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## **Better Serving Those Who Serve:** Improving the Educational Opportunities of Military-Connected Students



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This report was made possible through the support of the Collaborative for Student Success, a non-profit organization working to improve public education through a commitment to high standards for all students.

**Our nation's military families regularly face challenges when it comes to providing a high-quality education for their children — challenges that can often be more complicated, and more frequent, than those confronting civilian families.**

These challenges typically come about because active-duty-connected families move more frequently as a result of the transfers and new assignments that are a fact of military life. Making a transition to a new home, or to a new school, is not always easy. Each school, each school district, and each state can have its own way of conducting the business of education, including different rules and policies that our military families must learn to navigate.

These challenges are often greatest when a family moves to a military installation in a different state. For example, the academic lessons taught in a particular grade in one state can be different than the content taught at that same grade level in a different state. For high school students, the classes they are required to pass in order to earn a diploma are often organized according to different learning sequences.

Differences like these between education systems also make it difficult for families to determine the quality of different school choices, especially from a distance before a pending move.

This new report by the Collaborative for Student Success and the Lexington Institute identifies many of the questions military families must solve in order to assure high-quality educational opportunities for their children. It presents findings, observations and recommendations that can help education policymakers across the country provide the best solutions possible for our nation's military families and their 1.2 million school-age children.

Signed,  
General Paul J. Kern (United States Army, Retired)





# Key Findings

This report assesses the performance of schools in four states with large concentrations of active-duty military personnel who have children in the public school systems. They are Colorado, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia. The data, based in part on a common test provided to public school students around the country (the National Assessment of Education Progress or NAEP), present a picture of wide disparity, one in which the academic performance of students in states with military-connected children varies dramatically.

Among our findings:

- ▶ A shortage of high-quality educational options for military-connected families and students — from schools to programs within schools — often restricts educational opportunities, negatively impacts educational achievement, causes military families to make tough housing choices, inhibits quick assimilation into school communities, and can reduce a family's satisfaction with a military career.
- ▶ The underlying causes driving the quality of educational experiences for military-connected children are largely consistent and cluster around four key areas: uneven ability to participate in available educational options; inconsistent content and achievement standards from state to state; limited support for military-connected students; and less effective state and school district policies to identify and support military-connected families and students.
- ▶ The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, a state-by-state effort to examine and recommend policies and practices affecting military-connected students, can be an effective tool. While Virginia is a leader in implementing the Compact, North Carolina and especially Missouri and Colorado lag behind in utilizing this important lever for strengthening the educational experiences of military-connected students.



# INTRODUCTION

More than one million school-age children have a parent serving active-duty in the U.S. military. For these families, uncertainty can be a near-constant in their educational experience.

The multiple moves throughout a child's K–12 experience, the uneven education from locale to locale, the strain of preparing for college or career while also dealing with the stress of one or more parent deployed overseas — military-connected children face a host of issues impacting their educational careers that their civilian counterparts do not.

The challenges and opportunities of effectively serving military-connected students span policymaking from federal and state levels, to organizational leadership at the district level, to culture development at the school level, to responsive teaching and learning in the classroom.

Despite the transient nature of life in the military, where upheaval is commonplace and where huge swaths of children are either entering or leaving a school system with regularity, some states and districts are doing right by military-connected students.

This paper discusses the academic success and opportunities for improving the education of active-duty military-connected students. It focuses on four states — Colorado, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia — spanning the expansive range of circumstances and experiences for families across most every spectrum of deployment.

Many military-connected students benefit from strong schools where innovative education leaders leverage effective relationships with base-commanding officers to maximize support for their diverse needs as learners.

Others struggle to stay on track to college and career readiness while overcoming interruptions due to required moves. Many military families must navigate systems and teachers who have not received professional training in serving military-connected children. They must also adapt to learning under inconsistent educational standards in different states and school districts.

## INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

Another wild card in the deck until recently has been the Department of Defense's school network known as DoDEA (Department of Defense Education Activity), operating on military bases around the world. Although these base schools are primarily overseas, DoDEA does operate schools in seven states, including two of the states we examined (North Carolina and Virginia). DoDEA phased in College and Career Ready Standards aligned with the Common Core State Standards during the 2015–16 school year — a change that helped reduce some of the challenges for students in transitioning from DoDEA schools to local school districts in those states that have adopted Common Core or comparable standards.

While the vast majority of military-connected students attend public schools in or around military installations, some 20,000 attend DoDEA schools located in the United States.

Most of the nearly 1.2 million school-aged children connected to active-duty members of the U.S. military are elementary students: three out of four are under 12 years old, and two in five are younger than six.<sup>1</sup>

Deployments of their military parents do not distribute these children evenly. Nearly half of stateside active-duty service members live in four states: California, Texas, Virginia and North Carolina.

**There is wide variation across states in what students are expected to know and when they are expected to know it."**

It is not uncommon for these students to attend more than six different school districts during their K–12 schooling as a result of military deployments. When these moves require transferring to schools in different states, which is often the case, inconsistencies in content standards can pose substantial obstacles to their trajectory of learning. "There is wide variation across states in what students are expected to know and when they are expected to know it," as the authors of one authoritative teacher's guide explain.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "A Policy Leader's Guide to Military Children," Military Child Education Coalition, August 2012, p.38.

<sup>2</sup> Ron Avi Astor, Linda Jacobson and Rami Benbenishty, *The Teacher's Guide for Supporting Students from Military Families*, Teachers College Press, 2012, p. 14.

**Senior military leaders recognize that for officers and enlisted service members, decisions to continue their careers often depend on whether their families are happy. Central to the experience of military families is the quality of education their children receive.”**

“Inconsistent academic standards continue to be a real challenge for students in military-connected families,” observed Missouri’s governor-appointed Military Advocate Joseph L. Driskill. “When they move to attend school in a different state, they will often either be required to relearn content they have already mastered, or enter classes far behind their peers on other content. These challenges, on top of others like adjusting to new schools, friends, and homes, can really become problematic.”<sup>3</sup>

Senior military leaders recognize that for officers and enlisted service members, decisions to continue their careers often depend on whether their families are happy. Central to the experience of military families is the quality of education their children receive.

Any district with relatively large numbers or percentages of military-connected students deals with high levels of student mobility as active duty service members transition for military needs, promotion potential, or quality-of-life issues (like educational opportunity). Effectively supporting these students’ success makes it essential that their school understands their needs, including academic, social/emotional, athletic, and extracurricular considerations.

“We don’t get three to five years in our district to make change,” explains the superintendent of Missouri’s Waynesville R-VI School District, Dr. Brian Henry, describing his district’s educational philosophy. “Sometimes we get three to five months. That’s why we concentrate on accurately assessing where students are in their understanding of learning standards when they arrive and quickly intervening to promote their growth toward proficiency. Personalized learning is emerging as a valuable strategy in making substantial academic impact.”

Now for the first time, every state will be publicly tracking the academic progress of military-connected students. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act, signed into law in 2015, requires states to report on military-connected students to better meet these students’ needs. Advocates for this change

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<sup>3</sup> All quotes without footnotes are from in-person interviews conducted by the authors of this report.

# INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

felt that without better data, decisions about military-connected students — and the programs, staff, and funds that support them — are in danger of underserving their needs by operating on intuition alone.

As education and military communities compare student outcomes with their own expectations, this analysis considers how the different policy frameworks affect outcomes and opportunities. Public education systems are governed by frameworks and policies at the local school district, state and federal levels. Military base leadership and each military service issue their own policies as well. All of these are also subject to their own organizational dynamics, priorities and limitations. Timing, and not just substance, of decisions matters too, and can be critical for necessary planning by families, schools, school district budgets, and the requirements of base commanders with missions to fulfill.

