



Continue to Serve: **TEACH**

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There is probably no issue that holds a higher priority for military families than the issue of childhood education. For military families, the arrival of new set of permanent change of station (PCS) orders brings anxiety followed by a frantic search for a good school for the kids. Research and planning geared toward ensuring that the children are able to enroll in the best available schools takes precedence over the PCS pack out of house hold goods, over the military spouse's job search, and over the search for housing. Indeed, for most military families, the choice of housing location starts with researching school districts and student performance scores at the various schools in the region.

Why all the anxiety? Why does it seem natural for parents to worry about which school their children will attend? Why do military parents have to expend so much effort in finding a good public school for their children? After all, this is America – so isn't one public school just as good as any other?

Sadly, every parent in the U.S. today knows that our public education system is far from ideal. Explanations for why this is so fill everything from academic journals to blogs – and the proposed solutions to our nation's problems with public education have been a large part of the political agenda since the 1960s. While debates rage over issues like education funding, tenure, teachers unions, charter schools, vouchers, and curriculum design, the bottom line is that the key to delivering a great education is the quality of the teacher.

As with anything, a person gets better with experience. This is certainly true with the teaching profession. Yet over the last 35 years or so we've seen more and more teachers leaving the profession before they have a chance to develop into the great teachers our kids need and deserve. **The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that the U.S. loses about 16% of its first-year teachers, and between 40%-50% within the first five years.** This incredibly high rate of teacher turnover is the major contributing factor to the drop in the overall quality of our schools.

While there are many factors that lead to a new teacher's decision to leave the profession, one that could be eliminated pretty easily involves the state-to-state portability of teacher licensure. Teacher certification credentials earned in one state are often not recognized

by another state. For teachers, this lack of a consistent policy for state-to-state certification reciprocity drives many out of the profession. According to the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, some 50% of teachers relocate to another state to follow a spouse or partner. Of course, one of the most mobile professions is military service.

With every new set of PCS orders requiring relocation, the spouse of an active-duty military member who serves as a teacher is inhibited from easily finding a new teaching job. This is because each state sets its own requirements for teacher licensure, and these requirements must be met before the teacher can obtain the certification necessary to teach. This alone is a huge impediment to bringing more military spouses into the teaching profession.

Streamlining licensure requirements in a way that makes transfers from one state to another would make teaching an appealing career path for our military spouses. The military family would benefit because a career as a teacher would be more compatible with a career in military service. More importantly, America's kids would benefit because a military spouse would bring many of the qualities inherent in the culture of the military to the classroom, such as leadership, commitment, and serving as a positive role model. Further, the kids would be led by an increasingly experienced teacher, as the PCS moves would result in military spouses who have taught in a variety of states bringing new and diverse pedagogical ideas and methods to their new school.

It is time for a serious national conversation on teacher licensure and state-to-state reciprocity. Eliminating or mitigating the barriers to state-to-state licensure portability will allow more military spouses to become life-long teachers, which will benefit our nation's military families, our schools, and will reduce the current levels of teacher turnover, which will ultimately benefit kids.

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