VISION STATEMENT:
To serve as a model of positive leadership and advocacy for ensuring inclusive, quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children.

MISSION STATEMENT:
To ensure inclusive, quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition.

GOALS:
1. Provide responsive and relevant support systems, resources, and products.
2. Expand the MCEC outreach through engagement, advocacy, and partnerships.
3. Execute a strategic communications plan.
4. Build a strong, sustainable, and financially sound organization.

The Independent Charities Seal of Excellence is awarded to the members of Independent Charities of America and Local Independent Charities of America that have, upon rigorous independent review, been able to certify, document, and demonstrate on an annual basis that they meet the highest standards of public accountability, program effectiveness, and cost effectiveness. These standards include those required by the U.S. Government for inclusion in the Combined Federal Campaign, probably the most exclusive fund drive in the world. Of the 1,000,000 charities operating in the United States today, it is estimated that fewer than 50,000, or 5 percent, meet or exceed these standards, and, of those, fewer than 2,000 have been awarded this Seal.

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# Features

## Hearts Apart Brings Families Together

Program within school provides support to students during times of stress and uncertainty.

## A 13-Year Old Top Gun

Future U.S. Air Force pilot gets to plunge into the action at a week-long Aviation Challenge camp at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala.

## Special Insert: Transitions College and Career Readiness Grades 4-8

Transitions from elementary to middle school and middle to high school present unique changes and challenges. A collection of articles and information to help your child navigate successfully.

## About the Cover:

“Freedom” by Jesse, Grade 5,
E.A. White Elementary School,
Fort Benning, Georgia
U.S. Army

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SAB Denotes Science Advisory Board Member

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www.MilitaryChild.org

ON THE move® 1
On behalf of the entire MCEC family, we want to wish each of you the very best in 2015. Inside you’ll read about some of the exciting programs and initiatives we’re conducting this year. As always, we welcome your continued support and much needed feedback… both critical to our mission.

The needs of the Military Child, to include the Family and Sponsor, will continue to be at the center of our efforts in working together with the military installations, the local education agencies, and the surrounding communities. Exciting times — thanks for your support! Military Kids — Our Nation’s Future!

General (Ret) Benjamin Griffin, USA
Chairman of the Board, Military Child Education Coalition

Growing a Community of Support

At MCEC, we strive to empower military and veteran-connected children and the community that surrounds them. This includes parents, educators, school professionals, and military, civic and business leaders…this includes YOU! Please join us as we work to meet the challenge of ensuring the children of our service men and women have everything they need to reach their full potential.

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

Your tax-deductible donation to MCEC funds programs for students, parents and professionals, providing vital peer and community support systems. MCEC will be honored to be the recipient of your charitable contribution designated in one of the following areas:

- Student/Youth Initiatives
- Parent Initiatives
- Educator/Professional Initiatives

Together, we will grow a community of support ... for the sake of the child.

For more information and to donate, go to:
http://www.militarychild.org/partners/growing-a-community-of-support
While much can be accomplished by caring individuals, together we make a tremendous impact, and that’s what this issue is all about - working together to serve the children of those who serve us all! We must not forget that, although the pace of deployments has changed, the transition challenges military and veteran-connected children face must remain a priority.

At MCEC, we strive to anticipate the changing needs of our kids. Our Science Advisory Board, comprised of incredibly talented, nationally recognized researchers, pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and developmental clinicians is focused on how we can best support our kids, and they’re undertaking new projects (p.24) to ensure services continue to meet evolving needs.

In this issue you’ll also read about efforts like the remarkable DoDEA K-12 Partnership Grants (p.14) directed at military-connected school districts and charter schools nationwide. We’ve highlighted programs like “Hearts Apart,” (p.5) and provided tips for better school engagement (p.20) to strengthen the community of support around our students.

Speaking of communities, MEC is delighted to unveil Homeroom (p.20), an interactive community we hope you’ll use to participate in discussions, ask questions, get resources and connect with other community members. Check out the conversations and information available at Homeroom.MilitaryChild.org!

Our amazing kids are featured throughout the magazine, and you can hear all about 13-year-old Mariah Stebbins’ week as a fighter pilot (p.12) and the true meaning of Sara Snelling’s souvenirs (p.4). It is a privilege to feature the children of our nation’s service members and veterans, and each year through our Call for the Arts, we highlight their many talents. Please encourage any military or veteran-connected student to submit art, essays, poetry, photos or video for an opportunity to be featured on a magazine cover, a calendar or in one of our many informative videos.

With your continued support, our reach will grow and new programs and services will be implemented...for the sake of the child.

In gratitude,
Dr. Mary M. Keller
President and CEO, Military Child Education Coalition

OUR NEW SERIES OF PARENT VIDEOS, the Learning Skills Toolbox, sponsored by the General Electric Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation can be seen on our youtube channel and at www.militarychild.org/parents-and-students/resources

www.MilitaryChild.org
The Little Things in Life

While memories can last a lifetime, the details may deteriorate due to aging. Some would argue that the details within a tangible object can also be diminished, but those details can still be seen and recollected. Since I was five my father has gone through three deployments to various places of the world and each time returns home with a hand crafted souvenir for each one of his children. While I do not have one specific item that is significant to me, the entirety of my collection of souvenirs resembles the tools in [the essay] “The Inheritance of Tools” because each of the objects has its own purpose or meaning.

My father’s first deployment was during my early elementary years, or kindergarten through second grade, to Iraq. At this time, I had no idea what was actually developing, but I did know that my dad was going on an extremely long “vacation.” To a five-year-old the concept of importance is almost nonexistent, but when I was informed that there was a possibility I may never see my father again, I began to cherish anything I could relating to this time. During his first deployment he was traveling often, so every location of interest his platoon stopped at he would get a small souvenir for my sister and me. One item that I became exceedingly fond of was a coloring book. While I could not read what was printed within the book because it was Arabic, I was fascinated with how the pictures were incredibly elaborate and read from right to left across the page, not left to right. The spine was similar to what would be made if sheets of paper were stapled in the middle and folded over the staples to make a booklet. Of course, as a five-year-old, I scribbled along every page in the coloring book not realizing how significant this would become in later years.

The most recent deployment was last year and would most likely not be considered a deployment, but by using military standards his two weeks spent in Africa was indeed considered a deployment. While I cannot specifically state what he was accomplishing in Botswana, I can say that he was instructing the Botswanian military with his expertise. During his stay in Botswana, he experienced a tour of the native species, such as lions and elephants, but also visited with a local village. In this village, he met a woman who made elaborate baskets and decided to return home with one for each of his children. The brown, white, and red basket I received has a distinguished wood fire smell and a lid that doesn’t properly fit into the bottom half to ensure the contents within the basket remains within.

Most military families would agree that it is not about the gifts they are given by their loved one but that their loved one returned home safely to give the gifts to them.

Once my dad returned home from Iraq, three years later he was to be deployed to Afghanistan for another two years. This deployment went through fifth grade to seventh grade, or the preteen “I’m better than you” stage everyone goes through. At this time, I was irritated that my family had to encounter yet another few years without my father, but when glancing at the bigger picture, he was just serving his country, something I should have supported. While we had more contact with him through this deployment, he would still send small souvenirs from the places his platoon traveled through. One of the most memorable items from this adventure was a hand-woven rug. To many, receiving a rug sounds boring and they would most likely be unappreciative of such a thing; the vivid colors and uneven stitch of it were too beautiful not to cherish. Even though my dad sent many rugs home during this deployment, this one particular maroon and navy rug remains in my room for my pure enjoyment and recollection of how I ended up with such a valuable item.

To my peers these items seem insignificant, but it is what has been encountered in order to own these items that is meaningful. Most military families would agree that it is not about the gifts they are given by their loved one but that their loved one returned home safely to give the gifts to them. Whether I am five or eighty-five, I will always relish the minute characteristics of each object for the mere fact that they were given from such an important person to me and that they come from incredibly poverty stricken, unindustrialized areas of the world and are still ravishing.
HEARTS APART Brings Families Together

DEBBIE SACK
Counselor, Eisenhower Elementary School
USD 207, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

IN 2003, IT BECAME APPARENT that students at Eisenhower Elementary School had concerns about their parent(s) being deployed to hazardous places. Troops from Fort Leavenworth hadn’t deployed in many years, so this was very different for our post and our school. We decided we needed a support group within our school to address some of the issues being experienced by our students. The school counselor at Eisenhower came up with an idea for the Hearts Apart program. The purpose and mission of this group is to create a caring and safe place for the students to express their feelings. The group is also one of camaraderie and togetherness where the children can share experiences and lean on one another for support. We also have a strong emphasis on sending communication to the deployed parents.

