

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## School Personnel's Perceptions of Family-School Communication: A Qualitative Study

Farrell, A. F., & Collier, M. A. (2010). School personnel's perceptions of family-school communication: A qualitative study. *Improving Schools, 13*(1), 20-Apr. doi:10.1177/1365480209352547

**SUMMARY:** This qualitative study used an ecological framework to explore educator perceptions of family-school communication at two elementary schools serving U.S. Military families. Six themes emerged from individual interviews: 1) the importance of family-school communication, 2) the format of communication is based on individual teacher or family preference, 3) a supportive school climate builds family-school communication, 4) teacher experience and education effected their communication, 5) the school has the primary role in initiating communication, and 6) The contextual issues of military culture effects communication.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Family-school communication is key for student success and support and effective communication should be individualized, is critical and particularly complex with military families, and requires commitment and vision at the school level.
- No formal training with regard to family-school communication currently occurs in teacher preparation programs; much of the family-school communication skills developed by teachers come from personal and professional experience.
- Participants reported that the classroom teachers, although challenged by time constraints, are and should be the primary liaison between the school and families; participants also suggested that all school personnel should be involved at some level.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide in-service trainings for school personnel working with military youth focused on understanding the fundamentals of military life and culture, along with the unique challenges facing military families related to deployment
- Disseminate information regarding normative versus problematic children's responses to parental deployment and how these responses may impact functioning at school
- Offer technological interfaces such as a web-page with options to leave feedback, email, and/or text messaging to encourage reciprocal communication between families and teachers

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend education for school personnel regarding family-school communication and military culture/issues specific to military families
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and schools serving military youth to support students transition between schools following a parents change in duty station
- Promote the development of streamline educational standards, particularly related to graduation requirements, for military families who transition between states and countries

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

- This was a qualitative study using a semi-structured interview protocol that was created specifically for the study to evaluate school personnel perspectives of family-school communication in two elementary schools serving military families.
- This study focused on school personnel serving military children and families (branch not specified).
- Two public elementary schools in Connecticut were included in the study.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 15 educators; 10 were teachers and five held other positions in the school (e.g., administrator).
- The majority of participants were female (n = 14).
- No other demographic information for the sample (e.g., race/ethnicity, age) was provided.

## LIMITATIONS

- This was a convenience sample of seasoned educators from a small school district who volunteered to participate; therefore, participants may differ from non-participants.
- The use of a small sample of school personnel (14 of whom were female) from two elementary schools within one school district limits generalizability of results.
- School personnel may have tried to respond in the “best” way, which could influence the validity of results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine specific communication strategies that can be taught to teachers to improve family-school communication
- Conduct systematic research to evaluate child outcomes related to different formats of family-school communication
- Evaluate the effects of mobility on military children and explore which factors buffer the negative effects of mobility

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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