



# POLICY ANALYSIS



## State and Federal Policy: Military youth

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The relationship between the armed services and education policy is often limited to one of two areas: higher education opportunities for enlisted

AS A UNIQUE POPULATION, CHILDREN OF MILITARY FAMILIES OFTEN REQUIRE CREATIVE POLICY SOLUTIONS THAT ARE ADDRESSED IN A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT POLICY AREAS.

members or providing adequate career and technical training to improve employment prospects for veterans leaving enlisted service. Public discussions often lack insight about the consideration of services provided to dependent family members of those currently in the armed services.

With the end of the draft in the 1970s, the United States Armed Services transitioned to an all-volunteer force and began offering incentives to individuals to encourage long-term enlistment. Since then, “marriage, parenthood, and family life have become commonplace [in the military] and military spouses and children now outnumber service members by a ratio of 1.4 to 1.”<sup>1</sup>

This analysis provides an introduction to military families participating in K-12 education, an overview of state policies and strategies that seek to accommodate this student population and discusses some state-level policy questions and considerations to further support the children of service men and women.

While states have begun to **address** some of the **issues** facing military populations, additional actions can **help** better **support** military-connected youth.

Increased **data collection**, **program evaluation** and **expansion of existing services** have the potential to refine and improve state supports, as well as the lives of service members and their families.

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## What do we know about military families?

The United States military has approximately 1.3 million active duty members and more than 1.1 million additional members on ready reserve.<sup>2</sup> The overwhelming majority of enlisted members are stationed in the United States (87.1 percent) and are distributed primarily in five states (49.2 percent): California, Virginia, Texas, North Carolina and Georgia.<sup>3</sup>

Enlisted members tend to marry younger and start families sooner than their civilian counterparts.<sup>7</sup> The most recent assessment of military demographics finds that 35.7 percent of service members are married with children and 6.4 percent are single with children.<sup>8</sup> As of 2014, more than 1.1 million dependent children were living with active duty service members.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, most enlisted members leave the military after fewer than 10 years of service.<sup>10</sup> As a result, nearly 60 percent of military children are under eight years old.<sup>11</sup>

## KEY DEFINITIONS

In many cases, whether a state policy **applies** to a service member depends on the **status** of the service member. Key **status definitions** include:

### Active duty

Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States. Such term includes full-time training duty, annual training duty and attendance while in the active military service at a school designated as a service school by law or by the secretary of the military department concerned. Such term does not include full-time National Guard duty.<sup>4</sup>

### Ready Reserve

Units or Reserves, or both, liable for active duty.<sup>5</sup> Reserves may be called to active duty in circumstances such as war or national emergencies.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 1: ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY DEPENDENTS BY AGE AND SERVICE BRANCH**

AGE	ARMY	NAVY	MARINE CORPS	AIR FORCE	TOTAL DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
< 12 months	33,359	17,545	10,138	19,479	80,521
1	35,637	18,107	10,327	20,195	84,266
2	35,259	17,265	9,393	19,664	81,581
3	34,220	16,644	8,799	19,032	78,695
4	32,855	16,073	8,175	17,870	74,973
5	31,892	15,460	7,590	16,856	71,798
6	30,550	14,659	6,902	16,496	68,607
7	29,687	14,549	6,626	16,048	66,910
8	27,359	13,497	5,712	14,702	61,270
9	25,827	12,138	4,981	13,591	56,537
10	22,609	11,409	4,827	13,038	51,883
11	22,545	10,645	4,400	11,530	49,120
12	21,307	9,670	3,874	10,722	45,573
13	20,012	8,787	3,601	9,743	42,143
14	18,990	8,206	3,345	8,916	39,457
15	17,488	7,455	2,953	7,887	35,783
16	16,044	6,874	2,613	7,187	32,718



<b>17</b>	14,228	6,252	2,319	6,255	29,054
<b>18</b>	12,723	5,347	1,864	5,223	25,157
<b>19</b>	11,055	4,574	1,598	4,326	21,553
<b>20</b>	9,344	3,802	1,230	3,438	17,814
<b>21</b>	2,898	1,370	408	1,392	6,068
<b>22</b>	2,400	1,111	294	1,040	4,845
<b>Total</b>	508,288	241,439	111,969	264,630	1,126,326

Source: DMDC Active Duty Military Family File (September 2014)

