

## Your Question:

You requested information on school enrollment issues faced by children of military families and policies that support the school enrollment of military children.

## Our Response:

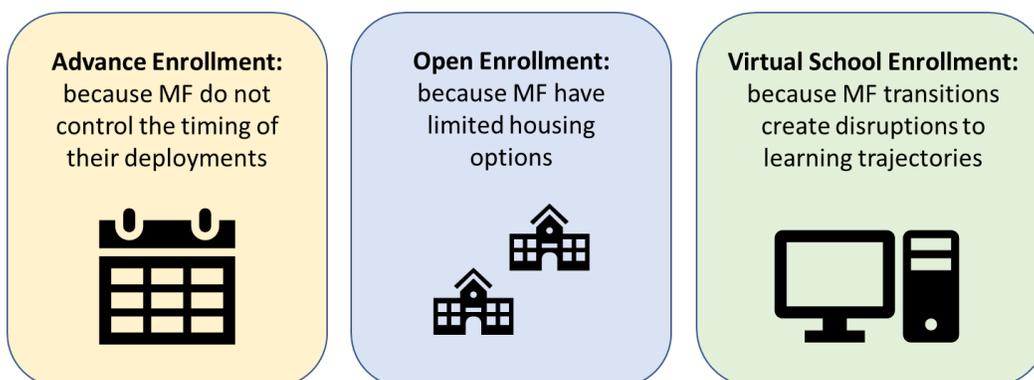
### Overview: Military Children

Military families (MF) are highly mobile; on average, they move [every 2-3 years](#). As a result, they are likely to be relocated multiple times during their children’s K-12 education. Military children average 6-9 school transfers in the 13 years between kindergarten and high school graduation. These numerous school transitions create a variety of challenges for the continuity of education for military children.

To address these issues systematically, in 2006, the [U.S. Department of Defense](#) (DOD) worked with the [Council of State Governments](#) (CSG) to develop the [Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children](#), a state level compact containing multiple provisions to support the school transitions of MF. The compact has since been adopted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Participating states established the [Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission](#) (MIC3) to manage the compact. While implementation has been variable across the participating states, in general this agreement provides [certain protections](#) for MF around enrollment, transfer of school records, placement, attendance and graduation.

One critical issue for military children is that of school enrollment. The MIC3 compact includes the following provisions to ease [enrollment challenges](#): military parents are allowed to carry unofficial school records for their children at the time of their move; receiving schools must accept those records for purposes of enrollment and placement as long as official records are received from the sending school within 10 days of enrollment. However, due to their [high and unpredictable mobility](#) and [limited housing options](#), military families face additional challenges not addressed by the compact — specifically, those related to enrollment timing, school placement and continuity of education.

### Enrollment Policies That Support Military Children



State policies regarding the school enrollment of military children can help to ease these transitions. Below, we discuss challenges and associated state policies in three areas: [advance enrollment](#), [open enrollment](#) and [virtual school enrollment](#).

## Advance Enrollment

Military service members are routinely re-deployed to new locations every three to four years. These moves, known as Permanent Change of Station orders, are typically received in the spring, with relocation happening the following summer. State and local policies often require physical residency before school enrollment. Since school enrollment and registration periods tend to close before the family's physical move in the summer, military children are often unable to access available lotteries, courses and programs in the new location where they will be attending school the following year.

Advance enrollment is a policy option that allows military children to access registration and enrollment at the same time as the general public, but prior to physically being located in the school district. As a result, military children are granted the same opportunities as other students in the district.

### Advance Enrollment: State Examples

As of December 2020, [19 states](#) had passed statewide policy on advance enrollment for military children; a few examples are provided below.

- In [California](#), a student is allowed to enroll in a school district if their parent is, pursuant to an official military order while on active military duty, transferred or pending transfer to a military installation within the state. Parents must have online access to enrollment and are allowed up to 10 days after the published date of arrival to provide proof of residence. Proof of residence includes a temporary on-base facility, federal off-base housing, or an owned or leased property.
- In [Idaho](#), each school district is required to establish a process under which a child may enroll in or register for courses at a school in the school district, regardless of where such child resides at the time of enrollment or registration, if the child is a dependent of a member of the United States Armed Forces who has received transfer orders to a location in Idaho and will, upon such transfer, reside in the school district.
- [Oregon](#) considers a student a resident of the school district regardless of physical location if the student is a military dependent transferring to the district because of an official military order. Such students are entitled to participate in all eligible enrollment and class placement processes.
- [Washington](#) considers a student a resident of the school district regardless of physical location if the student is a military dependent transferring to the district because of an official military order. The school district is required to accept, on a conditional basis, an application for enrollment and course registration, including enrollment in a specific school or program within the school district. Parents have up to fourteen days after the published date of arrival to provide proof of residence.

