *MIC3.net*

In our *Insights and Findings* below, we touch on specific components of the compact. Here we outline our findings on the Compact as whole:

THE COMPACT HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE AT PROVIDING COUNSELORS AND REGISTRARS FLEXIBILITY WHEN THEY KNOW ABOUT IT AND UNDERSTAND IT.

- "Our counselors are very educated on the Compact. They know where the red flags are for a kid and where they are not—it is very helpful." – District Supervisor

CONSISTENT AND WIDESPREAD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC AWARENESS ARE CRITICAL.

- "The Compact is part of the landscape now, but that may be unique to districts near military installations." – Superintendent in small school district

KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMPACT IS BECOMING MORE WIDESPREAD AMONG FAMILIES BUT REMAINS INCONSISTENT.

- "More and more families know about the Compact but they don't always understand it." – Recently retired superintendent
- "Parents sometimes think the Compact is supposed to do their bidding and resolve every issue. . .. Often my conversations are: 'This isn't covered under the Compact.' Sometimes we can still give advice to help out." – State MIC3 Representative

THERE IS OCCASIONAL RELUCTANCE FROM SCHOOL STAFF TO USE THE COMPACT TO BE FLEXIBLE.

- "Not all schools will tell parents about the Compact, so they have to be knowledgeable and advocate for their child." – Military Student Transition Consultant TM

- "Some principals just ignored the Compact. They told me, 'I have 100 other things on my list.'" – Retired School Liaison Officer
- "In Alabama, the Interstate Compact does not have the force of law." – School District Staff
- "Sometimes our military-connected counselor has to really push and advocate and point things out under the Compact." – High School Principal

Undoubtedly, the trajectory has been one of increased awareness and improved processes for mobile military-connected students against a backdrop of more complex academic standards and repeated deployments.

Insights and Findings

— PERSISTENT CHALLENGES BRIGHTENED BY A GROWING PRACTICAL AWARENESS OF THOSE CHALLENGES AND AN INCREASING IMPLEMENTATION OF GOOD PRACTICES TO MEET THOSE CHALLENGES FROM A SCHOOL, DISTRICT, AND MILITARY APPROACH PORTEND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE. —

Our Insights and Findings are grounded primarily in our interviews as informed by the academic literature on military-connected students and school transitions, in addition to readings of the extensive number of websites and general interest reports and resources on military children and military life. Each section also includes quotations from our interviews, which were selected to give a richer sense of the current experience.

Guided by our research, we shaped our discussion of the key challenges into categories: Administrative, Social-Emotional, Academic, and Multi-Agent. Potentially helpful practices are woven into our discussion of the key challenges as evidence of the current state of transitions. We next look at Promising Solutions for addressing the persistent challenges. Finally, against that background, we outline our Concluding Insights, highlighting several themes that cross categories. In closing, we propose a set of tools that could be implemented now with the potential to help with transitions, especially in the secondary grades.

Areas of Challenge

Administrative: In all schools, transitioning military-connected students need administrative processes that work for them. They need student records that are accurate, clear, and delivered in a timely fashion; school leadership that is responsive to their needs; and course, program, and extracurricular placement procedures that are fair and transparent.[15] Beginning with the Army-commissioned SETS project (MCEC, 2000), it became clear that that administrative processes that were not built on a foundation of academic reciprocity between sending and receiving schools were one of the biggest bottlenecks in transitions for military-connected students. While this situation has improved somewhat, administrative issues—particularly

[15]*Garner et al., 2014.*

ENROLLMENT/WITHDRAWAL

Smooth and speedy enrollment is critical for a good transition to the new school. When the new school accepts informal records or can electronically access the old records, the student can be enrolled promptly and is less likely to experience delays. When those records include rich detail about the student, the school is able to integrate the student more quickly. On the other side, an organized withdrawal process can prepare students and families for their next step.

— KEY FINDINGS —

Enrollment Systems and Practices: The actual process of enrollment varies substantially by district and even by schools within a district. Some districts have moved toward posting enrollment forms online, and others even have full online registration. Many, however, require families to bring copies of all of the paperwork in person to the school during school hours only. Families report that the differing processes can create extra confusion for families as they deal with the stress of moving. It is particularly challenging in districts where it is hard to tell what school the student is supposed to attend.

- Cumbersome systems at some districts may make it especially confusing for parents new to the community to understand school zoning and attendance rules based on the family's anticipated residence. These systems also make it difficult for families who have flexibility or who need a specialized educational experience to determine where to live if they are trying to choose their residence based on the school.

- Some districts have developed district-wide registration processes which may ease registration problems for families who know where they are relocating but are unsure about school zones.

- Some schools or districts have implemented online registration to reduce potential delays in enrollment and to allow students to register prior to relocation.

- In compliance with state and/or local policies, school districts may require parents to show proof of residency before a student is allowed to enroll in a particular school. This requirement may trigger additional school transitions when a family moves into temporary housing while awaiting housing on base or for off-base housing to be ready. In these districts, the student must enroll in the school that serves the temporary address. Then, when the family moves into more permanent housing, the student might have to enroll in a new school. Some districts have more flexible policies, allowing students to enroll in the school where the family expects to live, which can reduce the extra transfers. Other districts allow families to stay in a school where they start, even if they move out of zone.

"With our most recent move, we came from a state that was not yet out of school, but the school system here had ended and was on summer break. I could not register my children for school here because they were not out of school [at the previous school]. By the time I got here, the offices were closed. [T]hey are athletes and drivers ed age, [but] we were unable to participate in summer sports or driver's ed, because they weren't enrolled. Also I couldn't meet with anyone to discuss curriculum plans. So I had to go to the district office. They had someone come to the school to do something temporary so they could enroll" – Parent

"You can do utilities and rent houses and change doctors once you show orders that you're coming to this area. If the school district would act with those orders, it would have been fabulous for us and for the NC school system. You say my kids will need this high-level math over the phone, but they are waiting for documentation. If they could just take it from the military orders, that would help streamline." – Parent

Hand-carried Records: When students can register, enroll in school, and be placed in courses based on hand carried records, the transition process is less likely to include delays that disrupt academic and even social transitions. Earlier studies had shown that military-connected students could face significant delays enrolling in school or being placed in classes because of the slow transfer of records.[16] Some reported delays can be as long as three weeks, where a student is not enrolled—or is enrolled in classes that are not close to matching the child's proper placement.

- The Military Interstate Compact makes clear that schools are supposed to accept the hand-carried records and rely on them for enrollment and placement at least until the official documents arrive.
- Most school officials with significant military populations now accept and provide hand-carried records. Others often will once they are aware of the Compact.
- Some schools still require the official student records from the sending school before they will enroll or place students. This situation appears to be more common in districts with few military students where school officials are often less aware of the provisions of the Compact.
- Some parents have found that districts are more likely to require the official documents before they will place a student in advanced or specialized classes. For all types of programs, the Compact provides that the receiving school should honor the placements indicated as proper by the unofficial records at least until the official records arrive or it is shown to be an inappropriate placement.
- Many military-connected parents know to request their child's school records before moving and know that the next school should accept those records. Most online PCS checklists include student transcripts and/or report cards as "Important Documents" that the family should have copies of and carry with them. This action is especially critical for students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), accommodations, or other special needs.
- School counselors and parents expressed a desire for digitized school records that could be portable without a parent having to consolidate paper copies—particularly when the child has attended multiple schools.
- Even when the school accepts hand-carried records, students sometimes still face delays as school counselors and registrars attempt to interpret transcripts and then match classes and services from the previous school to what they offer.
- Some schools will rely on verbal descriptions of student records/transcripts/IEPs by staff members of the student's former school until the official documents arrive for students to start school immediately. There are instances, however, where schools refuse to enroll a student until all paperwork is ready, leading to days or even weeks of lost school time. These delays can have a significant impact on special needs students who may need specialized services to function in the classroom.

