

Best and Promising Practices

I. Introduction

May 2000, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) briefed the twenty-seven Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS) senior leaders (commanders, superintendents, and school board presidents) on the preliminary findings of the United States Army's Secondary Education Transition Study. The SETS research was conducted in order to understand the challenges that military-connected high school students have transitioning from one school system to another. The ten major patterns that emerged from the Secondary Education Transition Study data as the most cogent were the keystones of that briefing.

Working together, with the endorsement of the Chief of Staff of the Army, the SETS senior leaders developed the ten issues into an Army-wide Action Plan. The intent was to effectively use the salient patterns, lessons learned, and the shared promising practices discovered through the United States Army's Secondary Education Transition Study to increase the likelihood of predictability for the military-connected high school student. SETS is about mobile children, it is not just about the Army; therefore, the results and ideas gleaned have the potential to help all mobile students regardless of the occupation or service affiliation of their parents.

An outgrowth of the ten-issue action plan was a proposal from one of the working groups for a cooperative understanding. The concept was put forth that a Memorandum of Agreement be negotiated between the nine sites that participated in SETS. The Memorandum of Agreement, regarding Guiding Principles, operationalizes much of what was put forth in the research-based action plans. The SETS school systems and installation partners have agreed to look for opportunities, procedures, and means to ease the challenges inherent in school transition. The policy and procedures, curriculum and graduation requirements, and extracurricular participation links would be formally developed. Formal and informal articulation of courses, credits, and reciprocal avenues to fulfill graduation requirements is the highest priority.

This supporting document, Best and Promising Practices, is designed to facilitate the mutual development of reciprocal practices, conduits for information between systems about requirements, and accelerate the exchange of emerging opportunities. The fundamental architecture of the Memorandum of Agreement, as well as the supporting Best and Promising Practices document, is to sustain partnerships that serve as extra-ordinary models. The anticipated outcome will be institutionalized systems for transition predictability of the high school experience for the military-connected student.

II. Purpose

The purpose of the following best and promising practices is to provide a framework for possible courses of action. These suggestions and examples are for local consideration and are organized in support of the Guiding Principles, as stated in the Memorandum of Agreement, developed March 14-16, 2001. Best and Promising Practices, delineates possible areas/opportunities for school systems and supporting installations as they discover, develop and share expertise. . These ideas and initiatives outlined here are intended to be start points. Other creative solutions and innovative ideas, which reinforce the Guiding Principles, are encouraged.

III. Best and Promising Practices

A. Improve the Timely Transfer of Records

1. Develop and disseminate a checklist of necessary registration information and withdrawal processes.
 - a. Develop administrative procedures that address transfer of school records for students entering and leaving the system.
 - b. Develop a withdrawal procedure for high school students related to installation out-processing.
2. Provide the names of primary and alternate school personnel (include phone #, e-mail address position etc.) for additional information pertaining to the transfer of records.
3. Develop a comprehensive information campaign to inform parents of transfer of records procedures.
4. Post information contained on withdrawal documents on district Web sites.
5. Suggested administrative procedures for Transferring Records
 - a. A general withdrawal form can be generated at the campus most times during the school year without prior notification. This is usually sufficient for enrollment in another school. The school official (principal, assistant principal, or counselor) should sign the form documenting on the form those areas not cleared, if any.
 - b. In addition to the general withdrawal form, parents may request that they be provided records to hand carry with them. This request requires a 48 hour prior notice to ensure processing time and is available prior to 15 June and after 1 August of each school year from elementary and middle schools.
 - c. Because they are open all summer, the process is available at all times at the high schools. If requested, the following items should be provided to students or parents, as appropriate:
 - 1) Copy of report cards, or current grades in classes, if available.
 - 2) Copy of withdrawal document form, which includes the immunization record, completed course grades (9 week grades), identification of enrollment in special programs;
 - 3) Copy of any other records requested by parents, including any special program supporting documentation (*at no cost*)
 - 4) At times, special circumstances of a family may not allow for the 48-hour notification preferred. If this occurs, campuses need to respond to the situation with sensitivity and should make efforts to respond to the request.

