

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Military Parents' Perceptions of Public School Support for Their Children

Berkowitz, R., De Pedro, K. M. T., Couture, J., & Benbenishty, R. (2014). Military parents' perceptions of public school support for their children. *Children & Schools, 36*(1), e1-e8. doi:10.1093/cs/cdt024

SUMMARY: Survey data from parents from 8 school districts in the San Diego area were utilized to compare military-connected (MC) and nonmilitary parents perceptions of their children's school climate and needs in public schools. Compared to non-MC parents, MC parents reported more concerns with school climate and less encouragement of parental involvement by the schools. The primary problem identified by MC parents was a lack of knowledge on the schools part in terms of the military lifestyle and the unique needs of military children.

KEY FINDINGS:

- MC parents expressed a consistent, slightly less positive assessment of school climate than non-MC parents, and expressed a desire for increased educational resources and training specific to military culture and military families.
- MC parents expressed a high level of overall satisfaction with schools despite their lower reported levels of satisfaction with their connection to other families in the school.
- Parents in both groups identified physical fights between students and the use of drugs and alcohol as the greatest problems experienced at the school, though MC parents reported observing these problems to a lesser degree than non-MC parents.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Facilitate activities for MC families and other families in the school in an effort to help connect families
- Offer workshops for MC parents to learn about the school, staff, and faculty as a means of increasing parent knowledge and school involvement
- Provide education to military families regarding how to advocate for their child's needs within the school system

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration between MC schools and military-based organizations to improve support for MC students
- Recommend training educators about the special needs of MC students, particularly in districts with high populations of military families
- Promote the development of programs that provide military families with school liaisons to work on their behalf within schools

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METHODS

- Quantitative quasi-experimental data was obtained from the Core Model and Military Module of the California School Climate Survey for Parents administered online and in-person in both English and Spanish.
- The questions were grouped into six categories (background characteristics, school climate, parent involvement, school problems, need for service, and military parent satisfaction).
- This study sought to examine the differences in MC and non-MC parents views of school climate, parental involvement, school problems and need for services in schools.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 3,914 parents from 8 school districts in the San Diego area; 11% of participants (n = 448) were MC, and 75% of MC respondents were on Active Duty at the time of the survey.
- Length of childrens enrollment in current school was one two to years.
- No other demographic information (e.g., race, gender, ages) of infants or children were provided.

LIMITATIONS

- Only MC parents were invited to respond to school satisfaction questions and MC families made up a relatively small proportion of the overall sample, weakening generalizability.
- Measurement made it unclear whether MC parents perception of few school problems is due to an actual low incidence of problems, or to parents lack of knowledge due to their reported feelings of relative disconnect from the school.
- No information is provided about the representative nature of the sample, which limits the generalizability of results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Extended to other geographic areas and school districts with large concentrations of MC families
- Include school satisfaction questions for non-MC families to facilitate more robust comparisons of data
- Continue to examine why MC parents perceive their children's school as encouraging parental involvement less so than non-MC parents, as well as how schools might improve that perceived relationship

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