"Usually when [your child has] a 504 or IEP, as a parent you get a copy. It helps when you go to the next district—there is a gap between when you and then your records get there. It helps to have that copy with you. That way it helps place them." – Military Student Transition Consultant TM

"In the past, you hand carry [records], they aren't considered official. But I make sure I always hand carry and I get everything I can get, so we at least have something temporary before the official documents get there." – Parent

[16]*Kitmitto, et al. (2011); SETS (2001).*

Identifying military-connected students at enrollment: Schools need to be able to identify military-connected students upon enrollment and then to communicate that information to counselors and teachers, who can be prepared to provide appropriate support as the child enters the new school. Until recently, very few schools had any process for identifying military students and making sure teachers and personnel knew the student. This may begin to change as a result of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), which includes a required, report-only subgroup to increase awareness and understanding of student progress through the collection and use of a Military Student Identifier (MSI). The MSI calls on districts to use a flag or notation in school data systems to identify students with active-duty military parents for the statutory purpose of disaggregating military-connected students for reporting purposes so that schools and officials can understand over time how military-connected students are performing. The requirement also provides an opportunity for districts to identify who is military in order to provide academic and social-emotional supports. In advance of ESSA, 20 states—including Texas, Virginia, and North Carolina—incorporated the MSI in pupil enrollment and management systems. Full implementation began with the 2017–2018 school year. This change is a long-term effort that has value beyond data collection. It is only through the thoughtful use of information that educators can better attune and personalize response. This change will not happen quickly. The MSI initiative requires vigilance and commitment as education systems adjust to the extensive and complex array of ESSA requirements. For various reasons, many states are not ready for full compliance. Even in the states that are early adopters of the MSI requirement, our research indicated that procedures are uneven.

The Military Student Identifier initiative was seen as a way to have more quantitative data about military-connected students' school success, but implementation has been slow with reports of state- level education officials not knowing about the measure.

- Implementation of the Military Student Identifier might help schools provide both academic and non-academic services much more quickly to transitioning students.
- Consistent identification of military-connected students remains a challenge. Even when schools include a method for identifying military-connected students at enrollment, schools often lack a practice of ensuring that parents complete that part of the enrollment or that the information is entered into the school's data system.
- Some schools already identify military-connected students during enrollment through formal paperwork (such as the MSI) or informal conversation, but practices remain inconsistent.
- Though the consistent MSI programing protocols have been adopted nationally through the Common Education Data Systems (CEDS), the MSI is only a subgroup field within each state's pupil management system. Each state has a system for privacy-protected individual student de-identified numbers. Therefore, there are no mechanisms for any student number (military or otherwise) to transcend state lines.
- Privacy concerns from both families and schools sometimes complicate the tracking of military-connected students in data systems. Under the ESSA amendments, data on military-connected students (and other subgroups) are not to be disaggregated if the number of students in the category is small enough to risk identification.[17]
- Some individual schools already have a practice of communicating to teachers that a student is in a military-connected family. In other schools, the information is available if the teacher goes to look for it. Communicating this information is seen as critical to an effective academic and social-emotional transition.

[17]*ESSA Accountability Plans (https://ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essaaccountstplans1129.pdf).*

"Our counselors really did a lot of work to transition [military students] in. The biggest part is figuring out who they are. The registrar finds that out during the initial registration. It is part of the enrollment packet. But now they are flagging the students in our database. Now it pulls up with a purple star if they are military connected. . .. The star will also appear if a student has previously been in the [our] district." – Principal

"We often don't know that they're military unless we specifically ask, 'What brings you here?' But that can be the registrar's piece." – School Counselor

"We have a box to check on the registration form, and if they check it, I'm supposed to be notified so I can reach out to the military kids. There are a lot of times I haven't been notified so I've started picking up the forms myself. A lot of times, too, the parents don't say they're military—and I find out later." – Military counselor

Withdrawal: Due to a variety of factors, the withdrawal process for students who are preparing to move to a different school is rarely formalized. Indeed, school counselors report that they often do not know that a student has moved until he or she stops coming to school or they receive transcript requests from the new school.

- Few schools have formal processes to support and prepare students for withdrawal, possibly because schools often receive no formal notification. Schools often rely on parents or the students themselves to inform the school that they are leaving the school.
- Some districts are beginning to focus resources on supporting students who are leaving by connecting them with military and school officials at their next location. A few districts are even taking an extra step with transient students by proactively supporting their curriculum planning based on likely moves.
- Counseling and military services can help students connect with their new school to plan course selection and learn about extracurricular opportunities before they move. This process can become more urgent if there is a short lead time for the move, complications when the military member is a single parent or as a result of a family crisis. Challenges can also be related to spotty communication between the schools and local military leadership.
- School-move checklists found online often focus on finding and enrolling the student at the new location and often under-emphasize (or fail to mention) needed academic and social-emotional preparations. Consistent attention paid to the exiting student will help assure that the withdrawal processes are more thorough and go beyond simply getting copies of important papers to help set conditions for smoother transfer.

"At some point we started to realize that students who are leaving also need a lot of support. We hadn't worried about a warm hand off as much. We were focusing on getting kids settled here, but we've brought a lot of attention recently on how to get them ready to leave. We try to get them to let us know as soon as they know they'll be leaving so that we can help get them ready and the transition to the new school isn't hard." – Counselor

Correct course placement and successful credit transfers allow students to transition academically to their new school and can help ensure that seniors graduate on time. The flexibility afforded by the MIC3 encourages schools to do what they can to ensure that the burden of correct academic placement and making up credits does not fall to the students. But students, families, and school staff continue to find placement and credit transfers extremely complicated and, even, disheartening—with students repeating courses, losing credits, losing class rank, and struggling to keep up in other classes. This situation remains one of the most challenging areas in student transitions.

— KEY FINDINGS —

Course Placement: During the process of enrollment, students need to be placed into a grade, schedule, and courses that best match their academic ability and considers their grade level and courses at their previous school. This process can be complicated as counselors and registrars try to understand the academic history of a student who has been through a different curriculum—or several—and must match it with the requirements and resources of the school.

- Counselors and registrars generally handle initial course placement and transcript interpretation during enrollments. Teachers are not generally involved in this process but sometimes advocate for changes after initial placement.
- Placement challenges can be exacerbated under certain circumstances including: the sending district's curriculum/syllabi differs greatly from the receiving district (e.g., math and history curricula vary widely from state to state); many report challenges when the sending and receiving school are not both in Common Core states.
- The variety in school scheduling systems adds to the complexity of school transitions. If a student moves during the academic year and the sending school's or district's schedule does not line up cleanly with the receiving school (e.g., block vs. period scheduling, semester vs. yearlong courses, varying school calendars), the transition can be rocky. When student transfers from a traditional system (e.g., six or seven period day) to block scheduling or yearlong to semester courses, especially without finalizing credit requirements with the sending school (e.g., taking finals before a move) there is a risk to receiving course credit. This risk can have academic, career pathway, and ultimately graduation implications.
- Placement problems can be resolved more easily when there is communication between the sending school and the receiving school about the curriculum and the student. An engaged and informed parent is essential for effective communication.
- The Compact requires schools to be flexible in granting credits for comparable courses, but different course names or rigid requirements continue to complicate the enrollment process at some schools. For instance, we heard of seniors being required to take a 9th grade earth science course even though they had already passed an environmental science class with similar content. The Compact does not dictate how a credit is to be given, for example, and the receiving school may determine to award elective credit only.
- Counselors also reported that having state or district guidelines on how to match up courses from different states can be helpful in making accurate placements and credit awards. Advanced Placement (AP) courses, because there are national standards, are an example of courses-taking patterns that are more likely to transfer easily.