The Hearts Apart group at Eisenhower School is coordinated by the school counselor, Debbie Sack, and involves several parent volunteers. The group meets once or twice a month after school for activities like bowling, watching movies, making holiday presents to send to the deployed parent, and having parties, just to name a few. All of our sponsored activities are free for our families with a deployed service member. The Hearts Apart group also expanded to three other schools on Fort Leavenworth.

Each Hearts Apart student is given a deployment journal to log his or her feelings. There is also an envelope in the journal to hold special items to share with the parent when he or she returns. A kissing pillow is given to each child. These hand-stitched pillows are designed for use as a keepsake for the children and loved ones left behind by the departing soldier. The soldier kisses the pillow and gives one to each of his or her loved ones to hold onto until he or she returns from war. Each student in Hearts Apart also receives a bear dressed in a military uniform to serve as a comfort for the child.

At Eisenhower, we realize that many of our children are aching for loved ones who have been called to serve in other parts of the world. These children need support during times of stress and uncertainty, and our school does its best to play a vital role in helping children cope.

As a district, USD 207 Fort Leavenworth works very closely with the installation to be an integral part of the community and the mission on Fort Leavenworth. Not only do we strive to provide an exceptional education for the children of those protecting our freedoms and country, we also contribute to the closeness and family-like environment that is ever present at Fort Leavenworth Army Installation.

Art by Brynn • Grade 4, Stockwell Place Elementary • Bossier City, LA • US Air Force
Home as a Safe Place

LYNDA MACFARLAND
Author and Proud Army Wife and Mother
III Corps, Fort Hood, Texas

Sometimes as parents we observe the world around our children, and we are worried for them. Scary things are going on out there. Some are serious and some are common childhood experiences that are part of growing up. As parents, we wish we could shield our kids from so many hurts and disappointments, and from all real danger.

But we can’t, so we try to equip them as best we can. One thing I think many parents overlook is the real influence they have in their children’s lives. We teach them to brush their teeth, tie shoes, button and zip, and to ride a bike or swim. Many of us fail to realize, however, that we can also teach them that we know of a safe haven from the churning seas and blustery winds of life.

That safe haven is a home and family where they find unconditional love, acceptance of who they are, and appreciation for the unique person they are. If that child finds a family who encourages the free, but respectful, exchange of ideas and authentic praise when it is warranted, consequences for behavior when that is warranted, and plenty of good humor and hugs, a child will want to come home.

The child who feels safe and loved will share about their day - the good and the bad. He or she may seek a parent’s advice in a difficult situation if conditions have been set for sharing.

If we treat one another with respect, we foster an environment of harmony and support. Helping a family member can be as simple as setting the table or cleaning up after someone else made the effort and took the time to prepare a meal for everyone. Or it could be as crucial as figuring out together what to do about a bully at school.

A child who knows their parent will really listen will be more inclined to share and ask for support. Even if it is just to tell someone of a frustration or concern, not going it alone can be awfully comforting and can reduce stress in a child’s life. We have learned as adults that keeping something worrisome to ourselves increases our stress and makes it much less easy to bear. The same is true for our children.

We may say, “Of course we care for our child; we’re the parents,” but does your child know you care? You can directly tell your children you love them, but the smaller ways of listening, setting rules that you enforce for their health and safety and in consideration of others, attending to needs they cannot yet meet for themselves, are all concrete ways of showing that you care.

Kids need and want to know their limits, and providing those limits clearly and consistently also demonstrates your love for them. And it all provides that safe place for children to feel special when the world outside may treat them otherwise.
It began to seem as if the arrival of a new season was closely trailed by the arrival of a new moving truck; come filled with boxes, the vessel for which my family would spend two weeks packing a year’s worth of memories. And this pattern would continue for six years. It soon became second nature. My family would begin collecting all the memories created in one home to carry into a new house as spring gave way to the summer heat. To say that this situation was frustrating is a vast understatement. However, in the “Military Brat” Embraces Lifestyle

LAUREN ODUM
12th Grade, Bob Jones High, Madison City, Alabama
Semi-finalist for the National Achievement Scholarship

most basic relationship in a mere twelve months.

Therefore, from early on it became apparent that I was different. I was not able to reminisce in sharing kindergarten classes with the same kids who would eventually walk across the stage with me. To even state a hometown would have been a luxury. For a moment, I battled with my then unfortunate circumstances. It is something that is common amongst all of us military youth, a yearning to belong and find something that would somehow connect and relate us to the "Regular Kids." And if not kept in check, the feeling of being ostracized can soon transform into resentment and bitterness for a situation that ultimately cannot be changed.

I became especially angry. I stopped trying to make friends, and I closed myself off from numerous opportunities in fear that they would soon, like everything else, slip from my grasp the moment I felt myself getting comfortable. I was blind to the beauty that came along with being different. It took this last move, my sixth school in seven years, to fully appreciate the advantages and experiences that come along with calling myself a Military Youth.

My final move has left me dormant—and, oddly enough, a bit restless—for two years until I go off to college.

I was blind to the beauty that came along with being different.

Although the stability is a welcome change, in hindsight it is safe to say that had I not lacked the said stability in previous years, I would not be the person I am today.

Unlike the majority of my peers, I can appreciate cultures varying from my own because I have experienced them first hand. The value of sitting in French class and studying textbooks diminishes in comparison to actually roaming the halls of the Louvre Museum and interacting with people native to France. Not very many people can say they have actually tried to "do as the Romans do"

Continued on page 9...
Well, here we were again: new state, new town, new house, and new first day of school. This year, I began junior high (now called “middle”) school, seventh grade. I had lived through so many “first days” that I could get through this on autopilot….or so I thought.

This was the last move for our family on active duty. My dad had just retired after 20 years in the Army where he served two tours in Vietnam and was gone countless times for training and short tours of duty. For the first time, I might actually find a “best” friend. There was no more wondering which one of us would be moving. I might make a real friend that I could go through high school with and make homework! How terrible to be embarrassed because of good grades. Well, this was going to either be a tough year or one in which I learned about and embraced the people of a small town – maybe a little of both.

As a new teenager, I was excited about all the birthday parties, slumber parties, and movies I would be invited to by friends. This year marked the beginning of a little bit of freedom.

My mom told me that most people in this town had lived here their entire lives and so had their parents and grandparents. I could not imagine that life!

memories, the kind people write about in yearbooks.

But something was different about these kids. They stared at me as if I had something weird growing out of my head. No one spoke to me; they just stared. My mom told me that most people in this town had lived here their entire lives and so had their parents and grandparents. I could not imagine that life! I had moved so many times, stared at them, too. I tried to figure out why I did not fit in. I looked like them, I dressed like them, and I was the same age. So, what was the problem?

To top things off, I was called to the front of class one morning during Homeroom. I was the only student in the class to qualify for the National Honor Society. My grades from last year qualified me and, apparently, none of these kids took any books home or After all, I would be driving in just 3 years! To my great disappointment, I began to realize that birthday parties, slumber parties, and all other outings were taking place, but I was not invited. Again, my mom said things would change once people got to know me. I wondered how they would get to know me when they acted like I was from another planet.

Just as I was beginning to settle
into the routine of my schedule, I was introduced to the PE uniform. These required uniforms were the ugliest things you could put on your body! They were one piece, red prison jumpsuits. To make things worse (as if that was possible), since I stood at 4’2”, 80 pounds, mine was waaaaay too big. I looked like a short, fat ladybug. This outfit invited the wrath of a particularly mean girl who was also in my homeroom.

Wow, this was just what she needed to turn the teasing up a notch. She tormented me each morning in class and now we had to “change in” and “change out” in the same locker room. I quickly learned to be the first one in the locker room so I could get in a bathroom stall to change. However, this left my belongings fair game!

Once again, my mom said things would get better in time. You know what? They did! My daily life still had some struggles, and some of the mean girls still did their best to give me a hard time. But, I began to see that allowing others to direct my happiness, my habits, and my routines was making me miserable. I needed to just be me. I studied hard to maintain membership in the NHS, receiving a certificate each nine weeks in front of the class! I made the “A” Honor Roll, another trip to the front of the class! I also made a couple of friends along the way. As time passed, I ran for class officer, cheerleader and, as a 9th grade student, joined JROTC.

Along the way, I also began to see the beauty of small town life. Yes, there were times that I wanted to stay in my bedroom all day instead of going to school, but I went. There were times when I thought it was crazy to try out for clubs and organizations, but I did. The unspoken but important lesson my mom taught me was to not let others choose my attitude or my destiny; those were both in my hands.

Today, I look back to that first horrible year of junior high and realize those lessons continue to be helpful today. There will always be individuals who try to hold me down or hold me back. I know that they do not hold my destiny; I do. Thanks Mom!

while exploring the halls of the Colosseum. Moving so often has enhanced my social awareness and respect for diversity. I am cognizant of the fact that the world is so much more substantial than the four walls of a high school. Not only that, I am able to acclimate to nearly any situation, hence the reason I often associate myself with a chameleon. The “real world” value of being able to readjust rapidly to foreign environments is self-evident. But most of all, I have gained an outstanding appreciation of those who sacrifice their well-being for our country. It is humbling to be surrounded daily by the Army culture and come to the realization that I could be in a much more unfavorable situation like the brave soldiers fighting for us every day.