This analysis also raises practical questions for educators, policymakers, military leaders, and military families alike, such as:

- ▶ How can states improve policies to better serve military-connected students in their schools?
- ▶ What actions are school districts taking to meet the needs of on-base and off-base military-connected students, including students with special needs or who are gifted?
- ▶ Are military families able to take advantage of educational options and choices?
- ▶ What can military leaders learn from these states and districts to help ease the educational transition of the children of the men and women who serve?
- ▶ How can educators better accommodate the unique needs of military children?

Following the four state analyses, specific recommendations to improve and support quality educational opportunities and success for our nation's vital community of active-duty, military-connected students are discussed.





## Methodology

Data for each focus state are based on 2015–16 results on annual state assessments and on state results on the 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), for fourth-grade reading/English language arts and eighth-grade mathematics. NAEP, also known as the Nation's Report Card, is a common yardstick against which to measure a state's performance relative to a rigorous national benchmark, as well as with other states.

For selected school districts with large populations of military-connected students, districtwide student outcomes at these grade levels and subjects on the state assessment are indicated. These outcomes, relative to state averages, are then calculated to provide estimates of student proficiency rates based on state and NAEP definitions within each school district.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES for Serving Military-Connected Students

- » The Military Impacted Schools Association, a national organization of school superintendents representing impacted school districts, is a provider of funding, advocacy, and guidance covering a broad range of considerations. [militaryimpactedschoolsassociation.org](http://militaryimpactedschoolsassociation.org)
- » The Military Child Education Coalition supports educators and military families in many important ways, offering trainings, and advocacy while providing a clearinghouse function for useful resources. [militarychild.org](http://militarychild.org)
- » Military Families for High Standards is a spouse-led initiative that advocates for rigorous academic standards in K–12 education that limit the hardships faced by military students. [militaryfamiliesforhighstandards.org](http://militaryfamiliesforhighstandards.org)
- » Tutor.com operates a Free Tutoring for U.S. Military Families Program for all academic subjects and grade levels, with support from the Department of Defense. [military.tutor.com/home](http://military.tutor.com/home)
- » Military One Source's Education Page provides links and information for military families. [militaryonesource.mil/education-and-employment/pre-k-12-education](http://militaryonesource.mil/education-and-employment/pre-k-12-education)
- » The National Math and Science Initiative's College Readiness Program focuses on improving teacher effectiveness, and student participation and achievement in rigorous math, science and English courses through teacher and student support, open enrollment, and merit-based awards. [nms.org/programs/collegereadinessprogram](http://nms.org/programs/collegereadinessprogram)
- » Learning Heroes provides state-specific information and tools to help parents support their child's social, emotional and academic development and better understand their state's educational standards and assessments. [bealearninghero.org/learning-tools](http://bealearninghero.org/learning-tools)

# COLORADO



## Colorado Student Performance 2015–16

### COLORADO MEASURES OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS (CMAS) RESULTS

#### PERCENT MET OR EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Academy School District 20	58	21
Fountain-Ft. Carson SD 8	41	20
Widefield SD 3	44	34
<b>Colorado CMAS Statewide</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>20</b>

#### COMPARISON TO STATE AVERAGE

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Academy School District 20	132%	104%
Fountain-Ft. Carson SD 8	94%	96%
Widefield SD 3	100%	165%

#### COMPARISON TO 2015 COLORADO NAEP PERCENT PROFICIENT + ADVANCED

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Academy School District 20	52	38
Fountain-Ft. Carson SD 8	37	36
Widefield SD 3	39	61
<b>Colorado</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>37</b>



Colorado students performed above the national average for proficient and advanced scores on the fourth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) and eighth-grade math scores on the 2015 NAEP.

Academy School District 20 has fourth-grade ELA scores on the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) 14 points higher than the state average and higher than other Colorado Springs regional districts in this study. Widefield School District 3 has eighth-grade math CMAS scores well above the state average and regional school districts.

Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8, with more than 70 percent of its students being military-connected due to schools on-base or near Fort Carson, has achieved CMAS scores in fourth-grade ELA and eighth-grade math very close to the state averages, which is more impressive than it seems with many of its schools starting with 50 percent of their students being new to the state and district.