- Some states will not recognize classes taken in middle school as high school credits, forcing some juniors and seniors to retake classes they had taken in 8th grade.
- When a school does not provide a course in which a student was previously enrolled, the student sometimes has an option to complete the course online. This situation is common with language programs but may also occur with upper level classes. Credit by exam is sometimes an option.
- Magnet programs and other specialized programs, like the International Baccalaureate, often have enrollment limits that have been met or application deadlines that have passed prior to the family moving to the location. Schools and districts vary substantially in how they handle these constraints. Some will set aside seats, and the Compact encourages districts to waive application deadlines.

"There is so much variation form state to state. We really try to do our best to accommodate them and to make sure that the kids are not being penalized for PCSing in the middle the year." – School Counselor

"From the angle I look at it, the alignment of curriculum is the hardest part. [Our state] is very established in requirements they have at different grade levels. And they are unique in what they require." – District staff

"They didn't count my AP World credit, they put me in Pre-AP. I can show you my AP exam, I passed it."
– High School Student

"I had to redo an entire language credit. I had taken AP Chinese in Georgia. In [my new school], they wouldn't honor that. So I have to take a language this year and next year." – High School Student

"Grade placement is done in conjunction with the counselors. They look at prior classes—they might be taking a California history class, and then they come to Virginia and it's different. The biggest thing is with mathematics, and making sure we put them in a comparable class. Now that we have the Interstate Compact, the counselors are pretty good that if they are already earning high school credits. In high school it is a whole different process. Sometimes our military connected counselor has to really push and advocate and point out things in the Compact to make sure their classes are transferable."
– Principal

"If a family knows they are getting orders, we encourage them to reach out to SLO's or the military counselor, so we can make sure they are in classes that will transfer easier to other states and not take a wasted class."
– District Staff Person

Graduation and Credit Transfers: Graduation requirements that vary from state to state and lost credits due to scheduling inconsistencies can result in frustration for students and parents. Whereas the MIC3 helps ensure that students graduate from high school on time, the burden can fall on the students to repeat courses, take classes online, or to go to summer school.
- The Compact is often credited with improving district flexibility in allowing recently transferred students to graduate on time—or if it is too late and too complicated, allowing them to graduate from their previous school.
- The military services have instituted "senior stabilization" or senior deferment programs, which are designed to allow military families to postpone or be more flexible with PCS orders if they have a student in or near the senior year of high school. We were not able to assess the impact or effectiveness of these programs, and we met several students who had changed schools during or just before their senior year.
- Students and parents report frustrations with repeating classes already taken in order to graduate—or losing credits needed to graduate.

- Improvements in online learning opportunities and other technological advances have made it easier for students to earn the credits they need to graduate or to continue on an academic pathway.
- Honors classifications, class rank, grading, and systems of weighting GPAs do not always transfer because processes and offerings vary widely among schools. Some parents expressed concern that this situation can put students at a disadvantage in the college application process.

"Different state requirements make it very hard for our high schooler. A student comes in and says, 'I'm a senior,' but our counselor looks at the transcript and says, 'Here, you're actually a junior.' That's very deflating for that person and the family. So we try to see what we can do." – District Administrator.

"They looked at my old classes. They saw that I took PE a certain amount of times, and I got credit. They saw that I took two years of Spanish. They saw that I took US History instead of American History. I had to retake that. At [the previous school], I took civics in the 8th grade. Here, I have to take civics again in high school to get that credit. It's going through civics again." – High School Student

"[Counselors] are the gatekeeper for the diploma, and they want the kids to graduate, but they want them to graduate having checked the right boxes. They want to follow the rules. I just have to say "compact" or "military" and that gives them permission to be a little more comprehensive in matching credits and courses. It's nothing written." – District Staff

"I had to redo an entire language credit. I had taken AP Chinese in [my middle school in a different state]. And they gave me a full language credit because it was a high school class. In [the high school in a different state], they wouldn't honor that. So I have to take a language this year and next year." – High School Student

Military Interstate Compact: Schools' understanding and implementation of the Military Interstate Compact's guidance on course placement and credit transfers have been inconsistent. In districts and schools where staff is aware of the Compact, it has allowed creativity and flexibility in accepting credits and creating schedules. But there are still steps to take to ensure that all military-connected students, especially those with parents who are serving active duty, are benefiting from the Compact.

- Our research uncovered instances where students had to repeat courses they had already taken because of sequencing differences or name differences. There were other instances where students weren't given credit for a language class because of sequencing requirements combined with curriculum offerings at the new district. For instance, a student who took Chinese I at his previous school but had to take Spanish at the new school, only had one language credit because the of sequencing requirements.
- Where counselors and registrars find flexible and creative solutions, additional burdens may fall on the student. They may need to make up credits on their own time either virtually or outside of school hours. Sometimes students are placed in courses out of sequence with their grade or age level (i.e., a senior taking civics or health with 9th graders).
- Parents, students, and staff report feeling they often need to advocate and apply pressure in order to get students placed appropriately and fairly. When advocates know of and understand the Military Interstate Compact, they are better equipped to have these conversations.

"I don't think people understand the Compact and what it can do for them. Why is my child taking Georgia History when they just took Washington History? The parent doesn't have the knowledge that the Compact can help them, and often the school doesn't know about it. Particularly if you're not close to an installation where the school probably is knowledgeable." – Parent

EXTRACURRICULAR ELIGIBILITY

Extracurricular activities promote connection to the new school community and provide an outlet for students to express themselves and a place to meet other students with similar interests. Many studies indicate that participating in extracurricular activities is critical to an adolescent's sense of well-being and belonging. This experience can be particularly important for highly mobile students, who particularly need the consistency and connection that can be provided by sports or other extracurricular or co-curricular activities.[18] Rules and requirements for joining clubs and sports teams vary by state, district, school, and even coach/facilitator. The rules and requirements for sports teams are often set by state and/or regional athletic associations that are beyond the control of the school. Some honor societies allow their branches to impose local requirements that can bar new students. This complicated mosaic and the lack of clarity around the rules for extracurricular activities can provide additional stress for transitioning military-connected students, especially during mid-year transitions.

— KEY FINDINGS —

Smoother transition: Extracurricular activities provide new students with an opportunity to meet students who share similar interests and to maintain a key part of their identity across transition. Access to these activities can be critical for smoothing the transition of students to a new school setting and is particularly salient for those who arrive mid-year or in the latter years of high school.

- Students report joining sports teams or clubs as a way to meet people who share common interests and to help them make friends at their new schools. Many reported that it was the best way to start feeling at home. Students want to fit in.

- Parents reported that consistent participation in a sport or other activity their children could join at almost any school or community was critically important to their ability to connect quickly with the new community.

- MCEC school-based programs such as Student2Student® (S2S), Junior Student2Student® (JS2S), and other "welcome ambassador clubs" are ways for incoming students to meet classmates and other military-connected students through school tours, lunch buddy systems, and informal meetings (like cookie decorating or pizza parties). These types of activities can help jump-start extracurricular connections.

- Schools sometimes change rules when they realize that a firm deadline is closing out too many youth. At least one school revised its cheerleader try-out process.

"If they come in the middle of the year, we try to get them involved in something—clubs, you name it we have it. Even if they don't try out for a sports team, they can be part of some kind of group or organization. The issue we have is if they are cheerleading. If they transfer and didn't go through the try-out process—our cheerleaders try out in the summer—there isn't much we can do. That is one of the complications we might encounter." – Principal

"When I first came here I came here as a junior, I had a really hard first day at school. But they put me in S2S right away. That really helped, but I didn't really begin to feel at home until this year. I've been in S2S the whole time I've been here, and it's made me feel more connected." – High School Senior

"Because my last school was really small, I could try everything. So I was the cheer captain at my last school, I did softball, and gymnastics. But here, I don't really do anything." – Student

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[18]*Sherman & Glenn, 2011; Mmari et al., 2010; Bradshaw et al., 2010.*

Military Interstate Compact: The Military Interstate Compact's rule regarding extracurricular eligibility states that state and local level educational agencies should facilitate transitioning military-connected children's equal opportunities to join clubs and sports teams, regardless of deadlines.