Despite the short tenure of most enlisted men and women and the young age of the majority of connected dependent children, researchers have noted that the average military child will attend six to nine schools throughout the course of his or her development.<sup>12</sup> Importantly for state policymakers, 80 percent of the more than one million military-connected children in the United States receive their education in public schools.<sup>13</sup>

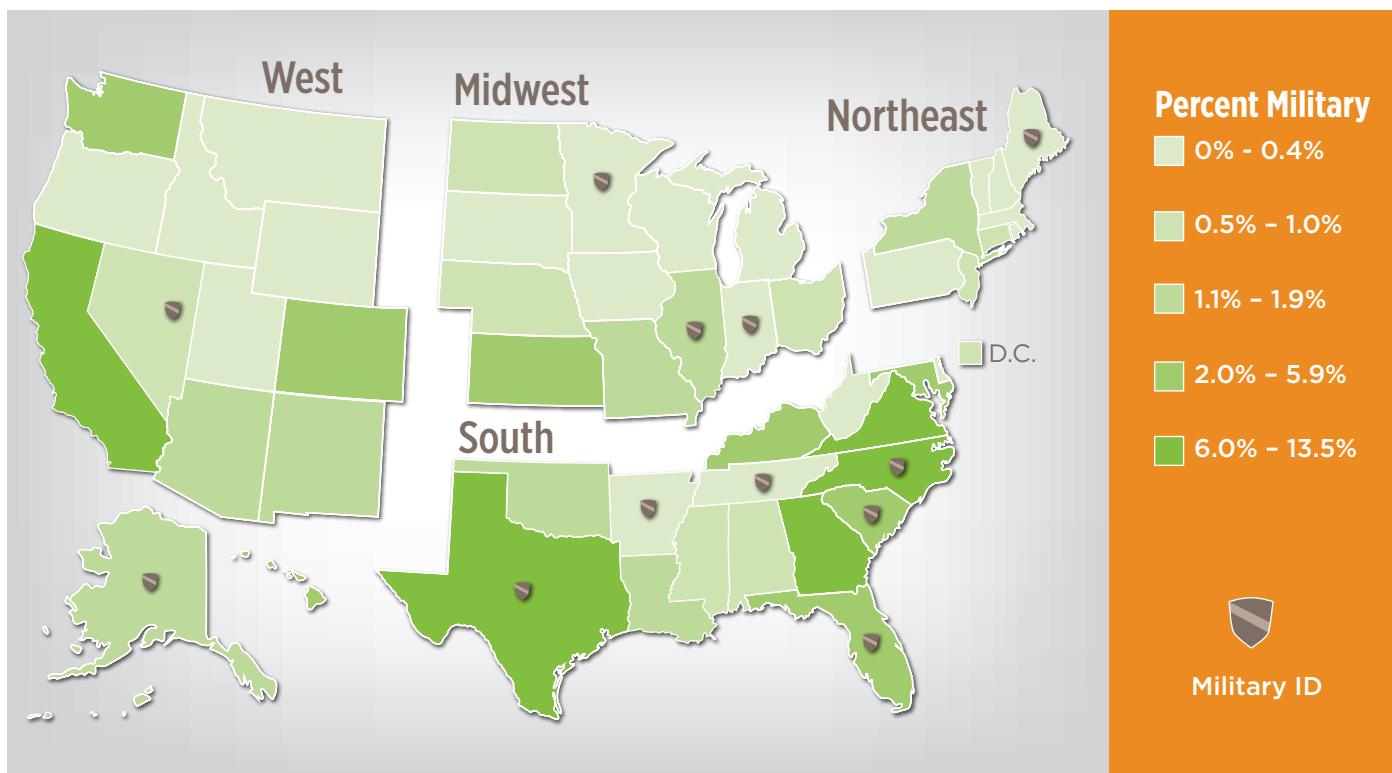
Military service requires families to relocate frequently and endure a number of hardships that encompass isolation from civilian populations to immensely stressful wartime deployments of parents. Further complicating the issue, the majority of dependent children connected to military households are under eight years old, creating a challenging environment for military families and policymakers alike.<sup>14</sup> Some of the specific education challenges resulting from military family environments include:

- **Mental/emotional difficulties:** Research demonstrates these difficulties are greater for military families than those of the general population and relate to parent deployment and post-deployment reintegration.<sup>15</sup>
- **High mobility:** Frequent relocation requires children to continuously reorganize their lives.<sup>16</sup> Known as military family syndrome, research has shown both positive and negative effects associated with frequent (often long-distance) relocation.<sup>17</sup>
- **Growing military-civilian gap:** The high mobility of military families can lead military-connected children to become increasingly isolated from school peers with whom, given the additional stresses their families must endure, they may already be struggling to connect with.<sup>18</sup>

## Federal Requirements

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) - the new reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 - requires states to identify military students (students with a parent who is a member of the Armed Forces) with a unique military identifier, which allows military student data to be analyzed as a separate, self-contained subgroup.<sup>19</sup> The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the prior reauthorization of ESEA, did not include this requirement and is new ESSA.

Although the law will only apply to active duty military-connected children and not reserve forces, the military identifier will better assesses military student performance, as well as help to understand the relationship between military life and dependent child development.<sup>20</sup> Prior to the inclusion of the military identifier language in the new law, only 12 states had laws or policies requiring the use of a military identifier.<sup>21</sup>



Source: Data for the map come from the DMDC Active Duty Military Family File (September 2014) as well as ECS legislative analysis of state military indicators (unpublished) and Census Bureau regional identifiers.

The map shows concentrations of military-connected populations as a percentage of the cumulative active duty force, as well as states with a military identifier prior to the passage of ESSA. Data are broken down by state and by region. As the map demonstrates, no correlation exists between the size of the military population and whether a state has a military identifier.

## State Policy Responses

The federal government provides a majority of the existing support for military families. However, some states have adopted policies to support military-connected students. State policies include school policies, school choice policies and family reintegration support policies.

### SCHOOL POLICIES:

States have few policies specifically targeting military-connected students. However, some states implemented policies that accommodate parent deployment and return, teaching military children and hiring specialized staff to support military-connected children in areas near military bases.

In 2014, **Connecticut** passed legislation granting 10 days of excused absence from school to any child from five to 18 years old whose parent or legal guardian is an active duty member of the armed forces. Schools will excuse absences when the parent or guardian has been called to duty, is on leave or has just returned from deployment.<sup>22</sup>

**Illinois** offers guidance and resources to education staff to better support military-connected students in public schools. The state provides support to military-connected families through the Illinois Early Learning



project, addressing the needs of the core military-connected youth population.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, the Illinois State Board of Education provides guidance through the Comprehensive System of Learning Supports – which includes universal programming, targeted early intervention and intensive individualized support – and military youth specific guidance for educators.<sup>24</sup>

In order to provide support to the more than 59,000 children connected to active duty members, **North Carolina** has created military liaison counselors to “focus on the unique needs of military students in the educational setting.”<sup>25</sup> The counselors offer training to school staff, develop and implement programs to support military students and provide outreach services to transitioning families.<sup>26</sup> The counselors are assigned to school districts in close proximity to military bases.

## INTERSTATE COMPACT

One of the key barriers facing military-connected students is overcoming issues related to high degrees of mobility. States have responded accordingly by adopting the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Adopted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the Compact provides flexibility and transition support for military-connected students in the following areas:<sup>27</sup>

- **Enrollment** – Expedites continuous enrollment of students in school. The Compact allows military families to carry, unofficially, from one state to the next and provides students with a 30-day time period to obtain proper immunizations. The Compact also allows kindergarten and first-grade students to enroll at their previously achieved level of the sending state.
- **Placement and Attendance** – Allows continuation of student designations such as advanced placement, vocational training and special education. The Compact’s provisions do allow the receiving state authority to determine if placement is best for the student. Additionally, the Compact provides flexibility with regards to absences as a result of a parent or guardian’s deployment.
- **Eligibility** – Allows special power of attorney guardianship for a child who has been placed in the care of a non-custodial parent. The Compact prohibits school districts from charging tuition if the non-custodial guardian is located outside of the normal school district. Finally, it includes provisions for a child’s inclusion in extracurricular activities.
- **Graduation** – Prevents delays in student graduation as a result of relocation. The Compact grants states latitude to accept or waive coursework and may identify alternative solutions to allow for on-time graduation.

