

School Transitions during COVID-19: A Toolkit for Military-Connected Families

## New School Virtual Introduction Checklist

### The Need

Frequent relocation can make it difficult for families to integrate successfully into schools and communities. A warm introduction builds an immediate sense of community, which can help support academic integration and socio-emotional stability for students and families. However, the sheer number of tasks that school staff must complete during high volume transfer periods – like the beginning of the school year – can make school support of your introduction inconsistent. With the addition of the COVID-19 pandemic limiting in-person interaction, PCSing families can improve their onboarding into a school community by initiating an introduction themselves.

### Tool Description

This virtual introduction checklist offers practices that will help you get some of the orientation materials and information you will need, especially with respect to how the school is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This tool first includes a checklist of steps to take, with descriptions and examples. Following the checklist is an email template to use to contact your new school to ask for some of the items in the checklist.

Another version of this tool, the school staff-facing Welcoming Practices Packet, was originally developed by MCEC, CPRL, and administrators as part of the Mitigating the Impact of School Mobility Toolkit. It has been revised to directly support families as they initiate their own introductions to new schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# New School Virtual Introduction Checklist

## Effective Practices

Use this checklist to identify and ask for different methods of getting acclimated to your new school.

Ask for:	Description and Examples
<input type="checkbox"/> New student and family resources	<p>Most schools have several materials that can provide helpful introductions to the school community, its events, and its practices. Some of these might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student handbook</li> <li>• School calendar, including dates for popular student events like a back-to-school party, extracurricular activity fairs, and homecoming celebrations</li> <li>• A schedule of upcoming events for new families, including any new family orientations, student info sessions, and new parent and student mixers</li> <li>• A staff directory, including any key contacts relevant for your child's specific needs or interests (the Student Questionnaire, also part of this Toolkit, will help you explain your child's interests)</li> <li>• Parent meeting/event schedules from the PTA, Military Parent's Club, or other relevant parent group</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual tour of the school	<p>Whether or not your school will offer – or you will choose – either in-person or hybrid learning, it can be helpful for you and your child to get a sense of your new school through a virtual tour to get a sense of the school community and to prepare for in-person learning later this year. Check to see if you can find this on the school's or district's website or on social media platforms. If not, ask a guidance counselor or the principal or another contact.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> COVID-19 communications	<p>Schools are making meaningful efforts to create agile plans for the current COVID-19 context and to communicate about those plans early and often with families.</p> <p>Be sure to ask to join:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Email lists</li> <li>• Messaging apps or platforms in use by your school and/or your child's teachers</li> </ul> <p>Also ask for past messages that your school has sent that may have important information that was shared before you PCSed. One of the most important topics is the school's selection of instructional settings – or the options and method of choosing that the school will be making available to you.</p>

Ask for:	Description and Examples
<input type="checkbox"/> Technical resources for distance learning	<p>Most schools will use some form of distance learning at some point in the school year. Ask about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any platforms, apps, or programs your child’s teachers and school will be using for instruction, teacher-to-student messaging, homework submission, and assessments. Make sure you get and test out login credentials before classes start, and keep those credentials in a place where your child and you can readily find them.</li> <li>• Your school or district’s policy on devices and internet connectivity. You may be able to get free or reduced-price access to one or both through your school.</li> </ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Summer academic information	<p>Secondary students often receive summer reading or other assignments at the beginning of the summer, but transferring students may not be in the loop about work they’re missing. Though practices around summer work may be in flux due to COVID-19, ask for any reading lists or homework packets that can help ready your child for the school year. Even if the year has started, catching up on these assignments can be helpful for your child academically.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Visits with Teachers	<p>Reach out to your child’s new teachers and ask for a short call to introduce yourself – and your child! Especially when face-to-face introductions aren’t possible, taking this extra step can go a long way in building a relationship with new teachers.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> New student events	<p>Welcoming events can be a great way for your child to meet other students. Though the COVID-19 pandemic makes in-person events unlikely, there may still be virtual ones your child can attend, especially through Student2Student® or other student groups.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> New Parent Events/PTA Information	<p>Parents who relocate frequently benefit from networking events as much as students do. The PTA, Military Parents’ Club, and other parent groups can be a great resource for you as you navigate your way through a new town and school.</p> <p>Look for both casual meet-ups and online Facebook groups, especially in a time when more formal, in-person, school-sponsored events are likely to be cancelled. You can also ask your teacher or school administrator to connect you.</p>

## Sample Introduction Email

Use this template to initiate your introduction to new school staff. Even if you've already been in contact with the school or your child has begun the school year, proactive outreach like this can still be very beneficial. Customize this to your family and child's needs before sending to an administrator, counselor, teacher, or registrar.

Subject line: New Student Introduction

Email text:

Hello Mr./Ms./Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is [Family Member Name], and I am [Student Name]'s [relationship]. We are a military family and just relocated to [Town]. My child will be attending [Name of School, grade] this fall. We've already enrolled, and I'm reaching out to you now to introduce myself and to ask for your assistance in locating a few resources or opportunities that would help us get up to speed on everything we need to know and to become part of the [School Name] community.

I've looked on your website and found some helpful information, but I'd also appreciate if you might be able to send a digital copy or link to any of the following:

- student handbook
- school calendar
- [add other items from checklist as needed]

I'd love to get a few minutes with you by phone or video-conference just to touch base. I also have a handful of questions that I think would be quickest to just ask and for you to answer in conversation. Here are some times when I'm available. Would one of these work for you?

- [Date and time]
- [Date and time]
- [Date and time]

I'm also hoping to arrange a meeting with [Student Name]'s teacher(s). Let me know if I should do that by email or if we should discuss it first in our call. After a couple relocations, we've found short meetings like this to be the best way to get [Student Name] prepared to hit the ground running on the first day of school.

Thank you in advance for your time. I know this is an incredibly busy time for you getting ready for the start of school, this year more than ever. I'm eager to do whatever I can – as I know you will be – to help make [Student Name]'s transition as smooth as possible.

Best,

[Your name]