- Implementation of the Compact on eligibility deadlines and other extracurricular prerequisites has been uneven. Whereas counselors and principals are often familiar with the Compact for academic and enrollment purposes, they are often less knowledgeable about its application to extracurricular activities. Coaches and fine arts directors may be less familiar with the Compact.

- Athletic associations or interscholastic associations govern most high school athletics, fine arts, and other extracurricular activities. The Compact does not have authority over these associations or governing bodies. There are usually association waivers and appellate processes available.

"We're not going to tell you 'You can't try out for the team.' If we have a military student who transferred in January, and we are in the middle of the basketball season, we will call the coach down and the coach will tell the student to come to the gym tomorrow at 4 p.m. for a special tryout. We make special concessions for military students for sports and clubs." – School Counselor

"We've started saving spots for highly mobile families for our academies, but that hasn't been happening for sports yet." – School Counselor

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Particularly because military-connected students are always on the move, they need intentional access to supportive peer relationships, extracurricular programs, and other services at each move to help alleviate potential stressors at home and in school.[19] Social support is consistently recognized as an important resource for helping adolescents cope with challenges such as parental deployment and relocation.[20] In the academic literature, according to teachers who work with military children, for some children the school may serve as a "sanctuary" that protects them against the stress and disruption they may experience at home during deployment. However, some studies argue that schools are not necessarily a positive resource for military-connected adolescents.[21] Even schools with substantial numbers of students from military families may find that their professional and staff are poorly equipped to provide support for students whose parents are deployed. Teachers, counselors, and administrators can clearly articulate the stresses faced by these children but may not be adequately prepared to meet the complex needs of those who experience serious difficulties as a result.[22] Although military-connected adolescents report less risk-taking behavior overall, mobility in military-connected children is seen as linked with increased mental health needs, particularly among adolescents.[23]

Military-connected students are also seen as resilient self-starters.[24] They may have had a unique exposure to different parts of the country and world, which can provide them with unique opportunities to appreciate and enjoy cultural diversity as well as unique "opportunities to mature." [25] In addition, some have found that because they grow up in such diverse environments, they are particularly "tolerant, resourceful, adaptable, responsible and welcoming of challenges."[26]

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[19]*Garner et al., 2014.*
[20]*Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013.*
[21]*Richardson et al., 2011.*
[22]*Richardson et al., 2011.*
[23]*Millegan, J., et al., 2014.*
[24]*Masten, A., 2013.*
[25]*Astor et al., 2012.*
[26]*Park, 2011.*
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Teachers, counselors, and administrators repeatedly reported that the social-emotional issues of newly transitioned military-connected children, particularly those with parents who had recently deployed, was not only one of the most important issues they dealt with but also one of the most complex. The student's emotional well-being and adjustment was affected by almost all aspects of the school experience and also profoundly affected by home life.[27]

The longer-term social-emotional impact of school transitions, particularly for adolescents, is not known.[28]

— KEY FINDINGS —

Identifying and Addressing: The social-emotional issues are much more difficult for staff to identify and address than academic issues. The need for explicit social-emotional support largely depends on teachers and counselors informally (and sometimes irregularly) learning this information from those students.

- Educators we spoke to reported that identifying and meeting these needs is more difficult than working with academic challenges.

- In one study, about one-third of military-connected students reported that their schools were not always adept at responding to their needs and that their teachers and peers did not understand what their life was like.[29]

- Students spoke of experiencing transition-related stress at home that made their school experience more complicated and added to the challenges of positive school connections.

- The basics of starting a new school such as learning the layout, finding the restrooms, and noticing informal school culture are stressors for almost all new students. Assimilating into new peer groups and navigating a new curriculum can become persistent stressors for the new student.

- Students expressed a need for informal spaces to speak with other military-connected students. It is up to professionals to help strike a balance between providing access to discrete resources while keeping in mind that students consistently express the need to fit in, yet be recognized and appreciated.

- The service clubs, like Student2Student®, which include military and civilian students, often ease some of the emotional stress of starting the new school by having a current student greet the new student, give a tour of the school, and invite the new student to lunch. Some students reported that these welcoming practices significantly helped ease their transition to the new school.

- Some schools administer a socio-emotional diagnostic during the enrollment period and follow up through counselors targeted accordingly. The professionals at these schools believed strongly that the screening was very helpful at helping them identify students who needed help, but they had not conducted studies of its effectiveness.

- In many districts, the school counselors are under-resourced and serve far more students than guidelines call for, which may limit their ability to be attentive to the range of issues presented by higher need students.

- Some schools have counselors who focus on military-connected students as part of their school counseling staff. Other schools may have independent counselors like a district's partnership with MCEC to provide a Military Student Transition ConsultantTM (MSTC). These academic counselors can pay specific attention to military-connected students and may be helpful in identifying social-emotional issues more quickly, but there are little data on this effectiveness. Students report that MSTCs can be helpful and that they liked talking with them or participating in those groups. Conversely, some students pointed out that they didn't want to give up time with their friends to meet with MSTCs and sometimes felt singled out.

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[27]*Kudler & Porter, 2013.*
[28]*Chandra & London, 2013*
[29]*Chandra et al, 2011; Aronson, K. et al., 2012.*

- Some schools have a Military Family Life Counselor (MFLC) on site. Funded by the Department of Defense, the MFLC program, which has existed about 10 years, is run by the military and independent of the schools. The MFLCs focus on behavioral health and well-being. Our reporting indicated that at some schools the MFLC was a helpful resource for struggling students and families, and at other sites little was known about the counselor's services. There are no data on the effectiveness of the MFLC program in secondary school.
- Studies have shown that military-connected students who have made multiple geographic moves are more likely to have mental health problems. Students aged 12 to 17 years are even more likely to struggle.[30]
- Students, teachers, and staff mentioned that providing and receiving support is easier for the student when the adult has a military background. Students reported feeling like counselors and teachers who did not have a military background or a military connection could not understand what the student was going through.

"I don't really feel comfortable talking to the counselor because a lot of times. . .they don't understand. . . I get super depressed whenever my dad's gone. . .because my dad has lost so many battle buddies and stuff. . . just know[ing] that. . . there's a really big chance that that could happen to my dad, it scares me." – Student

"It's kind of hard to adapt to what teachers expect. I got in trouble on the first day because I got up to sharpen a pencil – at my old school my teacher had no issue ... so I would just get up and sharpen my pencil. . . [The teacher here] started yelling at me. … It was embarrassing." – High school Student

"I mean some of them you can tell they've adapted really really well to moving, they just kind of fit right in, you know, they're social butterflies and then there's definitely some other kids who are very withdrawn and it's hard to get them to open up." – Teacher

"The unknown is really the biggest barrier. If you don't know background on a kid or where they are coming from, what experiences they have had. I train my kids to ask a lot of questions during the tour just to find a good place for them—a specific club or teacher who may have a connection." – Teacher

Frequency of Moves: Frequent moves can exacerbate existing social-emotional issues because of the changing support system that comes from moving to a new school and the difficulties with keeping in touch with friends in addition to the ordinary stresses of adolescence. Conversely, frequent moves may also lead to increased social competence and easier transition to post-secondary life.