B. Develop Systems to Ease Student Transition during the First Two Weeks of Enrollment

1. Share ideas for creating intentionally inviting school environments that are attuned to the needs of mobile military-connected students/families.
2. Establishing an institutionalized welcome program at each high school site.

Examples are:

 - a. Student and parent conference with counselor
 - b. Activities to ease into new school
 - 1) School tour
 - 2) Introduction to teachers, coaches, club sponsors
 - 3) Assignment of cafeteria/lunch partner
 - 4) Escort to bus

- c. Presentation of orientation packet
 - 1) Welcome brochure
 - 2) Map of school
 - 3) Student handbook
 - 4) Student organizer/planner
 - 5) Organization/club information
 - 6) School spirit items
 - 7) Pass to next dance/activity
- 3. Develop “virtual orientation” (school and installation Web sites)
 For example: Each school and military installation should consider having the following information on their Web site:
 - a. calendar
 - b. transition checklist
 - c. school registration form and registration packet
 - d. school counselor and school newsletter
 - e. area specific items
 - f. zoning areas
 - g. student handbook
 - h. school area map
 - i. link to MCEC Web site
 - j. School Liaison Officer email address and the services provided
 - k. Family Support Center/Army Community services available
 - l. Army Family Team Building Information
 - m. School Profile (test results, demographics, history of the school)
 - n. Sample portfolio including content example for student work (if applicable)
 - o. Sponsorship
- 4. Encourage counselors and/or transition specialists to participate in the MCEC Transition Counselor Institute
- 5. Conduct welcome events for new students/families
 - a. Dance honoring new students/families
 - b. Reception by principals, counselors
 - c. Pizza party
 - d. Feature new student names on media retrieval, opening exercises, school newsletter, etc.
- 6. Principal activities
 - a. Send welcome postcard to student and family
 - b. Provide name to PTA president
 - c. Tea/coke party with the principal
 - d. Present certificate of welcome

For Example: During the first two weeks of the regular school year there are potentially hundreds of “new” students/families. In August of 2001, Lawton Public Schools mail a card to the home of every enrolled student. The card requests that students/families *new to the Lawton-Fort Sill*

community return the card to the student's assigned school. This card provides the name and address of *new to the community* students/families to the principal. Hopefully, this prevents the student from being lost in a "sea" of incoming seventh graders or sophomores.

C. Promote Practices which Foster Access to Extracurricular Programs

1. Exchange information about the governing agencies requirements for extracurricular participation.
2. Encourage school system athletic and fine arts directors to network with each other on a consistent basis.
3. Suggestions for implementation of transition processes that encourage student participation:
 - a. Coaches, sponsors, and/or advisors are available to counsel incoming students year-round
 - b. A student interest inventory is offered through phone, fax, internet or mail to determine academic and non-academic interests to personalize information distribution on arrival and facilitate introductions to sponsors and coaches
 - c. Spring and fall orientations are conducted that include information regarding co-curricular and extra-curricular activities
 - d. Incoming students are interviewed by counselors to determine interests and guide them to matching activities
 - e. School Web pages include schedules, try-out time lines, activities, and contact information.
4. The school district may consider the following:
 - a. After meeting state requirements, schools offer open membership on a continuous basis
 - b. School officer elections occur in the fall
 - c. Perspective students auditioned via videotape for cheerleading
 - d. Spring induction is observed for Honor Societies (i.e. NHS, Art, Foreign Language)
 - e. Sports offerings are numerous enough to accommodate a year-round calendar
 - f. Cheerleading squads may be chosen mid-year as well as at the end of the year

D. Establish Procedures to Lessen the Adverse Impact of Moves from the End of Junior Year, as well as before, & during the Senior Year.

