



Issue Paper

Purple Star School Designation Program

(updated Sept. 10, 2020)

The Issue:

America's military-connected children experience academic and social-emotional challenges as they relocate to new schools due to a parent's change in duty station. These transitions create challenges since schools often have differing cultures, curricula, standards, course offerings, schedules and graduation requirements. As a result, many students struggle to stay on track to be college-, workforce- and life-ready. This has the potential to impact military readiness by degrading retention of service members and indirectly depressing the economic viability of local communities and states that host military installations.

Many Military Children are Impacted:

Military-connected students must move whenever their active-duty parent receives a relocation order (called a Permanent Change of Station). A military-connected child can expect to move six to nine times from kindergarten through their high school graduation, with approximately 200,000 students transitioning to a new school in any given year. Eighty percent of America's military-connected children attend public schools. In every state with a military installation, military-connected children will be transitioning into and out of nearby public schools due to parent PCS orders.

With an estimated 1.2 million active-duty military-connected U.S. children enrolled in schools in the United States and abroad, the number of children affected by these transitions is significant.

The National Advocate for Purple Star Schools:

The non-profit Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is the national advocate for Purple Star Schools, a grassroots initiative that encourages states and school districts to establish Purple Star School programs. A Purple

Star School designation lets military parents know, whether they are on active

duty or in the National Guard and Reserves, that a school is dedicated to helping their child gain the educational skills necessary to be college-, workforce- and life-ready. It signals that a school also supports the social and emotional wellbeing of military kids adjusting to new schools and the absence of a parent during deployment.

These programs award Purple Star School designation to K-12 schools within the state or district that have committed to supporting military-connected children through specific measures. To date, only Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, Ohio, Arkansas, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia (called Military Flagship Schools) and Indiana, have Purple Star School programs.

MCEC is raising awareness of the Purple Star School initiative among the many states that have yet to start a program. As the nation's most complete resource for states seeking to start a Purple Star School program, MCEC offers support and guidance throughout the process.

Purple Star School Programs – What they are and how they help:

Purple Star School programs are established by a state's education authority or by an individual school district. States may formally create the program through legislation or less formally through administrative procedures from the state capital or at the individual school district level. For example, the state education chief's office can create a program or a superintendent within a school district may do so.

A Purple Star School program establishes an application process inviting state or district-wide K-12 public and/or charter schools to seek designation as a Purple Star School. The state or district sets the requirements individual schools must meet for designation.

There is no one-size-fits all for these programs, however, MCEC recommends four study-driven requirements.¹ These include requiring that schools:

1. Designate a staff point of contact for military students and families. The individual can be a counselor, administrator, teacher, or other staff member.
2. Establish and maintain a dedicated page on its website featuring information and resources for military families.
3. Maintain a student-led transition program.
4. Provide professional development for additional staff on special considerations for military students and families.

¹ The four requirements originate from MCEC's 2001 Secondary Education Transition Study (commissioned by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center).

In addition to these four criteria, states may choose an additional criterion, such as a commitment by the school to hold a school-wide military recognition event; passage by the school district's school board of a resolution publicizing support for military students and families; or partnering with military installation School Liaison Officers (personnel who work with local education agencies in support of military-connected children) to provide opportunities for military parents to volunteer in the school.

The primary goal of these programs is to ensure that staff can help manage the academic requirements and planning challenges military-connected children face when they move between different schools. These schools also seek to accommodate students who may have missed out on the normal cycles of sports and club activities. Finally, these schools acknowledge that every military-connected child has left behind friends and support networks and may be dealing with a parent who is away from home on deployment.

Benefits to States Starting a Purple Star School Program:

A Purple Star School program offers states the following benefits:

- All states have obligations under the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Although the Purple Star School program is not funded by or associated with the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (which administers the Compact), a statewide Purple Star School program shares the Compact's goals of ensuring that military children transition successfully into new schools and stay on track for graduation.
- It helps protect state revenue. The U.S. military is now including the quality of K-12 schools near military facilities as part of its calculus in deciding future basing and personnel decisions. Communities with Purple Star Schools can help retain bases and attract military families who bring economic benefits to local communities.
- Purple Star Schools foster diverse, inclusive and supportive school environments through their initiatives and trainings, which serves all students, regardless of military connection.

For More Information:

Find out more at militarychild.org/purplestarschools . Or contact Jack Ballantyne, MCEC's Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, at COO@militarychild.org or (254) 953-1923 ext. 1124.