- For some students there is a weariness/exhaustion around trying to connect repeatedly in new contexts (i.e., thinking "I'm just going to move again soon anyway.").
- Counselors reported that it can be harder to help the students who move frequently because it is hard for staff to know the student well enough to flag issues.
- Some students reported using social media to keep in touch with friends from past moves whereas others expressed a reluctance to maintain the connection because they knew it was unlikely they would see their friends again. In addition, over time they saw their friends continuing a connection and a life that no longer included them.
- In some studies, parents have reported that frequent moves can be a positive factor in their child's behavior, and in others, frequent mobility is seen as improving social competence.[31]
- For children who experience multiple transitions, it is important to uncover their personal characteristics, practical and academic skills, relocation histories, experiences of rootlessness and restlessness, personal relationships, developmental issues, and unresolved grief.[32]

[30] *Millegan, J., et al., 2014.*
[31] *Weber & Weber, 2005.*
[32] *Pollock et al., 2001.*

"I don't feel comfortable. . . I mean I have friends and everything that I get close to, but for me, because I move around so much I've never really had like a connection with somebody that was like. . . to where they were like my best, best friend because I move around so much." – High School Student

"It's still a little nerve-racking at practice, because since it's my third high school, this would be my third high school I have to play football, so this is my third time I have to constantly prove myself. They know I can play, I know what I'm doing. I don't know, it just gets tiring and I just get tired of doing it after a while." – High School Student

"I mean I have friends and everything that I get close to, but for me, because I move around so much I've never really had like a connection with somebody that was like my best, best friend because I move around so much. So it's like we're friends for a little bit and then I leave. And I usually don't keep in touch with people that I leave because it's most likely that I'm probably not going to be able to see that person again." – Middle School Student

"[Supporting student transitions] is about knowing kids' stories, knowing what makes them tick and connecting them to that at our campus." – Middle School Principal

"Sometimes when I meet someone I like, I think, why should I even try, I'm just going to move anyway." – High School Student

"I guess [I feel] kind of nervous, no matter how many times I [start at a new school], I'm always really nervous, because I don't know anybody. I'll probably eat lunch alone, and then I'll hate that." – High School Student

Deployments: The social-emotional struggles of transitioning teens are intensified by frequent and repeated deployments of and separations from family members.

Students need extra support during deployments of family members. School professionals may not be aware that a deployment is taking place, and they often do not know which students have a deployed family member.

- When school personnel know of the deployment, often they only provide support in an ad hoc manner —such as an impromptu conversation with a teacher.
- A school move coupled with a deployment amplifies family stress and logistical turbulence.

"My kids have done nine deployments. They're tired . . . I'm tired." – Parent

"My dad's deployed six times so it's different whenever he's gone. It's a lot more stressful around my house whenever my dad's gone. I mean my mom she's so focused on like my dad being gone and everything that she tends to get depressed so it's like. . . especially since I'm the oldest child so. . . they expect a lot from me."
– Middle School Student

Resiliency: The repeated transitions and their required adaptions may also create adaptability and independence among mobile military children.[33]

- Several counselors noted that the military-connected students were often more mature than the other students and seemed able to handle the little bumps in the school life.
- Parents, teachers, and counselors spoke of their belief that post-secondary transitions would be less complicated for military-connected children because of their experience dealing with transitions.
- Many students developed individual ways of handling the transitions. One girl, who described herself as shy, said she had learned to approach other students on her first day of school in the period just before lunch to say, "I'm going to eat lunch with you."

"I don't have a worry in the world for military kids in college. Those four years are going to be the longest they have been anywhere. They will be self-starters and good at making friends." – Parent

[33]*Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, and Lerner, 2013.*

"I've got a few places that feel like home. Georgia and Korea and Alabama feel like home whenever I go back there." – High School Student

"I'm going to try my best always and try to get all A's because that makes it so much easier when you have to move to a new school." – Middle School Student

"I like traveling to different places. I don't like staying put. Like I would like to move a year and a half. I don't like just staying here. I'm not used to it. It's just fun. You get to see different cultures and all that stuff." – High School Student

"It's different for every child. But for most of them, they come in and they can get right to it. They figure out who to ask if they need help and can go up to new kids and start talking." – School Counselor

School Culture: Coming from a military culture into what might be a civilian-majority setting or from an international culture to a domestic one—or simply from one very different school culture to another—students often desire environments and practices that validate and draw upon their unique life experiences as military-connected individuals. A school culture and pedagogy that is responsive to mobile children's cultural needs promotes "school connectedness and supports students at risk of alienation or failure."[34]

- There can be a limited awareness of military culture among educators and school support personnel, leading them to be poorly equipped to serve military-connected students.[35]

- Student2Student® programs are reported to have great benefits for military-connected students as they navigate the culture of their new school. Students who participate in well-run chapters described the programs as helping them adjust to the new school. and some found comfort in having a space or club with a military emphasis.

- Getting a tour of the school on that first day—and an invitation to lunch—can be very important to help students feel welcome at the new school. Several students said they had not received any welcome at their new school, and our interviews showed that there are often logistical challenges to providing a consistent host program because of complications around student availability.

- Students and counselors identified a welcoming culture and practices as very helpful in getting a student settled and connected. Some noted that the "welcome" did not need to be military-specific.

- Students, counselors, parents, and teachers reported that making sure a new student has someone to eat lunch with on the first day of school is critical to helping the student feel welcome and to getting a strong start.

- For some students, a celebration of the Month of the Military Child or relationships between the school and the installation can help military-connected students feel more welcome. Some high school students reported that the military celebrations did not contribute to their sense of welcome at the school, and some were explicit that they did not want to be singled out.

- One school district is considering awarding a "military-friendly" school designation to schools that are particularly welcoming and have good practices integrating military-connected students.

"On my first day here, the counselor—or whoever gave me my schedule—took me to my class and introduced me to my teacher. She showed me where I should sit. That was it." – High School Student

"My freshman year I moved to three different high schools. I'm used to the whole get up and move. It's temporary, you make your friends but then you have to go. S2S makes the transition easier. I wish more schools did that. First the tour guides, although they don't have to, they offer to sit with you at lunch, so you don't have to end up sitting in the bathroom alone. Literally there are people who sit in the bathroom alone. But with S2S, you can sit with them, you meet their friends, so you feel like you have someone you know. Kind of like a cousin—they are like that helping hand." – High School Student

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[34]*Garner et al., 2014*
[35]*Mesecar & Soifer, 2017*

> *"My school in Hawaii was public and on a military post. Eighty percent of teachers were TFA [Teach for America] all coming from big cities, and while they were brilliant people, they had no experience with military culture. The teachers would get frustrated or annoyed that a student was disrupting the curriculum or had already read the book at their prior school." – Teacher*

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES

On the academic front, highly mobile, military-connected students—like all other students—need to have access to a curriculum with high academic standards and need to be provided with resources that enable them to reach those standards. This need becomes even more critical because transitioning in and out of various standards and curricular regimes puts students at risk of having gaps in their learning if courses and course content are organized differently and certain lessons or modules fall through the cracks.[36] Students also face losses of academic opportunity and chances for advancement when they move from school to school and may miss the opportunities to continue a specific type of study or lose access to programs.

- Overall, there are little data on the impact of school transitions on the academic achievement of military-connected students.[37] But a 2016 study of test scores among military and non-military students in Texas found economically disadvantaged military-connected students outperformed their non-military students who also qualified as disadvantaged in most categories. The same study, however, also showed that military-connected students who were not economically disadvantaged did not perform as well as similar non-military students.[38] The study did not identify whether or how frequently the students had moved, but it is a step toward assessing military-connected students' academic performance in comparison with non-military children and can inform thinking about transitions.