1. The school systems and installation partners should consider measures to mitigate the adverse impact of senior moves, such as:
 - a. Early resolution of class rank of arriving students to facilitate fair competition for honors
 - b. Conversion of grade point average (GPA) between losing and gaining school grading systems for the purpose of establishing class rank, competing for class honors, applying for post secondary education opportunities, etc.
 - c. Priority counseling to resolve graduation requirements and assist students/parents in accomplishing actions to obtain reciprocity for course credits, graduation certificates, senior year course selections, etc.
 - d. Providing post secondary education counseling to identify college/vocational-technical education opportunities and sources of potential financial assistance.
 - e. Priority placement into courses/classes essential for completion of graduation requirements.
 - f. Early identification and priority access to those extracurricular activities that will afford the transitioning student a greater opportunity for acceptance into post secondary education institutions.

- g. Encouraging parents to participate in early counseling sessions designed to facilitate a smooth and successful transition, as well as a productive senior year that provides the senior student with the opportunity to fulfill their secondary/post secondary educational goals.
 - h. Encouraging parent participation in “College Night” activities and other available forums intended to provide students with information upon which to base post-secondary education decisions.
 - i. Recognizing that those transition issues associated with the critical first two weeks of enrollment (*see MOA*) are of greatest significance to transitioning seniors.
2. Conduct surveys of recently transitioned senior students and parents to gain feedback useful for improving senior transition actions/processes.

E. Communicate Variations in the School Calendars and Schedules

- 1. Collaborate and post current/accurate calendars and school year events in a manner that is easy for parents to access.
- 2. Share calendar and school year information.
- 3. Define, explain, and illustrate the type(s) of high school schedule(s) in place at each high school.
- 4. Exchange ideas and strategies for “transition labs” or other systems for academic support specifically designed to ease the adverse impact of mid-year moves.

Note: It is important for the serving schools and installations to meet regularly to work on issues related to calendars and schedules and to clarify and comprehensively define the implications for each year.

- 5. For purposes of this document, the terms “calendar” and “schedules” are defined in scope by means of this comprehensive list of what those terms mean relative to school and installation documents. These include (but are not limited to):
 - a. Opening and close dates
 - b. Beginning of semester dates
 - c. Grading periods
 - d. Major Department of the Army, installation/community events
 - e. Graduation dates
 - f. Holidays and vacations
 - g. Extracurricular dates and tryout dates
 - h. Assessments (e.g. PSAT/SAT, state tests, graduation tests)
 - i. Enrollment dates
 - j. Summer school
 - k. Extended learning/ intersessions programs
- 6. Identify variations in schedules that it would be helpful to share with partners. For example block schedules are not the same from district to district. Many systems also have a version of block scheduling at the middle schools.
 - a. Systems and campuses will develop easy to access Web and print-based publications that provide detailed descriptions of each type of schedule used.
 - b. Systems and campuses will describe the processes available for transition support into and out of the scheduling systems in place at each campus

- c. Consider developing Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) for the schedules with the family in transition as the primary audience.
 7. Discuss and agree upon means by which basic information will be shared, from the Web page to hard copy materials for a welcome packet.
 8. Compose a general timeline and process for sharing and annually updating this information among the nine installations.
- F. Create and Implement Professional Development Systems
1. Exchanging the processes and products associated with the development and support of joint installation and school system professional development communities.
 2. Share strategies, resources, and effectiveness indicators.
 3. Provide joint "Understanding the Military Family" workshops by the installation and the schools. The Garrison/Base Commander may speak to school staffs that have a significant population of military students about how the military life and culture impact on students.
 4. Offer staff development courses that include instructional strategies for meeting the needs of a diverse student population.
 5. Installation and School System tours – Provide teachers from the post/base and the school system outside the gate an opportunity to tour the installation and the post/base schools, providing them a glimpse of a day in the life of the parents and their military students. These visits will facilitate the articulation of curriculum issues, expectations, and requirements for each school system.
 6. Handbooks — Develop a handbook for teachers to use as a reference, outlining the roles of the military units. Publications will be developed for the installation with the school (grade level or course) curriculum expectations and requirements articulated.
 7. Middle School Tours – Students from the post middle school will tour the high school in the adjacent county to provide a glimpse of a day in the life of a high school student.
 8. Middle School High School Night – Twice each year, in October and May, each of the high schools in the area visit the middle school on the installation. Principals, counselors, and coaches are available to talk with rising ninth graders about opportunities, expectations, and requirements for high school.
 9. Documents from the Army Education Summit held in July 2000 will be made available to school system personnel. These documents outline the ten (10) major transition issues and provide a context for teachers to understand the Army Secondary Education Transition Study.
 10. School districts present Parent Information Sessions, specifically including installation families in advertising the sessions. The sessions will feature various educational topics, i.e., Attention Deficit-Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), counseling groups in the schools, etc. The annual Military Parent Academy, a weekend seminar designed to offer parenting support, will be advertised to military parents who live off-post as well as those who reside on the installation.
 11. Institutionalize opportunities for parents and adopt-a-school units to be invited to visit and participate in the local schools.

