

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## District, School, and Community Stakeholder Perspectives on the Experiences of Military-Connected Students

De Pedro, K. T., Esqueda, M. C., Cederbaum, J. A., & Astor, R. A. (2014). District, school, and community stakeholder perspectives on the experiences of military-connected students. *Teachers College Record*, 116 (5), 1-32.

**SUMMARY:** An exploration of the schooling experiences of military-connected students and their strengths and challenges in civilian public schools was conducted. Research sought out the perspectives of district, school, and community stakeholders in order to better understand the critical perspectives of those charged with developing, administering, and sustaining system-wide initiatives and programs that promote systemic change at the school, community, and district levels. Overall, the study identified school-based strategies that promote emotional, psychological, and academic outcomes among military-connected students.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Stakeholders noted how military-connected students have unique cultural needs and challenges that necessitate school intervention.
- Some schools utilized self-initiated practices, such as developing cultural sensitivity towards students to address the unique needs of military-connected students.
- The stakeholders in the study felt that public schools have responded poorly to the issues and challenges of military-connected students.
- Stakeholders believed that public schools should be places of stability for military-connected students.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Foster student led groups within public schools that address the unique challenges military-connected youth may be facing
- Provide support networks for children and youth of Service members in their transition to school
- Develop online resources for parents and professionals working with military-connected students about the strengths and potential challenges for students in their public school experience

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Encourage collaboration among Department of Defense programs, public schools, and community-based organizations to support military families and their children
- Recommend education for those who work closely with military-connected students in public schools around the emotional, psychological, and academic challenges students may encounter
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that can support military families and their children through stressful transitions (e.g. deployment, change of schools, relocation)

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## METHODS

- Participants were purposively selected and included those who worked closely with military-connected students and public schools and those who brought different perspectives.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the fall of 2010.
- Data analysis consisted of four stages; (1) generation of an initial codebook, (2) reading in-depth each transcript, (3) discussion of the codes in relation to the transcripts, (4) independent coding of each transcript using the final codes.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Eight military-connected districts were included and varied in size in terms of the number of student enrollments (1,977 to 30,183) and percentage of military enrollment (2.0%\_ 27.3%).
- The sample included 31 participants: five district-level stakeholders, three principals, one school liaison officer, three licensed clinical social workers, 10 social work student interns completing their field placements, four education researchers, and five educators.
- Twenty-seven participants (87%) reported a direct family affiliation (i.e., had family member in the military, former military child, military spouse, or military Veteran) with at least one branch of the military (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard).

## LIMITATIONS

- The sample population was from one region of the United States which limits its generalizability.
- Students' perspectives were not included in this study; which limits data about the individual experience inside the school and classroom.
- Nonmilitary-connected public schools were not included in the sample; therefore, results cannot be extended to military-connected student experience within any public school.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the perspectives of teachers and students with regard to how military-connected students cope with military life stressors in the classroom
- Utilize different methods, such as mixed or quantitative that focus specifically on the classroom experience and the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students
- Evaluate practices such as military transition rooms and support groups in terms of improving the psychological, social, and emotional outcomes of military-connected students

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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