— KEY FINDINGS —

Academic Gaps: Frequent transfers put students at risk for knowledge gaps and academic struggles as the curriculum and pace vary considerably from place to place. Quite often, students could be required to spend valuable instructional time in one school on programs that repeat content and do not enhance their skills and abilities. They may also struggle to meet the learning outcomes in their new school because they are expected to draw on material to which they have not been previously exposed.[39]

- Even when counselors or the registrar place a new student in the right class, variations in standards, curricula, instructional sequences, and course content can leave students repeating some content and missing out on other content.
- Teachers in schools with many military-connected students have noted the complexity of trying to identify gaps in the student's knowledge and skills so that they can participate fully in their classwork, even when the transition is at the beginning of the school year.
- When a student moves in the middle of the year, it is far more complicated to integrate them quickly into the coursework.
- A critical part of professional development for teachers in schools with highly mobile students is learning to adapt the course content for a newly arriving student.
- Schools should develop and provide explicit supports to remediate transition-related gaps.[40]
- Some students report feeling demoralized when they are "lost" in a class they know they should be able to follow—or by having to repeat content that they have already taken.

[36]*Garner et al., 2014.*

[37]*Chandra & London, 2013.*

[38]*Muller, Tong, and Irby (2016). Military Student Achievement Report, Texas A&M University, 2016. The study, published in 2016, used the military student identifier to compare the performance of military and non-military students on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) tests in grades 4, 8, and some high school.*

[39]*Mesecar & Soifer, 2017.*

[40]*Arnold, at al., 2011.*

- Other students said that frequent transitions taught them to try their best consistently because they had learned that a strong background made the transitions easier academically.
- Some students and parents reported that the students had learned to advocate for themselves and had learned to reach out to teachers or classmates for help.
- Although online services, such as Tutor.com, are available to military students for free, the students in our research reported that they had not found them particularly helpful. Some teachers reported that they were either unaware of the program or did not know of students who had used it consistently. Others, however, reported that this service could be helpful.
- Supports at the school—including peer supports through Student2Student® or other groups, or support from the school staff—were reportedly helpful when structured and available.

"It is really hard academically, the math class in my old school basically did everything backwards from this school. What they learned at the beginning of the year was what I was supposed to learn at the end of the year. It was very backwards." – High School Student

"For me the most annoying part about moving is the different curriculum. You are changing schools but also what you are learning and how the teacher is teaching. Generally, I ask the people around me a lot. Most of the time, teachers don't understand it. So I reach out to my peers for help. That is the most important part of S2S for me—it's the student perspective." – High School Student

"Actually, I'm going to be straight up honest. I came to this school, all my grades were sixties. It doesn't even matter, because when I came here, half the classes I took, they're not even going to be on my transcript now, because they don't matter." – High School Student

"You want them to feel like they belong academically but when everyone else has been reading the same book for three weeks, you can't ask them to read 300 pages in one night" – Teacher

"These kids come into your class and they seem like they're doing okay. Then they say something, and you realize they missed a whole section of what we've already done. It's really complicated to make that up and they can feel embarrassed." – High School Teacher

Loss of Academic Opportunity: Highly mobile students face a loss of academic opportunities and chances for advancement when they move from school to school and may miss the opportunities to continue a specific type of study or lose access to programs.

- There can be a dearth of high-quality educational options for military-connected families living off base.[41]This absence can impede high-achieving high school students who have been in an advanced curriculum. They may lose access to AP, gifted, or other special programs because the local school district may not have them.
- The Texas study found that the rate of participation in gifted and talent programs, for example, was much lower for military-connected students.[42]
- Some parents expressed concern that their children might not be able to meet requirements for some of the more challenging academic tracks because of their child's repeated academic transitions.
- Some students said they felt like they were steered into less challenging classes when they moved to a new school.
- Magnet programs and other specialized programs like the International Baccalaureate often have enrollment limits that have been met or application deadlines that have passed prior to the family moving to the location. Schools and districts vary substantially in how they handle these constraints. Some will set aside seats, and the Compact encourages districts to waive application deadlines.

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[41]*Mesecar and Soifer, 2017.*
[42]*Muller, Tong, & Irby, 2016.*

- When a school does not provide a course that a student was enrolled in, the student sometimes has an option to complete the course online. This option is common with language programs but may also occur with upper-level classes. Other options may be credit-by-exam and offerings through the local community college.
- Students can also lose access to early college programs because of early or complex academic requirements. Placing students who moved from an early college program to a system without one can also be difficult.
- Students who had been in gifted programs or advanced classes may be required to retest even though the Compact provides that students are initially supposed to be placed in comparable programs. It is important to note that not every state requires districts to offer gifted and talented education programs and, even then, eligibility criteria vary between districts.

"The more you move, the more things can get lost in the shuffle. We try to set her up for college. I am worried that some of the decisions we made without all of the information are going to end up hurting her when we apply to college." – Parent

"When we moved, [the new school] wouldn't accept the testing for gifted. But what about the Compact? We missed a semester of services." – Parent

"We try to save seats at our school, but if a new student comes in the middle of the year and can meet our qualifications, we might not be able to admit them because we don't have room. I mean, we really don't have room, like we can't squeeze another desk into the classroom." – Counselor at a specialized high school

"What has been frustrating is that every time we get our kids recognized as gifted, we have to move again. And then the next place says they can't do it right away." – Parent

Special Education: For students with special needs, school transitions continue to present significant challenges. They suffer gaps in services, undergo additional evaluations, and sometimes lose services because of different state or district rules.

- Federal law governs special education services, predominately through the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), but each state has flexibility on how to apply key parts of the act. Even school districts have flexibility. As result, families with special needs children find the system complex and frustrating as they move among schools.
- Although new schools are required to provide comparable services for a new student who enters with an IEP (Individual Education Program), school districts have significant discretion in determining what constitutes a comparable service and may not have the resources to provide some services. This change can be disruptive for the student and confusing for the parent.
- The new school district should implement the IEP from the sending school until the new school has an opportunity to evaluate the student. States have different rules about how much time they must decide whether to re-evaluate. If the student is transferring within a state, the school has the option of adopting the old IEP.
- Different states and districts have very different cultures around special education—both as permitted within the law and sometimes in disregard of the law. For very mobile families, this situation can be very frustrating and may have a substantial impact on the delivery of services to the child.
- During school transfers, the student may face a loss of services as the new school begins implementing services under the old IEP.
- Some districts that serve a substantial number of military families have had significant problems with providing appropriate services and have faced lawsuits.

- Administrators and counselors reported that effectively managing and implementing IEPs for highly mobile students was one of the most complicated aspects of school transitions.
- Parents of children with special needs, as well as the professional who support them, reported that student enrollment and/or services could be delayed until the IEP is received and appropriate services are in place.
- The Department of Defense has created an Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) that assists military families with members who have been identified as having special needs. The EFMP is a broad program that assists with medical care, counseling, therapeutic services, as well as children's education. Family and school reports on its effectiveness vary considerably. It is important to note that the EFMP program is separate and distinct from special education and 504 requirements, programs, and accommodations.

"The biggest barrier to effective transitions is the special education piece. . . The most panicked emails I get are from parents of children with IEPs." – District Administrator

"We always ask if child has an IEP or a 504 plan, but, I have to tell you, sometimes the parents won't tell us. We don't learn about that until we actually get the records from the other school." – School Counselor

"I always tell parents to bring the IEPs. I had one mother move to Virginia with six kids and five IEPS, but they didn't bring the IEPs, so the school wouldn't let them enroll. I had to call Korea to find the IEPs. You don't want a special needs kid in a wrong environment." – Former School Liaison Officer

"It's always a daunting amount of work for families that move every year to put together the paperwork that is required for switching schools. It is especially daunting for families with special needs." – Former School Liaison Officer

MULTI-AGENT

Some of the needs of highly mobile students cut across the different facets of the child's life (e.g., housing, which sometimes has an impact on school assignment and eligibility). Multi-agency support allows school, military, and community partnerships to build on available resources and coordinate efforts to ensure that problems are solved.[43] Here we focus on the installation-school partnership.