As graduation day approaches and I look back at my numerous locations and their accompanying memories, I have found myself to be content with my unique circumstances. Of course, it becomes difficult to not be able to share the long-lasting memories my peers have amongst one another. Almost like the Roman warriors within the Colosseum, I too am fighting my own battle. However, unlike those who have fallen within the arena, I believe I have come out of my personal combat zone with a resounding victory!
Space Camp

ASHLEY MERTSOCK
MCEC Space Camp Scholarship Winner

MY EXPERIENCE AT SPACE CAMP was unforgettable. When I first arrived, I was fascinated by the life-size replicas of rockets towering over the camp. As the week went on, I learned the name and significance of every one of those rockets. I also made my own rocket and watched it shoot high into the sky. I loved every minute at Space Camp; what I did, what I learned, and the awesome friendships I created.

In Space Camp there were so many things to do and see. The very first thing that happened was that I was put into a team that consisted of only people who were my age. My team was called Team Sierra Nevada, after one of the sponsors of the Camp. The reason we were split into teams was because during the week, each team had to complete two missions and was awarded points on how well they worked together. There were also several other activities we were scored on, such as how well we worked together in planning a colony on Mars, how we reacted to unexpected anomalies in our missions, and how we answered questions in the Space Camp Quiz Bowl. At the end of the week, the results were tallied and presented at an award ceremony in the main museum. Disappointingly, my team did not earn the most points; however, another activity each team had to do during the week was create a mission patch that represented the team as a whole. At the award ceremony, my team was awarded Best Patch Design by a real astronaut! I was very proud, because I was the one who wrote the paragraph that described our mission patch. That was the most exciting event that happened my whole time at Space Camp.

Even though every day at Space Camp was filled with activities, there was enough time set aside for us to learn the entire history of space exploration. I am glad I like history; otherwise, this lesson would have been very boring for me. Each day we had to sit down to be given a short lecture on a certain period in space exploration history. The history began with the invention of gunpowder by the ancient Chinese and ended with NASA’s plan to launch another Lunar Mission in the near future. The events in between included the history of the USA vs. USSR space race, the history of the rocket, and the history of NASA.

My favorite lecture was about the story of a book written by Jules Vern. The story goes that Jules Vern wrote a book in the late 1800s called From Earth to Moon. Many people read the book and were inspired by the idea of real-life space travel. As a result, intelligent people got great ideas, and the period of space exploration began. I love to read, so this story was very interesting to me. I hope to read the book this coming summer.

“I loved every minute at what I did, what I learned, friendships I created.”
Passion

I love to talk and discuss space exploration and other sciences, but a lot of my friends at school do not. Then, in Space Camp, everyone I met knew just as much about space as me, if not more. All day I was surrounded by discussions ranging from how to design a space craft that could fly to the outer reaches of space to how an astronaut would eat ice cream in space. I engaged in a few of these conversations and actually enjoyed myself. I even made two friends, with whom I still communicate today. I sometimes mention random facts about space to my friends in school, but I still only receive blank stares. Now I am planning on going back to Space Camp with the friends I made, next summer.

I cannot say this enough; I loved Space Camp. My experience was truly unforgettable. I would like to thank the MCEC Bernard Cutis Brown II Memorial Space Camp Scholarship for giving me this incredible opportunity. I had such an amazing time at Space Camp; I would encourage anyone to participate in this scholarship program. I will admit, hand writing the essay was very hard, but

Space Camp; and the awesome

I am glad I did it. If another chance like this came up again, I would surely write another essay. Once again, I thank the Bernard Curtis Brown II Memorial Space Camp Scholarship for the truly amazing experience of a lifetime.

MILITARY LIFE CAN ENCOURAGE YOUNG READERS

Reading is a critical life skill. We all know this statement to be true, but what if, as a parent, you can’t seem to motivate your child to read? You might wonder if there are other ways to help your child strengthen literacy skills...and there are actually quite a few ways to keep your child focused on language even if they aren’t picking up a book as often as you’d like.

Military life offers authentic ways to support literacy use. Here are some ideas to encourage reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing (all critical language processes):

- Each time your family prepares to move to a new duty station, ask your child to research and provide information on some aspect of the new installation and surrounding area. They could take notes on area parks, schools, youth leagues, and places to visit, etc.

- Create fact books on each new area where your family will be stationed. Children might enjoy identifying state facts and including information about things like sports teams that will provide links to connecting to the new location.

- Military families are often great travelers. Provide a journal (or some note-taking device) so students can take pictures and record the experience. Then, keep journals together so that there is a history of each duty station and all activities the family wishes to remember.

- The information gathered from research on new duty stations and places visited can be used to support other families as they move into your area or into a location you have lived in or visited. Encourage children to share their stories and experiences to help others transition.

- Under direct supervision, consider allowing your older children to leave reviews on travel websites that provide detailed information for other travelers to use in their planning. This requires children to focus their message and to use writing conventions.

SHARON D. MATTHEWS, PH.D.
Texas A&M University
A 13-Year-Old TOP GUN

Summer 2014 MCEC Space Camp Scholarship Recipient

JOAN GEARY
Contributing Writer, The Keene Sentinel

Last August, Mariah Stebbins spent a week flying an F/A-18 Hornet military fighter jet. She withstood powerful G-forces in a centrifuge, and was crowned Top Gun — last man standing — in a fierce aerial dog-fight contest.

It’s all part of her training as a future U.S. Air Force pilot. But for now, her military career is on hold. At 13, she isn’t even in high school yet.

“But, after that, I really want to join,” she said.

Stebbins, who lives in Winchester, did it all at a week-long Aviation Challenge camp at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Ala. An affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, it’s the official NASA Visitor Information Center for the renowned Marshall Space Flight Center.

The hands-on, educational program is designed specifically for young people interested in military aviation, and is structured military-style. Mariah was one of only three girls among the nearly 50 participants in her group. She wore a military battle dress uniform, slept in a same-sex barracks resembling a military bay on a space station, and dined in a mess hall while there.

Every day, she worked with a 15-member team. Besides flying a state-of-the-art simulated combat fighter jet, she trained intensively in simulated emergency helicopter crashes and zip- lined into a lake for simulated parachute water landings. She practiced land and water survival skills, and undertook a Navy SEALs special operations search-and-rescue mission.

“I really liked the survival training, and to be able to be in all the different simulators,” she said. “Right before graduation, we did a mission at night. We had to do an army crawl through the woods without being caught.”

Now in 8th grade, she’s a straight-A student at the Winchester School, where she plays on the soccer team. Her father and stepmother, Mike and Angela Stebbins, own a used car sales and service dealership adjacent to the family home, which Mike built. They’re also a military family.

For more than a dozen years, Angela Stebbins has served with the N.H. Air National Guard, and is assigned to Pease Air National Guard Base in Portsmouth. Until recently, she worked in public relations, writing for the base newspaper and quarterly magazine. After completing an accelerated training program in Texas, she’s now a dental assistant at the base. Like her peers, she’s on duty one weekend per month, and two weeks per year. She plans to continue until she meets the 20-year service requirement for retirement.

This article originally appeared in SentinelSource.com, the online version of The Keene Sentinel; Keene, New Hampshire.
TRANSITIONS

College & Career Readiness for Grades 4-8

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www.gefoundation.com
While the middle grades may seem too early to consider college-level – or even high school-level – course work, academic advisors suggest that it is not. Because each course level builds upon previous knowledge and skills, the selection of preparatory courses in the middle grades allows students to create a solid base for academic success in future high school courses.

Dr. David Conley, professor of Education Policy and Leadership and founder/director of the Center for Educational Policy Research at the University of Oregon, refers to this selection as “calibration of the progression of middle and high school courses” in careful preparation for post-secondary work. But Dr. Conley also cautions parents and educators that true preparation for college and careers requires a comprehensive approach that addresses all the areas where students must develop knowledge and skills. He identifies the four key areas that allow students to become increasingly capable of managing their own learning as:

| Key Cognitive Strategies           | Ways of thinking that are necessary for post-secondary work, things like formulating hypotheses, developing problem solving strategies, identifying sources, analyzing, evaluating, and organizing. |
| Key Content Knowledge             | The foundational content and big ideas that students must know well and retain. This also includes students’ understanding and acknowledgement of the value of this content and of their level of mastery. |
| Key Learning Skills & Techniques  | Two broad categories:   |
|                                  | • The first is student ownership of learning, to include goal setting, persistence, self-awareness, motivation, etc. |
|                                  | • The second is specific learning techniques and strategies, such as time management, study skills, test-taking skills, etc. |
| Key Transition Knowledge & Skills | Attainment of the knowledge and skills necessary for students to transition to the next level. This includes an understanding of the post-secondary admissions process, how to choose career fields, how to access resources and financial aid, and an acceptance of what is expected in the post-secondary environment. |

TRANSITIONS OCCUR AT CRITICAL POINTS in every student’s life: pre-school to elementary, elementary to middle school, middle to high school and high school to post-secondary schooling or work. For mobile military children, those transitions are compounded by the addition of new locations, districts and schools.

