

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Schoolwide Impact of Military-Connected Student Enrollment: Educators' Perceptions

Garner, J. K., Arnold, P. L., & Nunnery, J. (2014). Schoolwide impact of military-connected student enrollment: Educators' perceptions. *Children and Schools*, 36(1), 31-39. doi:10.1093/cs/cdt026

**SUMMARY:** Interviews and focus groups were conducted with principals, counselors, and teachers at military-connected public schools to explore the broad impact of military-connected student enrollment on schools and educators. Results indicate that student school transitions and deployments require additional assessment and support by educators to meet the unique needs of military-connected students. The results also emphasized that efforts for increased communication about military-connected students' prior school history and parental deployments could be beneficial in easing the school transition.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Educators identified transition and deployment as factors affecting military-connected students' academic achievement and social-emotional well-being.
- Frequent military-connected student transfers create a significant amount of work for teachers, specifically the important task of assessing new students' educational needs (often without access to former school records).
- Teachers and counselors reported that children with deployed parents can sometimes be distracted, anxious, sad, or angry; only 38% of teachers reported that they were well equipped to meet the emotional needs of military-connected students.
- Respondents indicated a need to be more familiar with military culture, with less than 10% of the educators reported that they had been trained to work with military-connected students.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer in-services to local school districts, offering information about the needs, experiences, and challenges of military-connected students
- Educate military parents regarding the issues youth may encounter when transitioning to a new school
- Disseminate resources to military parents regarding ways to communicate with school staff regarding their child and military service

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that educate teachers and administrators about military-connected students
- Continue to support school liaison officer programs to enable closer collaboration among schools, teachers, and military resources and programs
- Recommend continuous monitoring of military-connected student enrollment, including parental deployment dates to help school personnel identify when and which students may need additional support

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

- Principals at targeted schools were asked to participate and identify educators who taught military students.
- Semi-structured focus groups and individual interviews were conducted to explore topics such as characteristics of military students, the greatest needs of students and teachers, and current responses to military students.
- Educators also filled out a questionnaire on access to student records, access to and satisfaction with support personnel, availability of informational resources, understanding of military culture, and preparedness to respond to military students' needs.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Seven principals, eight school counselors, 55 teachers, and four instructional support staff from seven elementary (K-5) and one K-8 school participated.
- Participants were from four large, urban school districts in close proximity to military installations from all branches of the U.S. military.
- Teachers were evenly distributed between K-2 and 3-5 grades, most were observed to be female, but age, gender, ethnicity, number of years teaching data were not collected.

## LIMITATIONS

- This study had a small sample size that was restricted to elementary schools in one geographic area; results may not generalize.
- Participants were selected non-randomly and this may have biased the data.
- No information was collected on several important demographic variables of the participants or students, which could influence the results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Triangulate this data with school climate or resource utilization data to gain additional insight into the needs of military-connected students
- Develop and identify effective professional development programs and models of staff collaboration
- Explore how teacher characteristics (e.g., age, gender, years of teaching) influence their ability to work with military-connected youth

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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