12. Encourage mentor and tutor programs like Partners in Education Programs (PIE).
 13. Facilitate the use of Web sites between schools.
 14. Designate a staff member in each school to serve as liaison and coordinate with their counterpart at the installation. This individual will help to ensure school staffs have any available information regarding transition issues.
 15. School systems should consider sending counselors and/or professional campus- level academic advisors to MCEC's Transition Counselor Institutes in order to have a designated transition specialist in place at each high school that serves military students.
- G. Continue Strong, Child Centered Partnerships Between the Installation and Supporting Schools Participate in a coordinated effort between the SETS partners to design the critical components for creating, implementing and monitoring the viability and robustness of the mutual effort and progress on the agreement (see the MOA). Examples of such partnerships:
1. Establishment of a military child committee
 2. Consist of members of both agencies
 3. Meet regularly
 4. Establish a "Local Action Plan"
 5. Establish additional collaborative activities such as:
 - a. Mentor/internship programs
 - b. Voluntary advisory council
 - c. Parent-teachers organizations
 - d. Chapel youth organizations
 - e. Family counseling programs
 - f. Family action agencies
 - g. Join ministerial alliance
 - h. Speakers' bureau
 - i. Pool of installation presenters for school classrooms
 - j. Joint organization student leadership projects
 - k. Leadership retreats for elementary or secondary students
 - l. Soldier mentoring activities
 - m. Encourage military parent involvement in school activities
 - n. Provide clear information on the eligibility requirements for in state tuition.
 6. Consider establishment of ex-officio school board member or military advisor to the school board
 7. Consider establishment of installation liaison to school board
 8. Exchange ideas with other school systems for coordination of effort and discussion of new challenges and opportunities.

Examples: Additional Lawton-Fort Sill Projects are: **APLAS** (Army Partnership with Lawton Area Schools.) Units develop partnership with elementary schools and provide mentors for junior high school students. Military Installation co-facilitates summer leaderships project for 100 high school

students. Military parents are encouraged to attend school conferences and functions. **Wings of Eagles** provides Lawton-Fort Sill sixth-grade students a weekend (Friday-Sunday) retreat at Fort Sill to enhance the young people's self-confidence, leadership skills and self-esteem.

H. Provide Information Concerning Graduation Requirements

Consider adopting the following practices that articulates the scope and conditions for reciprocity of graduation requirements:

1. Permit the course as a substitute for state or Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) requirements. As long as state or DoDEA requirements are met, local requirements will be adjusted to support the student's transition.
2. A local waiver policy to include a standardized application form, a systematic review process, and flexible guidelines for approval. The waiver process will document how graduation requirements were met.
3. School officials will issue course credits to a student who transition near the end of a semester, as long as the student has passing grades.
4. In the event that a transitioning senior does not qualify for a diploma in the receiving school system, but can qualify in the sending school system, course and test credits will be transferred back to the sending school for issuance of the diploma.
5. Adopt a standardized matrix that depicts in a graphic representation the partner school systems' graduation requirements. School officials will update the matrix content annually and whenever a major revision occurs.

6. Inform school partners, parents and students about required state *exit level/end-of-course* testing and passing scores to improve probability of appropriate, timely placement in courses and programs. This information will be disseminated through system/installation Web sites and print media.