Much has been written about critical transitions for students at the secondary level, while not as much exists for students moving through the middle grades. However, studies quoted in a National Association of School Psychologists online article\(^2\) identify that one of most difficult transitions for all students is from elementary to middle school. This is a time when children’s bodies, cognitive functions and emotions are rapidly changing. Couple that with the requirement to leave the comfort of a generally small and relatively insular elementary to go to a larger, less-nurturing, and more chaotic middle school environment.

When queried, students who had recently transitioned to middle school reported the following fears:

- Getting to class on time
- Finding lockers
- Keeping up with materials
- Finding lunchrooms and bathrooms
- Getting on the right bus to go home
- Getting through crowded hallways
- Remembering which class to go to next

And their middle school teachers expressed additional challenges:

- Reduced parent involvement
- Multiple teachers
- No recess, no free time
- New grading standards and procedures; more long-range assignments
- More peer pressure, given more and older students in the school
- The need for students to accept more responsibility for their own actions
- Unrealistic parental expectations
- Lack of experience in dealing with extracurricular activities
- Adolescent physical development
- Social immaturity
- Lack of basic skills

\(^2\) http://www.nasponline.org/communications/spawareness/transition_elem2mid.pdf
The following checklist for students in grades 4-8 can help them develop a plan to successfully transition throughout the middle grades.

4th and 5th Grades to Middle School
- Work hard at your academics, making sure you have a grasp of all the basic concepts.
- **Take responsibility** for completion of homework and in-school projects. Don’t rely on parents and teachers to remind or prod you.
- Develop problem solving and study skills. Ask teachers, counselors and parents to assist you with these two skills that will be critical for middle school and beyond.
- Become involved in sports and organized groups. It’s important to learn leadership and team skills and how to balance study with outside activities.
- Talk with teachers, counselors, your parents and trusted older students about what middle school will be like.
- Schedule a visit to your future middle school during 5th grade.
- Visit with the middle school counselor to determine what courses you will take and what opportunities exist for electives and future high school credit. Fifth grade may seem early to worry about high school, but planning ahead will allow you the greatest flexibility.
- Begin exploring careers that interest you and find out what education is required.
- If you haven’t already, begin to create a portfolio that will centralize all key academic and extracurricular information. In addition to test scores, certificates and other official documents, keep track of names and contact information. This is especially important for mobile military students who may attend as many as nine schools in their academic career.

Middle School to High School*
- One of the most helpful strategies for highly mobile military children is to plan two years in advance. By doing so you will build time into your schedule to make any necessary changes that may arise. As an example, in the spring of your 8th grade year, develop your high school four-year plan with a high school counselor. Review the MCEC Recommended Academic Plan beforehand.
- **Challenge yourself by taking the most rigorous courses you can.** Some subjects, particularly math or foreign language, have predetermined sequences, so look ahead and make sure you are keeping your options open for the future.
- Look into taking high school classes, if possible. If you do, check into end-of-course tests as some schools require not only completion of a course but also a passing grade on an end-of-course test in order to award credit.
- Explore rigorous programs, such as AVID and IB programs, as well as pre-AP courses.
- Begin discussing and planning for college expenses with parents and counselors.
- Tests become more common now. Every time you take a standardized test, discuss the results with your counselor. Add all test scores and any test information to your portfolio.
- Build a solid base for both academics and extracurricular activities. What you do in high school directly impacts where you can go to college.
- Consider participating in the Junior Student 2 Student (JS2S) program sponsored by MCEC (if available).
- Investigate taking the SAT and ACT for practice only. Scores from these tests can be used to qualify for certain scholarships and recognitions, such as the Duke Talent Identification Program.
- During summers, attend camps of interest at local colleges. You’ll not only have fun but will also get a taste of life at that college.
- See summer school as an opportunity to fulfill requirements, explore a new subject, or build a stronger base in core subjects.
- Explore career fields. Work with a counselor to find out what high school courses are necessary to pursue certain careers.

* From the Military Child Education Coalition Chart Your Course:Roadmap to Success (Middle School)
Creating a Portfolio

Organizing a student’s keepsake papers can be the key to creating a low stress transition. It’s ideal to begin creating the portfolio very early in a child’s school life. But it becomes more important for children in the middle grades and especially for mobile military students who may attend as many as nine or ten schools. An organized portfolio can:

• Help mobile students by centralizing all information needed for enrollment and placement
• Provide a convenient method of information sharing
• Create a picture of the student
• Organize middle and high school years
• Simplify college applications

Creating a portfolio can be as simple as designating a folder or a file box for each child. Assess which items to keep by considering their potential value in easing a child’s transition during a move or during college applications:

• Personal and Academic Information
• Contact Information for Schools and Teachers
• Personal Accomplishments
• Extracurricular Activities
• Letters of Recommendation
• Work Experience
• Special Skills, Interests and Talents
• Essays

Creating a Portfolio

Homework Tips for Parents

Math Homework Tips for Parents

☐ Encourage your child to use a daily math assignment book.
☐ Follow the progress your child is making in math. Check with your child daily about his homework.
☐ If you don’t understand your child’s math assignments, engage in frequent communication with his or her teacher.
☐ If your child is experiencing problems in math, contact the teacher to learn whether he or she is working at grade level and what can be done at home to help improve academic progress.
☐ Request that your child’s teacher schedule after-school math tutoring sessions if your child really needs help.
☐ Advocate with the principal for the use of research-based peer tutoring programs for math. These tutoring programs have proven results and students typically enjoy them.
☐ Use household chores as opportunities for reinforcing math learning such as cooking and repair activities.
☐ Try to be aware of how your child is being taught math and don’t teach strategies and shortcuts that conflict with the approach the teacher is using. Check in with the teacher and ask what you can do to help. Ask the teacher about online resources that you can use with your child at home.
☐ At the beginning of the year, ask your child’s teacher for a list of suggestions that will enable you to help your child with math homework.

Reading Homework Tips for Parents

☐ Have your child read aloud to you every night.
☐ Choose a quiet place, free from distractions, for your child to do his nightly reading assignments.
☐ As your child reads, point out spelling and sound patterns such as cat, pat, hat.
☐ When your child reads aloud to you and makes a mistake, point out the words she has missed and help her to read the word correctly.
☐ After your child has stopped to correct a word he has read, have him go back and reread the entire sentence from the beginning to make sure he understands the sentence.
☐ Ask your child to tell you in her own words what happened in a story.
☐ Check that your child understands what he is reading; occasionally pause and ask your child questions about the characters and events in the story.
☐ Ask your child why she thinks a character acted in a certain way and ask your child to support her answer with information from the story.
☐ Before getting to the end of a story, ask your child what he thinks will happen next and why.

www.MilitaryChild.org
PARENTS ARE NATURALLY CONCERNED about their children’s academic progress, particularly in Math and English Language Arts, the two building blocks of all other academic subjects. With all 50 states and the Department of Defense schools having adopted College and Career-Ready Standards (identified as Common Core Standards in most states), classrooms have implemented more academic rigor, greater collaboration among students, and increased critical thinking.

While standards (academic expectations) may be similar across all 50 states, curriculum (the way that subjects are taught) is not. Each district, and in some cases each school, determines its own curriculum, including the choice of textbooks and other resources. While this allows great autonomy for the states and districts, it often leaves parents at a loss in determining whether children have met the grade-level standards. This is particularly important for mobile military children who frequently move across district and state lines where standards may be the same but curriculum is different.