## SCHOOL CHOICE:

At least three states have attempted to address some of the mobility issues associated with military life through school choice policies. Two states extend the option of participating in education savings accounts (ESAs) programs to the children of active duty military members. ESAs are a unique form of school choice in that they provide a broader array of educational choice options to parents.

The **Arizona** program offers parents 90 percent of the per-pupil funding in a bank account that is replenished quarterly. The state permits parents to spend account funds on private school tuition, therapy, tutoring, extracurricular services, textbooks and curriculum. The state also allows leftover funds in the account to be converted into a college savings account. **Arizona's** ESA program is a limited eligibility program that allows children of active duty service members to participate.<sup>28</sup>

Other states provide fewer limits to student eligibility for the state's ESA program. **Nevada's** ESA program, for instance, offers universal eligibility to any student who has been enrolled in Nevada public schools for 100 days. The state waives the 100-day requirement for children of active duty service members.<sup>29</sup>

**Florida** provides eligibility to military-connected children in its McKay Scholarship tax credit program. The program offers a school voucher to qualifying students to attend any public school in his or her geographic district or any public or private school in the state.<sup>30</sup> Participation in the program requires residency and attendance in Florida schools for one year prior to enrollment in the McKay Scholarship program. However, the state provides a waiver for active duty military personnel relocating for permanent change of station orders.<sup>31</sup>

#### **FAMILY SUPPORT/REINTEGRATION POLICIES:**

While not specifically school policies, reintegration programs can help mitigate the negative effects of deployment within family dynamics and create valuable connections with the civilian world, in addition to connecting military families to quality services and programs.

**New Hampshire's** Ask the Question campaign was the product of a state legislative commission on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury and concluded on June 30, 2016.

Funded by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services Balancing Incentive Program, Ask the Question "is aimed at stigma reduction, education and military-civilian integrated care."<sup>32</sup> The campaign hopes to connect military-affiliated families to services and programs across multiple sectors, while simultaneously improving the quality of care by asking the question, "*Have you or a family member ever served in the military?*" According to the campaign, asking whether a person or a family member has ever served in the military "allows for more informed treatment/care planning and the ability to identify the optimal and specific military/veteran-specific referrals/resources."<sup>33</sup>

A similar organization exists in **Arizona**, called the Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF). This organization – run as a public/private partnership – similarly focuses on the state's ability to support service members and veterans.<sup>34</sup> However, distinct from New Hampshire's Ask the Question, ACMF coordinates key stakeholder initiatives that include a variety of resources, including training for first responders in crisis situations and early childhood support for military families.<sup>35</sup>

## Policy Questions and Considerations

The unique position of military children requires the development of closely coordinated policies at the state and local level that provide a great deal of flexibility for a highly-mobile population. Policymakers may find it helpful to consider the following questions when developing school policies for military children:

- Are federal, state and local services for military families coordinated?
- Are state programs easily accessible for military families?
- Do state policies unintentionally promote isolation of military families from the civilian population?
- Do existing state mental health services adequately address the needs of military-connected children?

## Policy considerations:

- **Improve mental health services:** Research shows the psychological impact of deployment on children is largely a result of the stress levels of parents.<sup>36</sup> States may consider programs and community support methods for mitigating deployment and reintegration stresses on parents with children.
- **Teacher training:** States can mitigate some of the negative effects of military-connected mobility with trained instructors in the classroom.<sup>37</sup> States with high numbers of military-connected children might include specialized training in teacher preparation programs to support these students.
- **Target early childhood learners:** The majority of military-connected children are less than eight years old. Framing supports around early childhood learning programs may prove beneficial for the students and families alike.
- **Make the most of the military indicator:** ESSA requires states to identify military connected students. Robust data collection provides states with incentives to improve learning opportunities for military-connected students. Additionally, states offering school choice options for military-connected children have the opportunity to better understand the impact of those programs on student outcomes.

## Additional Resources:

- **Military Child Education Coalition:** <http://www.militarychild.org/>
- **Military Impacted Schools Association:** <http://militaryimpactschoolsassociation.org/what-is-misa>
- **National Guard Joint Child & Youth Program:** <https://www.jointservicessupport.org/FP>Youth.aspx>
- **Military Child Initiative at Johns Hopkins University:** <http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/military-child-initiative/>
- **Zero to Three, Military and Veterans Family Support:** <https://www.zerotothree.org/parenting/military-and-veteran-families-support>

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