Projecting NAEP proficiency levels onto district performance shows that all districts are at the state NAEP averages, or in some cases well above those levels.



“Given these various challenges, the uniformity with which those charged with the education of military-connected youth laud the benefits of having those students in their classrooms, schools and districts is remarkable.”

For military-connected students and their families, transitioning to Colorado represents an attractive educational opportunity. The active-duty service member population in Colorado is growing, with almost 38,000 personnel, placing it in the top 10 of states with this demographic.<sup>4</sup>

On the 2015 NAEP, Colorado ranked above the national average, as well as Missouri and North Carolina in this study, in the percent of students scoring proficient or advanced on fourth-grade ELA and in eighth-grade math.<sup>5</sup>

The Centennial State adopted the Common Core State Standards in late 2010, with the aligned Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) coming online in the 2013–14 school year.<sup>6</sup>

To ease the transition of military-connected students, Colorado signed on as an original member of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which is particularly important as there are no Department of Defense-run schools in Colorado.

If military-connected students choose public schools, they can attend public schools on- or off-base. The Colorado Coordinating Council for the Interstate Compact has not been particularly active or influential in the state to date. This is a missed opportunity in too many states nationally, including some highlighted in this report.

Colorado has an array of military installations, with the Colorado Springs region being home to the majority of military-connected students and families at the Fort



The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children helps states and districts address key educational transition issues encountered by military families including enrollment, placement, attendance, eligibility and graduation. Developed by The Council of State Governments' National Center for Interstate Compacts, the Department of Defense, national associations, federal and state officials, departments of education, school administrators and military families, it has now been voluntarily adopted by all 50 states and is designed to improve the educational experiences of children of active-duty members of the uniformed services, National Guard and Reserve on active duty orders; members or veterans who are medically discharged or retired for one year; and members who die on active duty.

Carson Army installation, Schriever and Peterson Air Force Bases, Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, and the Air Force Academy.

School districts in the region have seen an average increase in military-connected student enrollment of five percentage points or more over the last 10 years. However, some districts have experienced 20 percent

<sup>4</sup> 2014 Demographics Report: Profile of the Military Community. Accessed October 2016 at <http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2014-Demographics-Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, Nation's Report Card 2015. Accessed October 2016 at [http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading\\_math\\_2015/#?grade=4](http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#?grade=4).

<sup>6</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative. Accessed October 2016 at <http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>.

# COLORADO continued

increases, such as Academy School District 20 and Widefield School District 3.<sup>7</sup>

The distribution of military-connected student enrollments is impacted by continued limited housing options on Fort Carson, charter schools, and Colorado's open enrollment law, which enables parents to choose any public school district in which to enroll their children. However, these choices may not be equally accessible to enlisted men and women as for officers. At Fort Carson, most enlisted soldiers live on-base and their children attend on-base schools, while officers tend to live off-base and their students attend schools in a variety of nearby districts. A pattern of uneven ability to exercise educational options plays out across the region.

Fort Carson is the largest employer in the Colorado Springs region and the second largest in Colorado. The base has more than doubled from 2006 levels to nearly 27,000 active-duty personnel and about 44,000 family members in the region. This has strained local school districts because of the large growth, the timing of troop movements, and ongoing deployments of large numbers of service members.<sup>8,9</sup>

Fountain-Fort Carson District 8 has the largest concentration of military-connected students in the region and state — almost 70 percent of its current enrollment. Along with other local districts, Fountain-Fort Carson has significant numbers of special education students.



Over the last 10 years, Fountain-Fort Carson has experienced a 97 percent increase in students with disabilities (and has the highest percentage of students with disabilities in the state) and a 517 percent increase in students identified on the Autism Spectrum Disorder.<sup>10</sup>

A key reason for these substantial increases in special needs students at Fountain-Fort Carson is the relocation of service members due to the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), which ensures service members and their families with special needs are assigned a duty station where their family's needs can be met, which Fountain-Fort Carson clearly is.

The district has handled this influx with comprehensive, quality programming tailored to unique military needs, well-trained staff, and the immediate identification of incoming military-connected special-needs students to enable the immediate provision of services with minimal interruption.