The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) have acknowledged this and created online downloadable toolkits to assist parents in understanding the standards and evaluating their children’s progress. Both organizations have created a toolkit for each grade (K-8 and High School) for Math and English Language Arts, designed for English- and Spanish-speaking parents. Each grade-level packet includes an overview of the standards, what to expect their children should learn at that grade-level, how to discuss their children’s progress with the teacher and how to enhance that learning at home.
Parents’ Guide to Student Success

This guide includes:

• An overview of some of the key things your child will learn in English/Literacy and Math in Kindergarten through High School
• Ideas for activities to help your child learn at home
• Topics of discussion for talking to your child’s teacher about his or her academic progress

Grades: Kindergarten-High School

PTA Parents’ Guide to Student Success

http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583

- ELA and Math at each grade-level (K-12)
- Written in English and Spanish
- Activities to do at home
- Ideas at each level to talk with teachers about a child’s academic success

Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) Parent Roadmaps

http://www.cgcs.org/Page/328

- Digital and pdf in English and Spanish
- Divided by grade level into ELA and Math
- What your child will be learning in each grade (including a 3-year snapshot for reference)
- Partnering with your child’s teacher
- Helping your child learn outside the classroom

Additional Resources

Achievethecore.org
Math Moves U
Khan Academy
Ask Dr. Math
Tutor.com
Math Playground
Purple Math
Illustrative Math

http://achievethecore.org/common-core-intro-for-parents
http://www.mathmovesu.com/
https://www.khanacademy.org/
http://mathforum.org/dr.math/
http://www.tutor.com/
http://www.mathplayground.com/
http://www.purplemath.com/
https://www.illustrativemathematics.org/

www.MilitaryChild.org
It seems only logical that parent involvement enhances student success. Rigorous research, casual studies and anecdotal reports all confirm that students are more likely to be successful in school when a parent is engaged.
Studies have found that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, are more likely to:

• Earn high grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs,
• Pass their classes, earn credits and be promoted,
• Attend school regularly, and
• Graduate to go on to postsecondary education.³

America’s Promise Alliance, founded by General (Ret) and Mrs. Colin Powell, addresses parent involvement within their long-term strategy. They look to four specific parent goals, no matter the age or demographic situation of a child. They have developed online toolkits, designed for parents, around each point:

✓ Attendance Every Day: Ensure that children go to school regularly
✓ Achievement Every Year: Monitor and help children make satisfactory progress each year
✓ Attainment Over Time: Set high expectations for children and plan for attaining their long-term goals
✓ Advocacy For All: Empower parents and families to improve opportunities for excellence in education⁴

The parent’s method of involvement changes as children mature in their educational journey. Early childhood and primary grade parents are likely to be involved inside the classroom and with regular homework assistance. As their children progress, successful parent support becomes more focused on guidance and support of post-secondary goals.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) addresses the need for parents of all children to interact with their teachers. Parents should engage these teachers when concerns pop up, as evidenced by frequent homework issues or changes in a child’s attitude about school. Communicating these concerns early can sometimes head off bigger problems. The article states that many parents feel the need to wait until the official parent/teacher conference before raising concerns. However, given multiple electronic modes of communication available to teachers and parents, there is no reason to let a concern go unaddressed.⁶

As their children progress, successful parent support becomes more focused on guidance and support of post-secondary goals.

⁴ http://www.americaspromise.org/parent-engagement-toolkit
What should I be when I grow up?

The best way to choose a job for which you are well suited is to KNOW YOURSELF! You can help your child get to know him or herself by:

- Talking to your child about your own work.
- Talking about careers found in books and on television is a great conversation starter. This opportunity allows you to ask questions such as the following:
  - Would you like to work on a team?
  - Would you rather work indoors or outdoors?
  - Would you like to work with computers or people?
- Encouraging your student to participate in camps or other summer programs that give information about careers. You can search the Internet for programs in your area. Older students can apply for summer internships or perform volunteer work that will provide experience with a particular career.
- Taking your child to visit colleges (public, private and community colleges as well as technical programs and trade schools) to help him or her find the perfect fit.
Next Step…
Develop your Knowledge.

- Explore your child’s current school interests and activities. Ask questions about his or her interests, hobbies, preferred activities, and sources of pride. Help your child make connections between school subjects and potential career interests.

- Have your child take a career interest survey. You can find several helpful career interest tools by searching online for “career interest survey for students.” A career interest inventory is a tool used to allow your child to describe his or her personality and preferred activities. At the end of the survey, the student is provided with a list of careers that are a match for his or her skills and interests.

- Ask yourself if your child’s future plans are realistic. What is the outlook for job availability in your child’s chosen career?

- School counselors within your child’s school are knowledgeable about the many career paths available. They can provide you with a list of careers to explore along with other career learning opportunities. In addition, school counselors can assist with developing your child’s academic and career plan as early as middle school.

Some helpful websites:

**VIRGINIA EDUCATION WIZARD**
www.vawizard.org/vccs/Main.action
Provides information to help you select and pursue a career that suits you

**VIRGINIA VIEW**
www.vacareerview.org
Includes games and activities for kids in grades K-8 and lots of info for parents

**BUREAU OF LABOR AND STATISTICS OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK**
www.bls.gov/ooh
A great source for high school students to do career investigation

**STEM EDUCATION ALLIANCE**
www.stemeducation.org
Provides career resources such as videos and articles
Bridging the Great Homework Divide: A solutions guide for parents of middle school students

IN A RECENT SURVEY, parents and middle school students reported that they are challenged by the demands of homework. Responses to the survey, titled The Great Homework Divide, indicate that students and their parents are struggling to adjust to the middle school workload, which can be both heavier and more varied than previously experienced by these students in a typical elementary school:

- Two-thirds of parents (66 percent) say that their middle school student seeks their help with homework.
- More than half of middle school students (57 percent) and their parents (59 percent) report that parents spend at least one hour a night helping with homework.
- Parents also report helping middle school students with homework, on average, two and one-half nights a week.

Reasons for Homework
Teachers assign homework for many reasons—to give students an opportunity to review class lessons, to measure students' understanding of those lessons, and to help students extend their learning by finding and using new information on a subject. Homework can be an extension of the classroom; it allows students to practice applying skills they have already learned. Homework also can benefit parents because it offers them a chance to learn what their children are expected to accomplish during the school year.

A Heavier Middle School Homework Load
Frequently, middle school teachers in all subjects assign nightly homework—and some teachers may add longer term projects, such as research papers, projects, and reports. The Great Homework Divide survey found the average sixth grader has 60–90 minutes of homework per night, and seventh and eighth graders can have homework that requires them to devote as much as two hours. More homework from more teachers requires students to develop organizational and planning skills. Parents can play an important role in their children's success by providing a support system for meeting homework requirements.

Stricter Homework Policies
Middle school students often face more exacting standards about how homework should be completed and the effect of homework on final grades than they previously experienced in elementary school. Many middle school teachers mandate that assignments be turned in on time and in a specific style or format. It is not uncommon for a teacher in middle school to give zero credit for late homework or to grade down for not following homework guidelines.

It is important for parents and teachers to work as a team when it comes to students' completing homework and receiving a quality public education and life-long learning experiences. Ensuring students' success is a shared responsibility. We have compiled some tips to help ease the challenges of the homework transition for middle school students:

1. Be prepared
   - Assume your child will have studying to do every night.
   - Set up a comfortable location for doing homework.
   - Make sure your child has the necessary supplies.
   - Work with your child's outside activity schedule and preferences when setting up a regular homework time.

2. Understand teachers' policies and expectations
   - Ensure that your child knows each teacher's homework policy.
   - Encourage your child to ask questions.
   - Remind your child to visit teachers if needed.

3. Be available and teach by example
   - Make yourself available during homework time.
   - Stop by and check in while your child does homework, offering your support and advice.
   - Show interest in your child's schoolwork and discuss what your child is learning.
   - Watch for signs of failure or frustration.

4. Identify other resources
   - Don't hesitate to line up extra support if needed.
   - Get to know the guidance counselors and other school employees.
   - Encourage your child to find homework buddies.

5. Stay in touch with your children's teachers
   - E-mail can be an effective way to maintain regular contact with middle school teachers.
   - Let teachers know of any significant changes at home.
   - Get involved where you can.

6. Nurture your child's interests
   - Inspire learning outside of school.
   - Find activities that parallel what your child is studying in school.

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4 million reasons to join - serving the children of those who serve us all.

Membership in Military Child Education Coalition® (MCEC®) demonstrates your support of military and veteran-connected children!

**Individual:**
Seeking to create an even more inclusive and broader community while providing the necessary resources with individual engagement, we’ve reflagged individual membership into three new membership categories:

- **Community Member** - A no-cost membership that never expires and comes with full access to digital MCEC resources and publications - the best of everything for free.
- **Sustaining Member** - Join at $25 annually or $60 for three years and receive a print copy of the annual MCEC calendar and special topic or new publications based on subject; digital copies of material and publications; membership letter for CDA certification; National Training Seminar registration discount rate.
- **Champion Member** - Join at $250 and become a member for life; receive print copies of *On the Move* magazine, annual MCEC calendar and special topic or new publications; digital copies of all other material and publications; National Training Seminar registration discount rate.

**Business & Organization:**
By popular request, we’ve added a lifetime member option for Business & Organization and Corporate categories!

- **Business & Organization Member** - Join at $75 annually or $200 for three years and receive print copies of *On the Move* magazine, annual MCEC calendar and special topic or new publications; digital copies of all other material and publications; National Training Seminar registration discount rate; Lifetime members at $2,000 receive all benefits indefinitely.

