

# EDUCATION

## Conference looks at education for 'military brats'

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**ATLANTA, Georgia (AP) -- Military kids typically change schools six to nine times before they graduate. Their paperwork gets lost. They're forced to repeat some studies or miss out on others.**

Education can be tough on the children of service members who move a lot or who have a parent deployed abroad. So a group of military parents and teachers are holding a three-day conference on how to ensure the children get a good education.

"A lot of people don't understand what we go through," said Kalie Larson, a high school junior who lives near Fort Hood, Texas, and is at her ninth school. "When I was younger I didn't have a lot of friends, to be honest with you."

Larson and others known as "military brats" visited the conference to share their experiences.

The meeting, which began Wednesday, was organized by a group called the Military Child Education Coalition. The group formed about eight years ago to improve schooling for the 1.8 million children of service members.

The group trains teachers in military towns to spot problems in the children of service members and lobbies the military to allow changes when possible.

Among the group's successes was an agreement five years ago by the Army and Air Force to allow soldiers and airmen to stay in one place when they have children entering their senior year, except for wartime combat assignments.

Teachers at the conference, many of whom have no personal military background, were looking for tips on how to reach out to kids who may feel shy or behind in their studies.

There to help was James Mitchell, superintendent in Groton, Connecticut, where 26 percent of students have a parent on active duty.

In Groton, new teachers are required to take a "Navy 101" class and visit the local installation so they can relate better to their students. The district has streamlined its records process so that it's faster to see what courses students have taken and what they still need.

The district also has joined MCEC's new "Student 2 Student" peer counseling program in which military students are paired with newcomers to help them with everything from where to sit at lunch to what to wear to homecoming.

"They're not different, they just have different needs," Mitchell said of the military kids.

The parent-teacher group is making military life easier for service members' families, said Wanda Cooper, who lives in Yokota, Japan, with two children and her Air Force husband.

Her kids, ages 13 and 19, have changed schools six times.

"They're changing and trying to figure out who they are naturally," she said. "And then we take 'em out and put them in another school -- in our case, a whole other culture."

Philip Denman can relate. A 17-year-old senior in Silverdale, Washington, he has changed schools five times. He remembers hating a new

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school "because everyone already had their cliques set."

But he's now a peer counselor and helps other military kids see the bright side of a globe-trotting life.

"I know some people who have stayed the same place all their lives, and I don't know how they do that," Denman said. "It's hard to be a military kid, but it can be pretty cool, too."

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