## Open Enrollment

Open enrollment is a form of K-12 public school choice that allows students to attend a different school than the one they are assigned to based on their place of residence. Currently, 46 states have open enrollment policies. As detailed in the ECS open enrollment [50-State Comparison](#), [Policy Snapshot](#) and [Quick Guide](#), these policies can be mandatory or voluntary for the school or district; may apply to inter-district transfers or be limited to intra-district transfers; and can include prioritization guidelines by population of students. These policies vary across states; in addition, a single state may have multiple policies that vary in scope and by target population.

Unlike civilian families who can choose where to live and thereby choose both their district and home school, military families have limited options when it comes to housing associated with their permanent change of station. As a result, school and district options for military children can also be limited. Many states have developed policies that specifically address the open enrollment needs of military children. Some states have mandatory clauses for military students that allow them to automatically access the state's open enrollment system. Other states have [existing prioritization systems](#) within their open enrollment policies that include military students as a priority category. Still others allow military students to remain in their placement for the remainder of the school year despite a change of residence.

### Open Enrollment: State Examples

#### *Mandatory Open Enrollment*

- [Mississippi](#) allows students who live on a military base to enroll and attend the school district of their parent's or legal guardian's choosing, regardless of the residence of the child.
- [North Dakota](#) allows students who attend school at a military installation school district to participate in the state open enrollment program.
- While school districts are allowed, but not required, to provide open enrollment to all students in [Oklahoma](#), districts are required to have policies that allow for inter-district open enrollment and transfers specifically for children of active-duty military personnel.

#### *Priority Open Enrollment*

- [Florida mandates that](#) children of active duty military personnel must receive preferential treatment in the controlled open enrollment process.
- [New Mexico](#) requires receiving school districts to give priority to children of active-duty military personnel who lived in the area prior to deployment.

#### *Remain in Previous School*

- [California](#) allows military dependents to remain enrolled in a school or district if a change of residence occurs because of a military assignment.

## Virtual School Enrollment

Approximately [one-third](#) of the nearly 200,000 military children moving between schools annually move during the school year. As a result, students experience disruptions to their education that can include losing access to classes and coursework, missing deadlines for course registration or completion, and receiving failing or incomplete grades. When the sending or receiving state of military personnel have a public K-12 virtual school option, it can provide displaced military children a way to keep up with coursework.

However, many states have [virtual school policies](#) that limit enrollment access to students that reside within the state. For military children, this means that they may either lack access to the receiving state’s virtual school while they are physically located in the sending state and/or lack access to the sending state’s virtual school once they are physically located in the receiving state. Lacking access to available virtual school options can limit a student’s access to K-12 education. [Some states](#) have developed explicit policies that allow military children to access state virtual school options regardless of physical location during the student’s transition semester.

### Virtual School Enrollment: State Examples

As of December 2020, [six states](#) had passed statewide policy on virtual school enrollment for military children; a few examples are provided below.

- [Alabama](#) allows a dependent of a member of the United States Armed Forces who has received orders to relocate to the state to have access to a virtual education option for grades 9 to 12.
- [Florida](#) requires the Florida Virtual School to give enrollment priority to military dependents.
- [Texas](#) permits military dependents who have moved or are transferred to the state to enroll in virtual coursework full-time.

### Resources

- [Council of State Governments](#)
  - [National Center for Interstate Compacts](#)
- [Education Commission of the States](#)
  - [Policy Brief: State and Federal Policy: Military Youth](#)
- [Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children](#)
  - [Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission](#)
- [Military OneSource](#)
  - [Military State Policy Source](#)
  - [Defense State Liaison Office](#)
- [U.S. Department of Defense](#)