**Corporate:**
- **Corporate Member** - Join at $1,500 annually or $3,000 for three years and receive print copies of *On the Move* magazine, annual MCEC calendar and special topic or new publications; digital copies of all other material and publications; National Training Seminar complimentary registration; Lifetime members at $50,000 receive all benefits indefinitely.

**College & University/School District/Military Installation:**
By popular request, we’ve included colleges & universities with school districts and military installations as voting members and established a new category of membership

- **Associate Member** - Join at $100 annually or $275 for three years and receive print copies of *On the Move* magazine, annual MCEC calendar and special topic or new publications; digital copies of all other material and publications; National Training Seminar registration discount rate; MCEC voting member.
- **Patron Member** - Join at $750 annually or $1,500 for three years and receive print copies of *On the Move* magazine, annual MCEC calendar and special topic or new publications; digital copies of all other material and publications; National Training Seminar registration scholarships; MCEC voting member.

**DO YOU WANT TO JOIN MCEC, update your membership or contact information, or have questions?**
Go to [www.MilitaryChild.org/login](http://www.MilitaryChild.org/login), or email Membership@MilitaryChild.org.
ON OCTOBER 1ST, 2014, Ms. Kathleen Facon CIV OSD/DoDEA announced that DoDEA had been able to continue its partnership with military-connected public school districts through the award of 44 new grants totaling over 46 million dollars to military-connected school districts and charter schools nationwide. Ms. Falcon shared in a communications release to Service Partners and Colleagues that, “Our leadership recognized the value of providing ongoing education programs and transition support services to military-connected school districts and therefore provided $46.7 million for Fiscal Year 14 so that we were able to continue to impact more than 93,000 military students in 550 public schools.”

The DoDEA K-12 Partnership Program originated in fiscal year 2007, when the DoDEA received the authority through the John Warner National Defense Fund to work in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education to ease the transitional stress of military-connected students moving between DoDEA schools and public schools in civilian communities. A grant pilot program was funded in 2008 to support STEM initiatives in Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and since 2009, partnership grants across the nation have ranged from 35 million to 65 million annually. The DoDEA Educational Partnership has worked with public schools to promote high quality education, seamless transitions, and deployment support through outreach and partnership development according to the DoDEA K12 Partnership website.

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is proud to recognize that many recipients of the Pete Taylor Partnership of Excellence Awards have been supported in 2014 and in past years with DoDEA K-12 Partnership grant awards. Three of the five Pete Taylor awardees for 2014 have previously received DoDEA support that help to lead the development of the sustainable, exemplary partnership programs MCEC recognizes annually.

In addition, seven school districts that were listed in the Higher Education category of the MCEC Pete Taylor 2014 awards as partners, received a total of 16 DoDEA Partnership grants between 2008 and 2014, with four new 2014 grants awarded in the communities these partnerships serve.
In 2014, in addition to expanding on the Military K-12 Partnership goals of creating new learning opportunities in STEM, strategic foreign languages, wellness, and socio-emotional support, DoDEA invitation only grants had an emphasis on supporting students with special education needs. In Chesapeake Public Schools in Virginia, the focus of their first DoDEA grant will be on literacy programs and strategies through professional development and promising practices. The MCEC Tell Me a Story (TMAS) Program will also engage parents and children with strategies to use literature to address difficult topics such as deployment, separation, and transitions with special needs children, who often find these topics difficult to process.

**2014 GRANTEE HIGHLIGHTS**

- **Clover Park School District in Washington State, near Joint Base Lewis McChord**, has received a fourth DoDEA Partnership award. Their three-year, 2014 award of $1,755,000 will focus on math and science achievement utilizing technology and engineering methods and provide teachers with professional development opportunities in science, engineering practices, and computer science. The grant is also intended to improve each student’s sense of community, personal responsibility, and well being through further development and expansion of positive school culture building programs. “These grants have been helpful in improving academic and support services to the district’s military-connected student population, strengthening relations between schools and families, and cementing the partnership between the district and Joint Base Lewis-McChord,” said Maria Flores, supervisor of curriculum and instruction.

- **The North Kitsap School District in Poulsbo, Washington near Naval Base Kitsap**, will expand their kindergarten through fifth grade science program, funded through a previous 2011 DoDEA Partnership grant, into a comprehensive K-12 program using their three year $750,000 grant to build capacity for the entire district. This project will improve secondary science instruction, increase teacher content knowledge, and review current instructional materials at both the secondary and elementary levels. Kitsap will add a second science coach for the 10 schools included in the grant. The project will also fund stipends for a science leader at every building to work with a science coach, support ongoing grade level/department work, and sustain the project goals.

- **The 2014 DoDEA award of $1,755,000 to Madison City Schools in Madison, Alabama near the Redstone Arsenal** will fund: SOS – Strategies of Success – Mathematics: College and Career Ready Focus. “With the DoDEA grant funds, the district is in a position to provide excellent professional development for teachers and administration in effective technology integration, instructional strategies, and college and career ready standards,” according to School Superintendent, Dr. Dee Fowler. Professional development learning communities and instructional coaching will be expanded to introduce and reinforce desired changes in the classroom. The grant will enhance the district’s socio-emotional support for students through additional counselors and the Student 2 Student (S2S) initiative. Madison City is also investing other resources such as MCEC’s SPARC training (Strength, Potential, Aspirations, Resourcefulness, and Confidence). SPARC will further help military-connected students and others to develop skills and identify their interests, according to a district press release on October 3, 2014.

“With the DoDEA grant funds, the district is in a position to provide excellent professional development for teachers and administration in effective technology integration, instructional strategies, and college and career ready standards.”
Teacher Serves as Advocate, Creates Tutoring Program

TERRY DOUGHERTY
Teacher, Galloway Township, NJ

Being a military spouse of 30 years was a significant influence on my decision to become a teacher. I have had experience with many school districts throughout the country, as we were transferred to a new base every three years. Each time we moved, my resilient children had to face the demanding nature of military life.

They attended many schools and were held to different academic standards depending on the state. They often fell behind in math and reading. Thankfully, the Common Core State Standards are addressing some of these issues.

I came to realize just how important it was to obtain the receiving district’s curriculum and pacing guides and work with my children prior to transferring. This strategy proved to be effective, and I encourage other military families to do the same.

Upon moving to the new school district, my children were functioning at or above grade level. As a parent, it was devastating to know that a teacher did not have high expectations for my “transient” children, so I assumed the role of parent advocate very quickly.

I have turned that position into a positive experience. My expectations are high for all my students, and I am consistently differentiating instruction to help them reach their goals. The children in my classroom work diligently, recognizing that I am there to support them. It is remarkable to see their self-confidence flourishing throughout this process.

My goal in creating the free military child tutoring program, They are Heroes Too! was to give military children and their families a voice in our community and programs that they needed. There were no programs for my children. Certified teachers and college students volunteer their time to work with our military-connected children. This gives them the opportunity for one-on-one instruction in areas of remedial need that may have been exacerbated by their transient lifestyle. The children start school in September more confident, academically and socially.

Military-connected children are embedded throughout communities everywhere. As the National Guard and Reserve continue to be activated, military personnel are no longer just attached to large
bases. They are our neighbors. It’s important we remember the sacrifices all of our military-connected children face.

Learn more about They are Heroes Too! at: www.freemilitarytutoring.org

Terry Dougherty has been teaching for fourteen years in Galloway Township, NJ. She is the 2014 Atlantic County New Jersey Teacher of the Year and also won a nationwide teaching contest, The Great American Teach Off, which recognized her free military child tutoring program.

In Pensacola, Florida near Eglin AFB and NAS Pensacola, the three year DoDEA Partnership award of $1,620,000 to Escambia County School District will fund a program called Tracking the Troops with Military Precision: Shipshape Students Marching Forward with STEM. This program will provide current technology and physical fitness to go hand-in-hand to help increase military dependent student interest and achievement in the areas of mathematics and science. Each school will utilize grant monies to improve academic achievement and overall student wellness in a variety of initiatives that include greater infusion of technology into classroom instruction, enhanced physical education instruction, after-school mathematics and science enrichment, and student-maintained community gardens. Students will also be provided opportunities to attend weeklong summer camps onboard the National Museum of Naval Aviation’s Flight Adventure Deck and the National Flight Academy—both housed on Naval Air Station Pensacola.

Anchorage School District, serving families from Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base, will start Project Connect with their $1,747,157 DoDEA Partnership Grant. The program will develop the capacity of teachers in six Meade-area schools to analyze achievement gaps in reading and math between disabled and non-disabled students. Once there is a thorough comprehension of the gaps, teachers will increase the utilization of data from formative assessments (including student self-assessments) to differentiate instruction and increase student mastery. Ongoing data collection and analysis will help teachers identify which students are struggling and determine what skills to pre-teach or reteach through specialized instruction.

