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MEMORANDUM FOR BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

HOW THE MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION CAN SERVE AN ADVISORY ROLE ON MILITARY FAMILY ISSUES

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WHO WE ARE: As the nation's leading non-profit solely dedicated to the unique issues surrounding the education of America's almost four million military-connected children, we offer our assistance as the Biden administration develops policies impacting military families.

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is a key resource for education administrators, military leaders, policymakers and families with a parent who is active duty or in the National Guard or Reserves. MCEC supports all military-connected children by educating, advocating and collaborating to resolve education challenges associated with the military lifestyle. Our goal is to ensure that military kids are college-, workforce- and life-ready.

WHY THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD CARE: Military-connected children in active duty families are unique among all K-12 students because they must move every two to three years as their parent changes duty stations. A military-connected child can expect to move six to nine times from kindergarten through their high school graduation. These transitions can disrupt a child's education as well as their social and emotional well-being. Throughout any given school year, some 200,000 military children must cope with a new school, new teachers and a new school culture. They must also grapple with new curricula, new graduation requirements and gaps in education. Many are now contending with the added burden of distance learning.

The new administration should note that meeting the education needs of military-connected children *directly impacts military readiness*. Department of Defense leadership is taking a keen interest because they realize that if schools near military installations are failing to successfully transition and provide inclusive, quality education opportunities for our nation's military children, service members will vote with their feet and depart the military.

EDUCATION ISSUES THAT IMPACT MILITARY FAMILIES: Based on our extensive expertise, we stand ready to inform and advise the Biden administration on the following key issues:

- RELOCATION: Military kids serve with their parents. They endure the challenge of repeatedly packing up their lives and starting over with no choice as to when or where they move. Changing schools and the resulting disruption and emotional stress is often cited as the most challenging part of the military lifestyle.
- TRANSITION INTO NEW SCHOOLS: Military children often have difficulty integrating into new schools because each state -- and often each school -- has its own educational requirements. This can lead to educational gaps, delays in advancing to the next grade and even impact graduation from high school. Students may also move to schools that are unable to provide advanced curricula such as Advanced Placement classes. Ensuring consistent, high quality education from region to region is a major struggle for families.

- STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: Military-connected students with special needs encounter all the difficulties of transitioning into new schools -- but with the added stress of ensuring that special needs services are consistent and adequate. In many instances, families report that schools are unable or unwilling to provide sufficient support. They further report that services provided by the military are also uneven. A federal review has found inconsistent implementation and support for special needs students among most branches of the military. Although the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act has enacted several provisions intended to address some areas of concern, it does not address all issues.
- MILITARY STUDENT IDENTIFIER (MSI): The government requires states to collect and publish data on the performance of military-connected children in public schools as a new demographic segment. The goal is to use this data to assess how students are performing in any given region and develop programs and services as required. Unfortunately, many states are not making this data available, leaving military leaders and families in the dark.
- PURPLE STAR SCHOOL MOVEMENT: Purple Star School (PSS) programs certify K-12 schools as friendly to, and familiar with, the unique education and social-emotional needs of military-connected children. MCEC is the national advocate for PSS, promoting and supporting this vital program for military-connected children. Purple Star schools are proving to be highly attractive to military families due to the transition-assistance they offer to students and parents.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS: Military readiness is inextricably bound to military family readiness, and there is no more important consideration for military families than the education of their children. To sustain both family readiness and military readiness, we ask that the new administration support these recommendations to ensure military families have inclusive, quality educational opportunities for their children:

- EFFICIENT COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION OF MSI DATA: The administration should press states to follow the law and collect MSI data and make it publicly available so that the performance of military-connected students can be accurately assessed and effective policies and or programs can be devised for military children.
- GREATER SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: Far more support must be forthcoming for families with students with special needs. This includes allowing families to maintain an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) at a new duty station for up to six months and requiring parental consent to all IEP changes. Also, the new administration should instruct states and the federal Department of Education to use MSI data to track special education disputes involving military children.
- ENCOURAGE STATES TO START PURPLE STAR SCHOOL (PSS) PROGRAMS: The administration should encourage the Department of Education to support and promote the PSS designation program, as the Department of Defense has begun to do. All 50 states and the District of Columbia should adopt PSS programs to qualify and designate schools that are friendly to military-connected students. At present, fewer than half the states have such a designation program.
- RENEW "OPERATION EDUCATE THE EDUCATORS": The administration should resurrect this Obama administration-era program, which prepares new educators for working with military-connected children and develops school cultures that are more supportive of children in military families.

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