

Education K-12 and the Military Community

Overview of the Issue

Children of service members and veterans face unique challenges. Some have two parents in the military; some have single parents who serve. Military children face deployment cycles and frequent relocations. Many face the prospect or reality of a parent returning home from combat wounded or profoundly changed. Some parents may not return. These challenges are likely to affect their development. If not addressed, children may withdraw from their friends, be held back a grade or give up on school altogether. Children are the future of our country; we have the opportunity to serve their needs and we owe them the best education possible.

Military-connected children may be especially vulnerable to influences that could cause them to develop the behavioral patterns that lead to dropping out of school. The number of dropouts in the U.S. is about 1.2 million.ⁱ Dropping out of school is not a one-day event, but a process that begins with discernable patterns that can set in as early as the third grade – clear signs like being held back or failing a grade and discipline problems. Less apparent signs may include emotional disturbances, being over-age for a grade, poor attendance, low commitment to school and a lack of participation in extracurricular activities.ⁱⁱ

Today, it is widely known that service members with strong family ties make the best soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. Returning veterans need their family even more as they undergo a transition into civilian life. More than half (54 percent) of service members have children, usually before age 30ⁱⁱⁱ. Only 5.4 percent of active duty and 8.2 percent of Reserve and National Guard members are single parents, while 11.4 percent of all U.S. families are single-parent households.^{iv} Most (72 percent) military children are under age 12^v. The total number of children with active duty parents alone is more than 1.2 million.^{vi}

Many military children display trouble academically during their parent's deployment such as lower test scores in math and reading, lack of engagement or participation in classroom activities, poor attendance and not completing their homework.^{vii} In 2005, the Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences found that children were experiencing sadness, lack of concentration and fears about what could happen to their parent(s) while they were away on deployment, and that they were exhibiting aggressive behavior as a reaction to their parent's deployment.^{viii} As the table below shows, these problems tended to get worse – not better – after a parent returned from a deployment.

<u>Reported (by Spouse) Behavioral Issues of Military Children</u>		
	Parent(s) Currently Deployed	Parent(s) Have Returned from Deployment
Fears about what could happen to parent	14%	21%
Sadness	12%	18%
Lack of concentration	10%	12%
Aggressive behavior	9%	11%

Source: Department of Defense, US Army Community and Family Support Center. (2005).

Military children are vulnerable to "drop-out patterns" due to the deployment cycle and the frequent relocations demanded by the military lifestyle. A child might suffer emotionally due to a parent's loss or injury, might be held back or be over-age for a grade due to relocation and might not care for a school if they feel that they are likely to relocate again prior to graduation. The child might eventually become so isolated that they don't try out for sports or join after-school clubs or activities. Additionally, the emotional and psychological well-being of the parent has an effect on children's schooling.

Existing Services

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children is an agreement signed between states that seeks to make the transition from one school district to another easier for the military child. The compact seeks to ensure that children aren't penalized or delayed in school, that they can transition to courses and activities were possible with few obstacles. If the Compact is enforced in your state, you should be aware of all its provisions and make sure it is being adhered to in your community. If your state is not yet participating in the compact, you can organize a push to ensure its eventual adoption.

How You Can Help

You can have an impact on the education of military children. Here are a few ways to help:

- Educate schools about the need to identify military children and understand their challenges
- Educate military families about any state, federal or local resources available to them
- Provide welcome and support programs to help children adjust quicker and feel a sense of belonging in their new community
- Ensure your state adopts and implements the *Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children* which eases many of the transition issues affecting military children; to find out more about the Compact, visit the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission at www.mic3.net
- Organize an annual media campaign to raise awareness of the issues military children face

By implementing these promising practices in your community you can help serve the military children throughout our country.

Quotes

“Military children continually amaze us as they rise to the challenges of military life. It’s a life of frequent moves, changing schools, leaving friends and making new friends.”^{ix}

- Robert L. Gordon III, deputy assistant secretary of defense
(Military Community and Family Policy),
April 1, 2011

References:

ⁱ Alliance for Excellent Education, Issue Brief; The high cost of high school dropouts, what the nation pays for inadequate high schools. (2007, October). Retrieved from <http://www.all4ed.org/files/archive/publications/HighCost.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Metlife foundation afterschool alert issue brief (2009, July). Retrieved from http://www.americaspromise.org/~media/Files/Resources/Afterschool_A%20High%20School%20Dropout%20Prevention%20Tool.ashx

ⁱⁱⁱ Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military. (2009). Demographics 2009, profile of the military community Retrieved from http://cs.mhf.dod.mil/content/dav/mhf/QOL-Library/PDF/MHF/QOL%20Resources/Reports/2009_Demographics_Report.pdf

^{iv} Questions and answers about military families: a Sloan work and family research network factsheet, 2009. (2009, February). Retrieved from <http://wfnetwork.bc.edu/pdfs/militaryfamilies.pdf>

^v Military Child Education Coalition, Supporting military children youth and their parents. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.militarychild.org/files/pdfs/3-Youth&Parents.pdf>

^{vi} Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military. (2009). Demographics 2009, profile of the military community Retrieved from http://cs.mhf.dod.mil/content/dav/mhf/QOL-Library/PDF/MHF/QOL%20Resources/Reports/2009_Demographics_Report.pdf

^{vii} Chandra, A., Lara-Cinisomo, S., Jaycox, L.H., Tanielian, T., & Han, B., Burns, R.M., Ruder, T., Rand Corporation, Center for Military Health Policy Research. (2011). View from the home front Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR913.html

^{viii} Department of Defense, US Army Community and Family Support Center. (2005). Highlights, survey of army families, v Army Research Institute. Retrieved from <http://www.army.mil/fmwrc/documents/research/safv/SAFVSummary.doc>

^{ix} <http://afps.dodlive.mil/2011/04/01/month-of-the-military-child-kids-serve-too/#>