The Davis School District in Utah, near Hill Air Force Base, was awarded $675,000 for a math/science initiative at Hill Field Elementary School. The project will provide enriched experiences for students through hands-on activities, including access to technologies, tools, and materials not normally accessible to these elementary students. These opportunities, coupled with targeted staff development and curricular alignment in grades 4 through 6, and also coordination with secondary STEM curriculum will provide real-world skills developed through application of current and emerging technologies.

Savannah-Chatham School District serving families from Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Air Field was awarded a grant of $911,084 to implement Continuous Opportunities for Reading Progress and Success (Reading CORPS). This project will supplement instruction provided in the general curriculum and provide additional assistance to students in meeting the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards in reading as it impacts math. Reading CORPS students will participate in 5-10 segments a week of direct instruction based on individual student needs. CORPS teachers will provide direct instruction through SRA Reading Mastery and blended learning from Compass Learning.
Growing up in a military family can offer a unique kind of education. Military-connected children are often recognized for their resilience, patriotism, hardiness, and general ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances. The skills I learned along the way help me to not only be a better trainer but also to deal with the bumps in the road that are an inherent part of traveling for a job. From an early age, I learned the importance of teamwork, perseverance, expecting the unexpected, and having an appreciation for new experiences.

When a family is getting ready to PCS, they have to work together to pull it off successfully. Whether you’re six, and your job is to pare down your toy box, or you’re sixteen and you actually get to help drive the family cars to the next duty station—a job, I think it’s worth noting, that I was never entrusted with—everyone has a job to do, and everyone has to be able to depend on each other. The same applies to training, because no matter how seasoned a trainer is, to some degree, we have to be able to depend on each other. It’s not uncommon to arrive at a training site having never met the person that you’ll be working with for the next two days. We have to trust that our partner will not only be prepared, but also that we will work well enough together that our training participants will have a positive experience. The MCEC trainers are very lucky to have great support from the professional development staff who coordinate all of the moving pieces (trainers included) to ensure that all of the logistics are in place. Our trainings are so well regarded because we have experts working to write meaningful and relevant curriculum. Indeed, if a training is successful, it’s testament to the hard work put in by the wonderful crew back in Harker Heights.

I count myself among the many “Army brats” who would tell you that one of the best parts of growing up in a military family is getting to see so many places. Being a trainer allows me to continue to travel to all of the amazing places that MCEC goes (which, in case you didn’t know,}

Now live!  Our Interactive Community: Homeroom.MilitaryChild.org

MCEC is proud to unveil Homeroom, an interactive tool and helpful resource for anyone interested in supporting military and veteran-connected kids.

This brand new platform is a great place to participate in discussions, ask questions, and connect with community members. Homeroom also has an ever-growing list of downloadable, easily accessed resources.

Drop into Homeroom, leave a comment, post a resource or share your experience—no matter where you are located, Homeroom will be there to provide a place to gather in support of our great kids. This easy to use platform is available for smartphones, tablets, or computers. Check it out at Homeroom.MilitaryChild.org!
is just about everywhere)! Whether my plane touches down in Tokyo, Tumon, or Tallahassee, I know that a new adventure awaits. While certain locations certainly seem to offer more “exotic” appeal, I’ve found that there’s always something special to discover in a new city. The training participants are always eager to share something special about their community, whether it’s a beautiful walking trail, a brewery that offers free tours, or a great restaurant that specializes in local fare, so it’s not hard to find a way to kill some time.

Any life skills one has acquired will surely be tested and honed if one has the opportunity to travel via airplane. In the literal hands of the TSA, we learn that our sense of dignity can be easily compromised. Then, we must push those indignities of recent memory aside when we get to the gate and use our negotiating skills and sweet-talking as necessary to score some extra leg room on the upcoming flight. Once on the plane, there aren’t a lot of perky flight attendants and well-dressed business people. It’s mostly just sweatpants, communicable disease, and loud cell-phone talkers. The concept of resilience comes to mind. Exercising this resilience, and remembering that even the most miserable flight can’t last forever, makes the situation just a little more bearable.

As unpredictable as air travel is, it’s nothing compared to any number of weather events that can threaten a training. It’s going to take a lot more than a little rain or imminent blizzard to call off a training. The MCEC road warriors (as we are lovingly referred to) swap stories about “nightmare” trainings where in we were forced to train during a tornado, without power, while everyone crouched under their tables. Or, at the very least, having to tread through some snow in inappropriate footwear. However, the participants who brave the elements to come to a training event make it all worth while. It’s encouraging that we have participants so dedicated that they would brave the elements to attend the event.

Training participants come from many different disciplines and offer a myriad of perspectives. Each community has its unique attributes and challenges that tend to shape how exactly they might use the information gleaned from that particular training event. The quality that they all share is that they want to learn how to better support the military-connected children that they serve. I think that is why professional development is so important. With every training, we have the opportunity to educate the people who have dedicated their lives to helping children. Our participants, whether there by choice or not (and it’s true that the latter are occasionally a tougher bunch to wrangle than the former), give us their time and attention for a day or two. Our only means of acknowledging this sacrifice is to provide the most quality training experience possible.

There’s much that seems to divide this country. A state gets colored blue or red, and based on that we assume a lot about the people who live there. It’s true that not every training participant sees eye-to-eye with us or with the other people in the class. But more often than not, those differences fade. It’s encouraging when 50 people put their differences aside, for the sake of the child. It’s also a comfort to know that no matter where a military family gets stationed, MCEC will follow, ensuring that their new community is equipped to support them. Because when it comes to supporting children, we really are in this together.
Understanding School District Organization
Best Practices

Bill Harrison, Retired Superintendent

The Garrison Commanders at Fort Bragg held quarterly meetings with the superintendents of school systems serving the post. The meetings were informative and productive and solidified the relationship between the post and the school systems. Each superintendent provided an update on their system. At each meeting one of the school systems would provide a presentation on “best practices” in serving military children. In addition, the Garrison Commander would share resources available through the Army and bring in outside resources from time to time.

As the superintendent of a system serving approximately 16,000 military students, I met with the Commander on a frequent basis. In my mind, the best practice is frequent face-to-face communication.

Building School District Relationships
Strong Relationship is Key to Success

Robert Muller, Ph.D., Professor, Retired Superintendent

Building school district relationships cannot be overstated in terms of importance. The more closely the installation and school district work throughout the various levels of the organization toward a common purpose of educating students, the more effective the effort will be.

Additionally, having strong relations with the installation in times of crisis becomes priceless. The ability of the superintendent to pick up the phone and contact a member of the senior leadership team at a moment’s notice is very important. Making the call to someone who the superintendent knows through prior dealings is huge. Therefore, frequent and planned partnership meetings are critical to ensuring a positive, proactive, and productive relationship.

My experience with student and teacher outreach from the installation has always left me wondering who is benefitting more, the students and teachers or the members of the Command Team. Teachers and students are so appreciative of our military personnel. When the Command Team is present at events it sends a powerful message of support that is obvious to those in attendance. At the same time, I have not seen a time when the Command Team did not become fully engaged in the events they attended. In my estimation the Command Team along with the school staff and students benefit in perhaps different but powerful ways.

The Give and Take of Relationships
Colonel Rebecca Porter, Ph.D., USA

Developing and nurturing relationships with local school officials is key. And the time to build those relationships is now – before you think you need them. Consider the friends you have relied on at different times in your life. You did not become friends with them when you needed something but rather had been developing a relationship for some period of time. Perhaps the friend needed to call on you for assistance in the past, and you gladly helped them out. Now those same friends are prepared and willing to return the favor if you ever need it.

This sort of give and take is the nature of friendships, relationships, and communities. It may not be that military leadership ever needs something tangible from the school district (or vice versa), but perhaps the military-connected students in the school could benefit from school personnel having an understanding of the military, the local installation, or the demands that the mission puts on military children. In such cases, an ongoing relationship with regular communication between the installation and the school system can make all the difference in getting military-connected students’ education needs met.

No matter how you accomplish it, building a relationship between installation leadership and school system officials – with regular and open communication – is a key to enhancing the education of military-connected children.
Establishing School Partnerships
School Success and the Adopt-A-School Program
Karol Carlisle, Retired Elementary School Principal

School success hinges on many moving pieces and parts. The Adopt-A-School program is one key piece that has proven to support students on several levels. This symbiotic relationship is an important reminder that partnerships matter.

As a former principal at Meadows Elementary School on Fort Hood, I had the awesome privilege of experiencing an exemplary Adopt-A-School program first-hand. Leadership-level soldiers joined our site-based Decision Making team to assess and develop our campus plan. Other volunteers eagerly and regularly interacted with students in multiple activities as positive role models by mentoring and tutoring identified students and leading Field Day and Fall Festival activities.

Soldiers displayed positive character qualities of courage, citizenship, and responsibility. Students eagerly anticipated each and every event with our Adopt-A-School Unit.

