

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Understanding Teaching and Learning with Military Students in Public School Contexts: Insights from the Perspectives of Teachers

Arnold, P. L., Garner, J. K., & Nunnery, J. A. (2014). Understanding teaching and learning with military students in public school contexts: Insights from the perspectives of teachers. *Children & Schools*, 36(1), e9-e17. doi:10.1093/cs/cdt044

SUMMARY: Educators from elementary schools near large military installations participated in focus groups and interviews and completed questionnaires regarding the knowledge, skills, and dispositions teachers perceive as being critical for supporting military students' academic and social development. Educators' awareness of military culture, targeted academic supports, and appropriate sociocultural supports were cited as the three salient categories recommended for culturally-relevant teaching and counseling of military students.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Basic knowledge of military conventions, structures, functions, events, and socio-occupational practices were identified as being integral to understanding and teaching military students.
- Teachers recognized the need for flexibility with academic expectations and requirements due to variations between school districts attended by highly mobile military students.
- Building personal connections with military students and fostering peer relationships between military and civilian children were strategies used by educators to support the specific social-emotional needs of military students.
- Educators may struggle to identify military students in their classroom as they present no outwardly visible attributes or characteristics that immediately indicate a difference in culture.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide professional development to educate school faculty and staff working with military families about military culture
- Work with school liaisons to facilitate communication and negotiation of expectations for military students
- Publicize targeted academic resources for military students to schools with military student populations to improve the academic transitions for students new to the school

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue efforts to support mobile military children as they transition between schools
- Recommend training for school personnel about the needs, experiences, and challenges faced by military youth
- Support the adoption of the Common Core State Standards to make school transitions for military youth more seamless

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



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METHODS

- Data for the current study are part of a larger study looking at the academic and socio-emotional needs of military students from eight schools near large military installations.
- Snowball sampling was utilized to identify schools and educators that served military youth.
- Educators participated in focus groups and completed questionnaires; individual interviews were conducted with principals and counselors.

PARTICIPANTS

- Seventy-four educators participated; 55 were teachers and 19 were counselors or principals.
- Students from military families comprised between 15% and 99% of the populations of the schools included, and all service branches were represented in the sample.
- No demographic data for participants were provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Participants were recruited using snowball sampling, which may result in a sample that may not accurately represent the larger population.
- Detailed information about the participants (demographics, years of teaching experience, etc.) were not provided and could influence results.
- Only K-5 schools were included in the study with no data drawn from schools with relatively few military students.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the specific academic and social supports found to be most effective for military students
- Expand this study to all ages of military children, as this study only included K-5 schools
- Supplement these findings by seeking perspectives of military children and parents themselves to evaluate how students' perspectives compare to those found in this investigation of educators and administrators

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