— KEY FINDINGS —

Installation-School Partnerships: Developing a strong relationship between installation staff, district and school personnel, and military-connected families is critical and helps ensure that the families receive the support and services they require. Our research suggested that the relationships between local school districts and the installations have developed unevenly over the years. Our finding is similar to the follow-up findings from EMC-21. The institutionalization of the SLOs (and representatives from Exceptional Family Member Programs) has created some very helpful relationships between schools and installations in ways that substantially ease the transition experience for families—and provide schools with a point of contact that can help personnel understand military culture and military family needs. However, in many instances, the SLOs were seen as unavailable and uninterested. Finally, in the SETS study in 2001, an effective partnership between schools and installations was seen as a missing link in an effort to align processes and standards among school districts.[44] Although improvement has likely occurred, this area could significantly help with improving the transition experience for military families.

Because of research restrictions imposed by the military, our contact with active duty SLOs was extremely limited. However, we interviewed other individuals who had worked as SLOs or supervised SLOs, in addition to numerous school personnel who had first-hand experience with the installations.

[43]*Garner et al., 2014.*
[44]*SETS, 2001.*

Strong relationships between the installation and school districts are often seen as critical to supporting military students and families in transition, but the willingness to support the relationships with resources or time varies greatly across school districts and installations.

- The effectiveness of the installation-school partnership varies and may be difficult to institutionalize because it appears to be personnel driven—and the people change.
- The interplay of temporary housing and school enrollment is a vexing issue that calls out for a stronger school-installation partnership. Often families get orders to move before housing is available (on or off the installation), and they move into temporary housing while awaiting on-base housing or another new home to be ready. In the meantime, their child must enroll in school. Some districts will only allow students to enroll in schools where they live at the time, which can force the student to change schools again when the family has permanent housing.
- Some districts have put an installation representative on the school board as an ex officio member.
- Other districts have established standing committees of district personnel, installation personnel, parents, and community leaders that meet regularly to address concerns relating to military-connected students.
- Although some district leaders said that communication with the installation was critical to serving military-connected students well, other leaders did not express an interest in developing the relationship.
- The primary contact with the military for most school personnel is the School Liaison Officer (SLO). The SLO, employed by the military installation, is meant to be a resource to military families as they navigate school systems and to the school systems that serve military children whose parents are at their installation.
- In some areas, the SLOs are responsible for several school districts, covering many schools and many miles.
- Some SLOs have developed district-specific checklists for families and have practices of specific outreach and presence within the schools.
- Some families reported that speaking with the SLO before they moved to a new installation was very helpful in navigating their school choices. Others found that the SLOs were not particularly knowledgeable.
- A significant proportion of school administrators, counselors, and teachers report limited interaction with or little knowledge of the SLO responsible for military-connected families at their school.
- The most specific dissatisfaction with the services provided by the SLO came from parents.

"If it's a military student, the military counselors look at those transcripts and make sure students are getting the best possible experience. The counselors notify the military counselor. We also have a very open relationship with the SLO, so if they have been contacted, they reach out directly to the school counselors. They are working on 5–10 new cases every month. We see the SLOs once a week. We are constantly in email contact. It is a true partnership with all of us inter-working." – District Staff Person

"I've been working with our SLO on a military moving checklist. They used to have as a mandatory requirement that [families with grade school-aged children] had to check with their SLO when they transferred. That [requirement] has been removed. Because it is not a requirement for families, they don't see it as a necessity. There was so much on there that it was an information overload. It needs to be added back. We have been working on that discussion." – District Military Support

"We have two separate working committees—a school council and another. The committee generally has focused on identified issues relating with the families and allowing for conversation and action plans." – District Staff Person

"We do have a wonderful SLO. I will also call the housing office at some time each year and I get to know people there. Their staff turns over a bit, but then we just get to know the new people. The folks at the youth center, I see on a daily basis." – Principal

"We started with a good garrison officer six or seven years ago. He assigned every unit a partner school. We share a lot of resources, and that was the direct outcome of the partnerships he promoted. The support came from the military." – Superintendent

"The biggest practice is making the school system aware of the SLO—go to the schools and the school board and introduce yourself. If it was a military parent, I was called in on that meeting to see what we could do for the military family, and also to be an honest broker and try to find a solution that works for the student and the family." – SLO

"We probably talk to the SLO two–three times a semester. For example, I called the SLO because there was a student whose mother is active duty, but the student had behavior problems unrelated to the military status. . .We have a good relationship with him." – School Counselor

"I do not communicate with the SLO. I would like to, but to be perfectly honest she is just not the best communicator. I have tried—she just doesn't answer the phone. Me and [another] MSTC —we go to the newcomer's briefings. The SLO is supposed to be there, but she isn't. She is nice but hasn't been helpful. We never see her." – MSTC

"The SLO works with four or five of the districts surrounding the installation." – School Counselor

"High SLO turnover has been a problem. Having a consistent SLO would help." – School Counselor

"There are families who don't even know that there are SLOs—sometimes the information is given to the service member, and the service member doesn't share with the spouse, or the spouse may not be proactive." – MSTC

"I find SLOs wholly dissatisfactory. What you need to be able to say is this is my child, tell me what school you would put this child in if it were up to you. . . She just wasn't helpful. She would say, 'You can find this out online,' but then it's like, well then what are you doing?" – Parent

"If the school liaison officers could be better it could be a wonderful thing. Usually, they don't know the schools and haven't formed a relationship with the schools or administrators. . . It would be the very best thing they could do—to actually go to the schools in their area and get to know them. We're already paying it for it." – Parent

Promising Solutions

Through our interviews and research, we found several promising practices, some of which are in the challenges section above, and we found potential solutions to critical systemic gaps. We grouped these into three categories: *DATA TOOLS, INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES, AND HIGHLY-SKILLED PERSONNEL.*

— DATA TOOLS —

An invaluable data resource in meeting the academic, socio-emotional, and administrative needs of a military-connected student is the student's records. These records include academic records (including special education and gifted categorizations), records of social services and extracurricular programming received by the student, and records of health needs and histories (e.g., immunizations and mental health issues). Ensuring that all these records accompany the students during their move (or get to the receiving schools before students arrive) and are interpreted and incorporated accurately and efficiently by the receiving school is central to meeting the needs of students and requires that both sending and receiving school are committed to keeping and using data.

Additionally, there are too many unknowns about military-connected children and their educational experiences.[45] To better serve these students, we need to know what has been effective and what has not. We need to know where they are succeeding and where they are struggling.

- The implementation of the Military Student Identifier will improve the ability to identify and track academic successes and challenges of military students. The challenge: consistent implementation and data collection.
- The development of internal mechanisms to provide information about and a fuller picture of the student to the right school personnel would enhance the ability of a new school to identify and meet the student's needs more quickly. The challenge: Cumbersome or missing technology complicates the sharing of information; privacy concerns may limit ability and willingness to share information.
- The creation of an in-depth student portfolio that provides information on the richness of the child's experiences, including much more than test scores, transcripts, IEPs, and discipline records would put the new school in a better position to know and begin serving the whole child. The challenge: Such detailed information could be cumbersome to maintain and could trigger privacy concerns.
- The development of communication protocols between schools or school districts to and from which students often transition could speed the integration and positive assimilation of a student into the new school. This step could allow more accurate course placement, including the targeting of academic supports or opportunities. The challenge: Introducing another requirement at enrollment may be seen as too burdensome or as difficult to maintain.
- The development of parent-centered, tech-enabled tools and rubrics that will allow parents to maintain information can guide decision-making and access to resources. The challenge: Maintaining accurate information from outside sources and inconsistent data sources can undermine usability. Educating parents on the tool may be cumbersome.

[45]*Chandra & London, 2013.*

With the right institutional culture and institutionalized support process, schools will be able to address administrative and academic needs as well as socio-emotional, cultural, and multi-agent needs.