Note: The signatory partners will determine the process and responsible agents who will be required to maintain the "graduation requirements matrix" and distribute all updates. Adopt a policy of program continuity for a student enrolled in top tier diploma programs, such as a college/university preparatory program of study, and/or rigorous academic programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB). A student with satisfactory grades will not be required to re-qualify for these programs.

I. Provide Specialized Services for Mobile Students when Applying to and Finding Funding for Post Secondary Study

1. Share information with SETS Partners on methods that have worked in informing parents and students of the best methods for college and vocational/technical applications and the mobile student.
2. Ensure that every junior and/or senior student (and their parents) receives information about the college and vocational/technical application process, financial aid, available scholarships and grants for pursuing postsecondary education. Counselors and/or teachers provide models of completed applications, financial aid documents, scholarship and grant forms, and letters of recommendation. Include the military liaison in the distribution process.

3. Provide all-11th/12th grade students and their parents with printed information about what they will need for postsecondary educational pursuits and success. The document/handbook includes checklists, timelines, suspense dates, Web sites, phone numbers and names of contact persons at various local and state colleges/universities and at technical schools as well. The document/handbook is updated annually with assistance from counselors, other school personnel and college/university/technical school contacts. This document/handbook would be included in the welcome/orientation packet that all transfer students receive upon arrival at their new school. In addition, multiple copies of the document/handbook will be provided to the military liaison for distribution from that office.
4. Conduct a district-wide college night and individual school college nights as well to provide information and assistance for students and/or parents with college and/or vocational/technical applications and financial aid packets. Information about available scholarships and grants should also be provided. College and vocational/technical admissions professionals conduct all activities. Ensure that the military liaison is included on the mailing lists of all scholarship, grant, and financial award grantees. The military liaison can schedule and replicate this program possibly at their Youth Activities Center on the installation.
5. Hold career education/information seminars for transitioning students. Invite representatives from local colleges/universities/vocational-technical schools, civic groups and various companies that provide scholarships or financial assistance to interested students, such as the Kiwanis, IBM, Texas Instruments, Coca-Cola, What-a-Burger, Motorola, Dupont, Texaco, Service Merchandise, Wal-Mart and J. C. Penney. Keep the military liaison informed of the dates of these seminars or that individual could also schedule similar seminars at the installation.
6. Work with MCEC to inform the colleges and universities of the unique needs of military students related to (post secondary) application and funding.
 - a. Request that MCEC send copies of all documents that describe and detail the unique needs of military students to local college/university admissions personnel. (Local district/installation will provide addresses.)
 - b. Provide the name of the military liaison to the local college/university.
 - c. Create a local Task Force and/or Standing Committee that includes representation from MCEC, public education, the military liaison, local colleges/universities and vocational-technical schools to develop solutions to identified needs and to address issues affecting transitioning students. (Names of committee members would be included in the document/handbook that is distributed to all transitioning students.)
7. Train counselors and teachers on how to best assist a mobile student on preparing college and vocational/technical applications.
 - a. Ensure that all high school counselors and the military liaison are provided with information and training from the MCEC Transition Counselor Institute—provide videos, booklets, or other publications that can be distributed at local schools or on the installation. Counselors will in turn serve as resources/trainers for teachers.

- b. Provide assistance on completing college applications, choosing a career, pursuing financial aid and completing financial aid packets, writing resumes and themes for college entrance requirements, and securing letters of recommendation from former and current teachers and administrators. Training software could possibly be installed on one or more installation computers at the youth activities center.
- c. Partner with local colleges, universities, and technical schools to conduct orientation classes for local seniors. Create a mentoring program that matches successful college freshmen with local seniors to assist with the college application and financial aid process. Hold several program sessions on the military installation, if necessary.
- d. Use resources of the installation Education Center to provide information and assistance to parents and students—especially about careers and opportunities to finance post-secondary education through military service. Provide information about various funding sources, scholarships and grants that are available for special populations such as single parent families, military dependents, and minority groups.