

Partnering with Families in the Military, National Guard and Reserves

Military, National Guard and Reserve families have unique needs and strengths. Children of these families move between schools on a regular basis, facing the loss of friends, adjusting to new cities and bases, and changing schools. It is important that children of military families are afforded the same opportunities for educational success as other children and are not penalized or delayed in achieving their educational goals by school policies and practices.

According to The Council of State Governments' Interstate Compact of Educational Opportunity for Military Children, the average military student faces transition challenges more than twice during high school, and most military children will have attended school in six to nine different school systems in their lives from kindergarten to 12th grade. Other families experience similar levels of mobility, or higher, because of changes in life circumstances. The same policies and practices that will benefit partnerships between schools and military families will often benefit students of other highly mobile families.

Sample Action Steps

- Create a welcoming environment and sense of community for all military students and families.
- Plan and implement effective strategies for integrating military students and families into new schools and communities quickly.
- Develop involvement activities that engage one parent at home and deployed parents.
- Meet requirements for parental involvement in the No Child Left Behind Act, Section 1118.
- Become familiar with the three phases of deployment (pre-deployment, deployment and reunion) and the unique issues of each phase for children and families.
- Create a streamlined system for admitting highly mobile students, reviewing records, and requesting needed information.
- Act as quickly as possible to assess a student's past course work and to place the student in similar courses to keep the student on track for graduation.
- Make allowances for kindergarten and first grade enrollment for students who were enrolled in kindergarten in a different school, but whose birth date does not meet the cut-off date for your district.
- Create a system and policies needed to include highly mobile students in extracurricular activities.
- Create a system and policies to assess the learning needs of exceptional children (special education and gifted) to allow continuity of programs and services for students.
- Conduct involvement activities that promote successful student and family transitions to new schools.
- Collaborate with military bases to use available resources to strengthen school programs.
- Give families and students opportunities to talk about their concerns and questions about family members and friends who are deployed.



- Pre-deployment
 - Teachers and administrators meet with families to talk about the length and location of the deployment.
 - Establish a plan for good communication.
- During deployment
 - Provide information on the school Web site about homework, school calendar and pictures.
 - Teachers and administrators can ask families and children for news about a deployed parent.
 - Watch for signs of change in children’s behavior and learning.
 - Use the deployment as a teaching opportunity about writing, geography, government, etc.
- Reunion
 - Provide opportunities for students to express how they feel about their parent’s return.
 - Invite parents to visit your school to talk about their tour of duty and their work.
 - Link families to counseling services as needed.

Resources

Military Child Education Coalition

This organization focuses on ensuring quality educational opportunities for all military children affected by mobility, family separation and transition. It provides a number of resources to support children and their families. Booklets available on their Web site include:

- *How to Prepare Our Children and Stay Involved in Their Education During Deployment* – geared to families
- *Supporting the Children and Families of the Guard and Reserves* – offers ideas about how communities can support the children and families of those serving in the National Guard or Reserves. This booklet introduces concerned citizens and educators to issues facing children and families of those serving in these critical segments of the military and to help communities create dynamic networks of support for these families.
- *Getting Your Ducklings in a Row* – gives parents basic information regarding age and vaccination requirements of school systems serving the majority of military children.

Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children – from the Council of State Governments <http://www.csg.org/knowledgecenter/docs/ncic/ICEOMC-ProjectandIssueSummary.pdf>

Reports and Resources

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Johns Hopkins Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships provides a number of resources for supporting children and families of those serving in the military.

Their Web site describes effective programs and best practices to improve school climate, family and community partnerships, students' "connectedness," transitions to new schools and the academic, social, emotional and health of students from military families. <http://www.jhsph.edu/mci>

The site also contains:

- A Best Practices Library with examples and ideas of effective programs and practices.
- *Building Resilient Kids* is a distance learning course developed by Dr. Michael Blum for the Military Child Initiative (MCI) at Johns Hopkins University. Among many topics, the course includes two modules on School, Family and Community Partnerships and on School-Community Partnerships, designed with Dr. Joyce Epstein and Dr. Mavis Sanders at the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS).
- *The Military Child Initiative* (MCI) provides technical assistance for districts and schools on partnership program development. MCI aims to improve educational environments for highly mobile and vulnerable young people, with a special focus on children and families in the military.

Source

The Council of State Governments' Interstate Compact of Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Retrieved January 14, 2008 from <http://www.csg.org/knowledgecenter/docs/ncic/ICEOMC-ProjectandIssueSummary.pdf>