- The identification and institutionalization of state-level education personnel charged with creating an ongoing, but flexible state infrastructure could develop locality-specific institutionalized processes to support military-connected students and transitions. The challenge: State departments of education may be reluctant to take on another mandate and program emphases change with political transitions.
- Continued implementation and public awareness of the provisions of the Interstate Compact could accelerate the standardization of key practices around school transitions and could lead to support for developing nationwide tools on credit/course transfer consistency. The challenge: Stakeholders may already be overcommitted, and resources may be stretched.
- Institutionalizing welcoming practices and specific counselors with expertise in serving highly mobile students could lead to greater acceptance and more stability for these programs, both of which are identified repeatedly as very helpful to the transition process. Internal programs may be more likely to take root in the school's culture and continue more consistently. The challenge: These programs may be identified as expendable when school budgets are tight. The option of grant funding may not create sustainable programs.
- Strengthening military-school partnerships is a core component of improving the school transition experience for students and parents. This action will allow schools to be even more responsive to individual student needs. The challenge: Both institutions have other key constituencies and have shifting personnel, which can complicate relationship development.

— *HIGHLY SKILLED PERSONNEL* —

The presence of skilled, supportive professionals in schools, districts, and communities is key to the goal of meeting student transition needs and could go a long way in dealing with the challenges of mobility and transitions.

- Professional development that is consistent and targeted to counselors and staff with student contact can have a substantial impact on the experience of military children transitioning into the schools. The challenge: Commitment to professional development requires consistent implementation, which can be difficult to sustain across personnel and management change.
- Maintaining practices that can be sustained, even with the dynamic of personnel changes, can help inform and prepare personnel over time. The challenge: Institutions may be reluctant to develop and test practices instead of relying on individuals in particular positions.
- Districts and schools with significant numbers of military-connected students should make clear on their websites and parent information the name and contact information of the POC for military children. The challenge: Maintaining that information may not be a priority for the school districts.

Concluding Insights

— THIS SECTION HIGHLIGHTS SEVERAL CROSSCUTTING THEMES AND INSIGHTS —

Significant improvements over the last decade have set the stage for continuing improvements and have led to much greater understanding of the needs of military-connected students in school transitions.

- At a national level, the increased understanding of mobility issues and efforts to standardize key processes around enrollment and graduation were brought about by persistent advocacy and the implementation of the Interstate Compact.
    - — Awareness and implementation of the Compact needs to be improved in districts with fewer military-connected students.

- At a school or district level, student host clubs like Student2Student® and military-focused counselors are strong factors in easing the stress of transitions.
    - — The student host clubs need a strong faculty member and the support of the school administration to ensure sustainability from year to year.
    - — The Student2Student® clubs and other similar organizations could increase their effectiveness if they expanded and were consistent in their outreach to clubs at other campuses.
    - — The military-focused counselors (whether on staff or grant supported) can provide an important point of contact for military families and can serve as an embedded expert for the school or district staff.

- Information about schools and good practices is more widely available, mostly on websites and other online resources.
    - — Parents have access to numerous checklists and parent groups and other websites that can provide up-to-date information about schools and changing educational rules. Some of the information is not accurate, however, and parents should be wary of relying on internet information without confirmation.
    - — School and installation websites have improved considerably and often have information specific to transitioning military families.

Core challenges in school transitions persist but are amenable to improvement with professional development, better processes, and tools to share information.

- Course placement and credit transfers continue to be a source of uncertainty for school personnel and students.
    - — Improving interventions can help students adjust to different course content.
    - — Developing tools that identify and share course content could help with credit transfers and course placement.
    - — Gathering data on the longer term academic effects of transition on post-secondary students could guide development of appropriate tools to address these issues.

- Social-emotional challenges remain complex and difficult to address.
    — Implementing emotional screening protocols for all students can be helpful.
    — Developing a richer student profile to share at transition could be effective in helping schools meet the social-emotional needs of children at transition rather than waiting for problems to appear.
- Special education presents particularly complex challenges for mobile families.
    — Creating more uniformity and clarity of standards can aid consistency of service delivery.

Some barriers to good practice cut across domains.

- Inconsistency of implementation and practice: The intensely local nature of public schools in the United States complicates efforts at uniformity or consistency.

- Lack of sustainability: Good programs often lack long-term funding and institutional support; this situation seems particularly true with external programs that are not built into the school budget.

- Lack of data and information: The absence of concrete data information on military-connected students, the use of in-depth student portfolios and absence of parent-centered research tools combined are a formidable obstacle.

- Personnel changes: The staff turnover inside the local education agencies and at the campus level impede consistency and institutionalized of practices, processes and procedures that support military-connected students.

Parent Factor: Schools change, installations change, but parents are the consistent factor in their child's life. Informed and proactive parents can go a long way toward easing the difficulties of transitions. Parents can make sure that they have engaged in the school transfer processes from exit to entry. Parents need to understand the transcript details and the planned high school graduation to post-secondary path. Parents can research schools and districts in advance of the family's move to determine if there are particularly good or bad fits and to determine if there are deadlines for programs or activities.

As one student put it when the school counselor refused to put him in an AP class he was qualified for: *"My mom came in and did a little persuading work."*

"When you first get your orders, you immediately look to see where it is and what the schools are. Along with internet research, you also consult all your military friends—you're looking at test scores online, student body, is my child going to find a place where he feels like himself? Is he going to be around people like him, do they have academics, sports, clubs that he wants? All of that kind of thing. Then you look at how far the drive is from post. It's important to know how far do I have to go to get my kids the kind of education we want them to have." – Parent

"The biggest barrier to an effective transition is not doing your research." – Parent

"I would say, know your kids and know what they need. School systems vary so much from place to place." – Parent

TOOLS

What can be done NOW

AT HOME

Parents

- Use education-specific checklists
- Contact SLO and EFMP prior to move.
- Visit school and meet with staff.
- Find activities and programs for your child.
- Learn credit requirements and understand your child's academic needs.
- Keep up-to-date portfolio with education records.

AT THE BASE

Military Personnel

- Ensure SLO contact information is clearly available on website.
- Include SLO and local school information on orders.
- Maintain accurate school information on installation websites.
- Institute regular meetings with school/district personnel.

AT SCHOOL

Teachers

- Find out if a new student is military.
- Develop class-specific welcome packet and practice.
- Start or support student host clubs.
- Attend PD on school transitions.
- Develop curriculum prepared for mid-unit transitions.
- Designate new student buddies.
- Honor military-connected students in April during Month of the Military Child.

Administrators

- Create user-friendly websites with clear contact information.
- Designate staff for military issues.
- Support student host clubs.
- Invite military participation at school meetings and events.
- Implement tool for identifying military-connected students at enrollment.

School Counselors

- Attend and give PD on the Compact and transitions.
- Apply flexiblity around course placement.
- Implement a social-emotional screening assessment tool for transitioning students and create a follow-up plan.
- Create a welcome video and/or binder.

Closing

"Because the research base is so thin, it's hard to reach strong conclusions about which programs and policies would best help military-connected children thrive…. One thing, however, is certain: Military children are children first, meaning that they must do many of the same things children in civilian families do."
(Easterbrooks, Ginsburg and Lerner, Future of Children, pg. 107)

Our research shows that military-connected students continue to face significant challenges related to school transitions, particularly when those transitions occur frequently. But there is much that is not known and begs for additional research, both to understand the extent of these challenges and to help design tools to better serve these students. Particularly, we need a deeper understanding of the academic consequences of multiple school transitions both for high-achieving students and those who struggle. Relatedly, we also need more data on the impact transitions have on post-secondary success. Finally, we need a better understanding of how to support students with special needs who are likely to see their challenges compounded with multiple school transitions.

In schools all around the country, dedicated professionals are working to make transitions easier for military students. We must make sure that these professionals have the best tools to support their work, and we must make sure that we learn from their experiences.

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