“What Can Schools Do To Meet The Unique Needs of Military-Connected Students?”

Who are military-connected students?
The Code of Virginia defines military-connected students as a student enrolled in a public school whose parent is serving in either (i) the active component of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or National Guard, the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Services or (ii) the reserve component of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or National Guard.

Why are military-connected students unique?
Most military children attend schools in six to nine different school divisions from kindergarten to 12th grade, and on average, a military student transfers more than twice during high school. With each move come different graduation requirements, eligibility for services and programs, school calendars, deadlines for specialty programs/school/extracurricular activities, and more. In addition to frequent moves, family separations through deployments and reintegration following deployments can make school-, home-, and community-life challenging for military children.

What are some of the challenges?

**Academic**
- Placement in appropriate programs and courses
- New graduation requirements
- Acceptance of credits based on courses and assessment taken in other states
- Eligibility for gifted programs, specialty schools/programs
- Attendance due to gaps in between moves

**Social and Emotional**
- Mixed emotions
- Making new friends
- Reorienting to new routines and policies
- Missed deadlines for extracurricular activities
- Sense of belonging
- Increased responsibilities at home/changes in family structure
- Safety of deployed parent(s)

**Logistical**
- Living in temporary housing
What can schools do to help?

- **Implement the Interstate Compact with Fidelity** - The Interstate Compact is state law, § 22.1-360 of the *Code of Virginia*, which addresses key transition issues encountered by military families including enrollment, placement, attendance, eligibility and graduation. Provisions in the Compact provide for a consistent policy across state lines for transitioning military students.
- Consider sponsoring a peer lead transition team to welcome new military-connected students. Training for these teams is offered by School Liaison Officers.
- Advocate for and implement **more flexible local policies at the local level**, such as awarding of partial credit, allowing parents with order to apply to specialty programs prior to their arrival, permitting residency waivers for families in temporary housing awaiting permanent housing in your school district etc.
- Become **familiar with military culture and terminology**.
- Celebrate the **Month of the Military Child** (April). The VDOE website provides a number of resources and materials to help schools celebrate the amazing contributions of our military-connected students.

**Resources**
- Contact your **Military Instillation’s School Liaison Officer**.
- **Virginia Department of Education** (VDOE) provides professional development regarding state laws, best practices, and consultation on case-by-case issues.
- **Military Child Education Coalition** (MCEC) offers training for educators and peer mentoring programs.
- **Military One Source** offers free tutoring services to military students and is a clearing house for many other supports of value to military families.
- **National Military Family Association** provides resources for comprehensive child care, accessible health care, spouse employment options, etc.

**Why purple?**
Purple represents the blending of the colors of the five branches of our armed forces - Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy.

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