

# WHERE ARE OUR MILITARY-CONNECTED KIDS ATTENDING SCHOOL? AND HOW ARE THEY DOING?

A Call for a Student Identifier





#### for the sake of the child...

#### A message from

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Every school district in America has military-connected children and youth. Uniformly high expectations for academic performance across all curriculum areas, accurate and timely data collection, and reporting and knowledge by individual schools of this unique population will make an immediate and positive difference in effective school responses and improved student performance. A "report only" military-connected student identifier gives a significant return for a very small investment.

The current Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires extensive program evaluation under Section 1501. In order to comply with its provision, school districts and states already collect and report student demographic and performance date including gender, ethnicity and program participation for bilingual, migrant, special education, vocational or career and technology education along with annual academic performance measures in reading and mathematics.

Independent of these efforts, the Common Core Standards, now adopted in 46 of our 50 states, encourage world class curriculum standards and assessments to assure our Nation's global competiveness in the 21st Century. Clearly, common standards for core curriculum areas will offer a serious and needed benefit particularly to our highly mobile one million military-connected students.

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which 39 states have joined, is designed to minimize school disruptions. The Compact requires participating states to collect and report standardized data concerning educational transitions for military student populations. In the absence of a consistent data element this is not possible.

The Military Child Education Coalition applauds all the efforts that will strengthen our competitiveness, our national security and our children's future. We encourage our Nation's leadership to consider this a next step that works in concert with these ongoing efforts while attending to the children of our military families.

## A MILITARY STUDENT IDENTIFIER

indicates trends and patterns so that critical support reaches these students.

Though there are over one million school-age, military-connected students in pre-kindergarten through grade twelve, there is NO reliable, consistent school-based data on the academic health of these students. Without precise data, decisions about children, time, money, and initiatives are at risk of being based on supposition rather than reality.

#### On a local, state or national level, we don't know:

- a. where our military-connected children attend school
- **b.** how they perform
- c. whether they graduate
- **d.** whether they choose higher education options or enter the workforce

M ore than two-thirds of Active Duty military families live in civilian communities, and nearly one million of their children attend schools in those communities. Ongoing research tells us service members' participation in combat operations can impact families for a generation after the conclusion of military service.

B usiness, industry and military organizations rely on sophisticated, precise data systems to provide real time information on performance, informed decision making and timely feedback to operate efficiently and effectively. We should support military-connected children in the same way.

The Department of Education regularly urges schools across our nation to operate using data-driven decisions; yet schools do not have any uniform data on military-connected students. Education systems can answer the question "How did your female and male students perform in mathematics last year?" or, "How did your migrant students perform in reading last year?" They cannot answer questions such as "How many military-connected students do you serve and how did they perform in mathematics last year?"

hildren in military families are twice as likely as their civilian counterparts to join the military as adults. As a nation, we need to know they are well-prepared to serve.

A military-connection data element for students will allow educational institutions and policy makers at all levels of government to monitor critical elements of education success including:

- a. academic progress and proficiency
- b. special and advanced program participation
- c. mobility and dropout rates
- **d.** patterns over time across state and district lines.

Reserve Forces have often not been "recognized" as being part of a military family even though the Reserve Components have been deployed multiple times and in record numbers. It is essential to include these military-connected students in regular data collection and reporting. The identifier will make it possible to precisely determine needs and gauge resources to give critical support to these students.

The the Departments of Education and Defense invest over 1.2 billion dollars annually in military and Indian-Lands school districts. Military impacted school districts cannot track their military-connected students' performance because there is no linkage in student data systems.

Implementation of a military-connected student identifier will assist educators in more effectively preparing transitioning students for their new school. This will also provide a key performance indicator for the local districts to discover practices and processes worthy of attention and replication for students from prekindergarten through grade twelve. What is learned

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will provide leaders with the essential data needed to make reality-based, informed decisions

from quality data about the military-connected student will help other children who experience school moves or other disruptions to academic continuity or opportunity.

Parents will have evidence-based insights about school districts and campuses with respect to the educational attainment of military-connected students as a cohort. By giving military parents more precise information about how military-connected students are faring as a group, they can be more confident about choices concerning the education of their children.

Today, over two million military-connected children and youth (birth through age 23) live with perpetual challenges presented by frequent moves, parental and sibling deployments, and a host of life transitions that include reintegration and dealing with profoundly changed parents. The well-being of these children depends heavily on a network of supportive adults who are trained to identify early signs of emotional or physical challenge. The Military Child Education Coalition exists to serve these children from birth into adulthood.

# WHO ARE OUR MILITARY-CONNECTED CHILDREN?

- Almost 2 million children (Mom, Dad or both Active Duty, Guard or Reserve)
- 1,381,584 of the military-connected children are 4-18 years old
- Over 80% of these children and youth –
   1,105,267 students attend U.S. public schools
- Less than 8% attend Department of Defense schools
- Over 2 million children have a mother or father who has served in Iraq or Afghanistan, many have served multiple times
- Active Duty military students move 3 times more frequently than civilian counterparts
- Every school district in this country has military-connected children and youth

"It used to be a big thing when a student had a parent deployed and everybody knew about it right away. Now it's common enough...sometimes **we don't even know...** And I think that means they don't always get the extra care and things that they need to be successful."

- (Public School Educator)

### GAO Study Confirms the Need to Identify Military-Connected Students

"There are no data available on these students that could be used to assess their academic achievement or educational outcomes, or determine where funding needs are the greatest. Such reporting requirements exist for certain other groups of students, such as economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. Federal agency officials acknowledged this need for information, and Education has begun discussing how to address this need."

 Education of Military Dependent Students-Better Information Needed to Assess Student Performance GAO, March 2011



#### About the Military Child Education Coalition

The Military Child Education Coalition - the nation's only organization focused solely on the educational needs of America's military children - is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit, world-wide organization. A model of positive leadership and advocacy, the MCEC's work is focused on ensuring quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition. The MCEC performs research, conducts professional institutes and conferences, and develops and publishes resources for all constituencies.

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