Supporting Military-Connected Students
Secondary Super Strategies | INTRODUCTION

Who are Military-Connected Students?

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act defines military-connected students as youth with a parent who -

1. is a member of the armed forces (as defined in section 101(a)(4) of title 10, United States Code); and
2. is on active duty (as defined in section 101(d)(1) of the same title.)

Military-connected students can face several challenges including:

- separation from a parent or caregiver due to deployment;
- high mobility rates;
- academic and social challenges attributed to frequent school changes, deployment of a parent(s), return of a deployed parent, injury to or death of a parent, etc.;
- difficulties qualifying for, receiving, or continuing special needs services due to differences in regulation interpretations, testing required to enroll in or receive special needs services, and resource availability in school districts;
- understanding and interpreting new school regulations and policies;
- elevated stressors;
- risk for depression and anxiety due to relocation, deployment of a parent(s), etc.; and,
- adjusting to curriculum and instructional methods or school climate/culture that may differ from school to school.[1]

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Military-connected youth can undergo frequent school changes due to relocation and deployment experienced by their military parent(s). Schools have the ability to support students and their families by reviewing current policies and procedures for those transitioning or enrolling mid-year and ensuring a smooth, timely process.

- Develop a welcome packet for students who may enroll mid-year.

- Encourage administrative staff and teachers to discuss deployment with students.

    √ Include conversation on where their parents are going and the role they serve within the military.

    √ Create a "lunch bunch" program with an administrator, school psychologist, counselor, or another support staff member to invite students to open up about their experience.

- Ensure school staff maintains frequent communication with the at-home caregiver.

- Make everyone aware of school services available to military families.

- Include a section on parent contact forms where parents can indicate their preferred forms of communication.

- Allow for flexibility with parent meetings by offering a webcam or call-in option, if available.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2018, the total number of military-connected youth was 1,650,464 with the highest percentage (37.8) ranging from birth to 5 years of age. The second largest group was 6 to 11 year olds at 32.1% and 12- to 18-year-olds at 23.6%.[3]

- Encourage staff to maintain consistency, predictability, and structure in the school environment to provide a sense of stability for students.

  - √ Offer advanced notice to these students of schedule changes, such as testing schedules, planned fire drills, and early dismissal days.

- Encourage students to volunteer at school or within the community to help them feel connected and in control.

  - √ Remind them not to feel guilty for having fun and encourage them to continue co-curricular activities.

- School staff members should document any changes in behavior or activity level to determine any developing patterns.

- Reach out to administrators in neighboring districts to create a network and develop a support group that can communicate over e-mail, engage in joint projects, start a club, or help educate other students.

- Offer professional development opportunities to staff to raise awareness and understanding of the unique challenges faced by military-connected students. Topics could include:

  - √ establishing a safe and stable classroom environment

  - √ recognizing signs of stress

  - √ sending positive messages
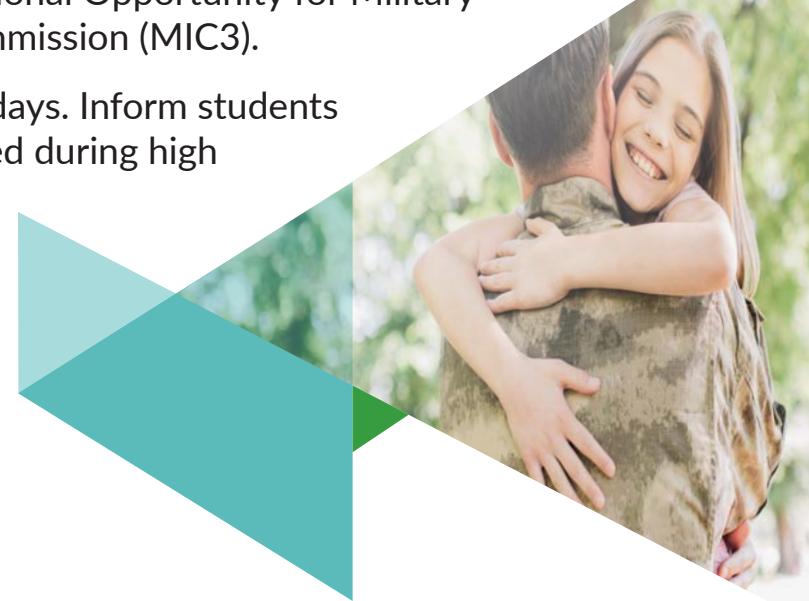
  - √ trauma-informed care

- Administrators and school counselors should stay abreast of legal guidance pertaining to military-connected students.

  √ For example, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the Educational Opportunity for Military Children Act, and the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3).

- Partner with your local community college for CTE career exploration days. Inform students on the different career options within CTE and how they can get started during high school.

- Career aptitude tests can assist students in determining their skills and interests for future occupations.

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Department of Defense, the average military family moves three times more often than their civilian counterparts. This transiency often disrupts friendships, academic progress, and students' sense of connectedness.[2]

Sources:

[1] American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. (2011). *Who are Military-Connected Students?*. Retrieved from https://secure.aacte.org/apps/rl/res_get.php?fid=1256&ref=rl.

[2] American Association of School Administrators. (2009). *AASA Toolkit: Supporting the Military Child*. Retrieved from https://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Resources/Toolkits/Other_Toolkits/AASA_Supporting_the_Military_Child_Toolkit/MilitaryChildToolkitComplete.pdf.

[3] Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. (2018). *2018 Demographics Report: Profile of the Military Community*. Retrieved from https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2018-demographics-report.pdf.

[4] Rossen, E., & Carter, C. D. (2011, February). *Supporting Students from Military Families*. Principal Leadership, 14-18. Retrieved from https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Handouts/Families%20and%20Educators/Military_Families_Feb11_NASSP.PDF.

[5] Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act H.R.2353, 115th Cong., (2018) (enacted). https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353/text?r=2.