The quality of schools and children’s education is a prime concern of military families. Installation leadership engagement with school district leadership has the potential to strengthen the quality of education opportunities for military-connected students and can yield lasting results.

Ensuring Excellence Through Shared Responsibility
Parent Involvement Eases Transition
Cindy Simerly, Parent and Military Spouse

Transition issues top my list of challenges as a parent of two military-connected kids who handled moving and changing schools very differently. Wondering whether they’d be ahead in certain subjects or behind in others, and concerns about testing for special programs arose with each move. One way I reduced some of the stress was to contact the school district ahead of time to learn more about policies and practices covering academic readiness, requirements for programs like Gifted Education, and participation in extracurricular activities like band or athletics. When possible, I asked for contact information for department heads, coaches, or band directors. My goal was to ask questions that would enable me to better prepare my kids for their new school; whether that meant gathering specific paperwork ahead of time, or requesting materials from the school we were leaving in order to expedite placement in classrooms or on sports fields.

My “recon” also included sources on the installation itself. Summer brings an influx of new service members and their families, and most installations recognize newcomers will be looking for information about the community. Newcomer gatherings are a great resource to meet other families and installation representatives and to learn about local opportunities.

Through each move, I found programs and people willing to help, but showing initiative definitely made the process smoother. As parents, we know and understand our children well, and using that knowledge to ease transitions goes a long way with administrators, teachers, and other personnel who are there to help.

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Research Key to Better Programs for Military Children

KRISTINA SCHMID CALLINA
Research Assistant Professor, Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development, Tufts University

TODAY, THERE ARE ABOUT TWO MILLION CHILDREN and adolescents who are the sons and daughters of America’s Active Duty, Reserve, or National Guard military members. In addition, since 9/11, there are four million youth who are the sons or daughters of Veterans, and since the start of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, more than two million children have seen their military service parents deploy into harm’s way. Many of these families are involved in multiple deployments – sometimes four, five, or even more family separations and reunifications. In addition, more than five thousand service members have died during deployment, with tens of thousands having suffered physical injuries in theater. Hundreds of thousands continue to struggle with traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder, all profoundly affecting children and families.

Despite the challenges of mobility and deployment, military-connected youth are resilient. This message is at the heart of the Fall 2013 The Future of Children volume, “Military Children and Families.” The volume was co-edited by COL (Ret.) Stephen J. Cozza and Richard M. Lerner, Director of the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development (IARYD) in Eliot-Pearson. Drs. Cozza and Lerner are the co-chairs of the Science Advisory Board of the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). The Future of Children volume brings a life-span developmental perspective to the study of military-connected children and families, one emphasizing their strengths and resilience.

In addition, the volume highlights how research about military children can contribute to a general understanding of their development and, as well, to knowledge of other populations of American children. Military children and families experience unique challenges. For instance, they move around the country and the world repeatedly at rates much greater than non-military families. Therefore, research about the ways in which military-connected youth cope with such relocations may allow researchers and practitioners to better address issues faced by other young people who are affected by transitions associated with frequent moves.

Because of their high rates of mobility, military children may need to adjust to new living environments, schools, and peer groups more so than non-military children and families. They are also likely to experience repeated cycles of parent-child separations and reunions more so than other youth. The ways in which military-connected youth cope with such changes may provide important information about resilience that educators, practitioners, and researchers can apply to all youth who need help navigating major life transitions. In addition, military children and families have strong social support networks and services, and they show important strengths and virtues, for instance, involving shared values of duty, service, and patriotism. Such character strengths and ecological assets may be models of thriving for all American youth.

In turn, general developmental research can be applied to military youth. Young people with active-duty parents must cope with the possibility or actuality of parental death or serious/permanent health problems and disabilities, and here research about parent loss or illness from the study of non-military children may help advance understanding of issues faced by military youth.

A key point in The Future of Children volume is that research about military children and families needs to be improved. For example, we need more longitudinal research about normative development among military children and families and more research about their strengths, resilience, and social support networks. We need such research to generate the development
and implementation of evidence-based educational and social support programs and health practices, and we need to promote collaborations across military and civilian support systems for youth in order to translate and apply knowledge from our work with diverse military-connected youth and families.

To begin working toward these goals, this past March, the MCEC hosted a one-day pre-conference at the bi-annual meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescence in Austin, TX. Developmental scientists, educators, and practitioners from across the country participated in discussions of how best to support military-connected youth and families throughout the deployment cycle and beyond. Prof. Ann Masten, who serves on the MCEC Science Advisory Board, spoke at the conference on the resilience of military families. “Resilience and lessons learned from growing up in a military family cascade through generations,” she said, emphasizing the importance of a life-course perspective in the study of military-connected youth and families.

Young people from military families also participated in the conference to provide insight about issues related to changing schools and making new friends. These students are part of the MCEC Student 2 Student, an in-school program that supports new students who are transitioning into a school to help them feel welcome and navigate their new community. “Being a military child has helped me come out of my shell, grow, and become my own person,” one student said.

The pre-conference was a successful step in the efforts to integrate research and practice about non-military youth in support of military youth, and to apply our understanding of military youth and families to their civilian counterparts.

“…[military children] show important strengths and virtues, for instance, involving shared values of duty, service, and patriotism. Such character strengths and ecological assets may be models of thriving for all American youth.”

Kristina Schmid Callina is a Research Assistant Professor at the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development in the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University, and the Associate Editor for the section on military-connected youth and families of the journal, Applied Developmental Science.

To receive a printed copy of The Future of Children, Military Children and Families, visit store.MilitaryChild.org

Understanding School–Related Challenges Facing Military Children

Peer-to-Peer Relationships Save the Day

Julie Coffey, Retired High School Counselor

The look of terror in the eyes of the new student told the story every time. As a high school counselor on a military reservation, I enrolled new students almost every day. School people tend to believe that the most important element in enrolling a new student is the coursework, but I believe the first area to be addressed should be the social-emotional wellbeing of the student.

Establishing a Student 2 Student (S2S) program in our school gave immediate peer contact to the new students and provided a way to “pay it forward” to our established students. “Will I fit in? Who will hang out with me at lunch? What is cool/dorky here?” Instead of having the new kid syndrome of self-doubt, new students were immediately greeted by S2S kids whose primary goal was to help all new kids find their place in this setting.

The S2S team did a variety of activities aimed at helping new kids fit in and be able to decipher local school, post, and city traditions and cultures. S2S gave new students individual school tours, helped design New Kid Camp, held monthly get-togethers for old and new students to mingle, introduced new students to teachers and coaches for extracurricular interests, etc. The first two weeks of a new student’s life in a new place is the critical time to engage that person’s head and heart. S2S provided a safe, nonthreatening place for the new kids to start their journey.

The reason I know that S2S peer contact works extremely well in helping new students assimilate is that almost all of my new students wanted to join S2S to help other new kids. Wanting to pay it forward in this way is a sure sign that a person feels cared for and vital.
RESEARCH & COMMITMENT

Hallmarks of MCEC Science Advisory Board

THE MCEC SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD is a 21-member volunteer board consisting of the nation’s leading researchers, pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other developmental clinicians. The Science Advisory Board supports MCEC efforts and advises MCEC on research endeavors.

At the 2014 National Training Seminar, the Science Advisory Board divided into four working groups: Lessons Learned, Translation to Practice, Keeping the Promise, and MCEC Outreach. The working groups meet virtually over conference calls or video conferencing to stay connected and focused.

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<th>WORKING GROUP</th>
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| Lessons Learned     | To provide a repository for organizational lessons learned on supporting and advocating for military-connected children during a time of war                                                                                                                                   | Colonel Rebecca Porter, Ph.D., ABPP  
Commander US Army Dunham Health Clinic                                                      |
| Translation to Practice | To launch a campaign to enhance awareness of military-connected youth, highlighting positive youth development strategies along with evidence-informed resources available to school systems and public health leaders | Paula Rauch, MD  
Director, Marjorie E. Korff Parenting At a Challenging Time Program  
Chief, Child Psychiatry Consultation Service to Pediatrics  
Massachusetts General Hospital  
Family Team Program Director, Red Sox Foundation/MBGH Home Base Program                     |
| Keeping the Promise | To “keep the promise” by upholding, promoting, and advancing society’s commitment to supporting current and Veteran military-connected families across their life span                                                                 | Lieutenant Colonel Eric M. Flake, MD, FAAP, US Air Force  
Assistant Professor Uniformed Services University  
Chief of Developmental Behavioral Pediatrics Madigan Army Medical Center                     |
| MCEC Outreach       | To make connections with higher education and professional associations to educate others about the need for rigorous scientific research on military and veteran-connected children and families                                                                 | Ronald S. Palomares, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Psychology & Philosophy  
Texas Woman’s University                                                                     |
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The Military Child Education Coalition® solely exists to help the military and veteran-connected child thrive in the face of transition and separation.

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