<sup>7</sup> Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments, Final Transition Report. Accessed October 2016 at <http://www.ppacg.org/library/military/military-impact-ft-carson/phase-iv-july-2013>.

<sup>8</sup> Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments, Final Transition Report. Accessed October 2016 at <http://www.ppacg.org/library/military/military-impact-ft-carson/phase-iv-july-2013>.

<sup>9</sup> 2014 Demographics Report: Profile of the Military Community. Accessed October 2016 at <http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2014-Demographics-Report.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Fountain-Fort Carson School District. Letter to stakeholders, "Re: Fountain-Fort Carson School District — Special education status and need." September 21, 2016.





Military-connected students have many good education options across the region. For example, Academy 20 and Widefield have achievement scores on the 2016 CMAS<sup>11</sup> that meet or exceed the state's proficiency averages in fourth-grade English language arts and eighth-grade math.<sup>12</sup> A 2014 study by WestEd for the U.S. Army showed that many elementary, middle and high schools serving Fort Carson-connected students had attained academic performance in the upper percentiles of public school performance statewide.<sup>13</sup>

Dr. Montina Romero, Fountain-Fort Carson's assistant superintendent, acknowledges they have work to do on the CMAS, but said, "military-connected students in the district for two or more years show a lot of academic growth." The length of time local districts and educators have with military-connected students is an important consideration when evaluating student outcomes.

The realities of military-connected student mobility can be daunting. In some of the region's schools, particularly on-base schools, 40 to 60 percent of the student population changes every year. This can be a strain on staff, which is why many districts hire military spouses

to be teachers and school staff due to their unique understanding of the challenges for military-connected students.

The demanding combination of special needs students and high rates of mobility could pose a challenge to graduating students on time, particularly around credit accumulation. But at Academy 20, Fountain-Fort Carson, and Widefield, four-year graduation rates meet or exceed state averages, and all but Widefield meet or exceed the national average of 83 percent.<sup>14</sup>

Given these various challenges, the uniformity with which those charged with the education of military-connected youth laud the benefits of having those students in their classrooms, schools and districts is remarkable. Academy 20, Fountain-Fort Carson and Widefield all show how meeting the needs of military-connected students is also about highlighting their unique experiences and contributions.

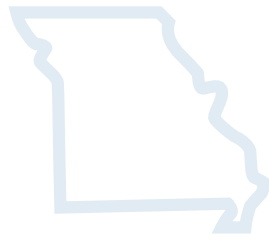
<sup>11</sup> Also known as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, assessment. Accessed December 2016 at <https://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/cmasfactsheet>.

<sup>12</sup> Colorado Department of Education, Spring 2016 CMAS Results — PARCC English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. Accessed September 2016 at <https://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/cmas-englishmath-dataandresults>.

<sup>13</sup> School Performance in Army-Connected Schools, WestEd, January 28, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Colorado Department of Education, SchoolView Data Center. Accessed September 2016 at [https://edx.cde.state.co.us/SchoolView/DataCenter/reports.aspx?\\_adf\\_ctrl-state=pac20phpb\\_4&\\_afWindowMode=0&\\_afLoop=6473986966459216&\\_adf\\_ctrl-state=1a938e3ymo\\_4](https://edx.cde.state.co.us/SchoolView/DataCenter/reports.aspx?_adf_ctrl-state=pac20phpb_4&_afWindowMode=0&_afLoop=6473986966459216&_adf_ctrl-state=1a938e3ymo_4).

# MISSOURI



## Missouri Student Performance 2015–16

### MISSOURI ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (MAP) RESULTS

#### PERCENT PROFICIENT + ADVANCED

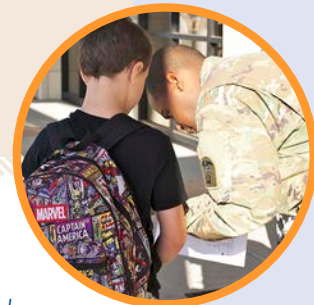
	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Knob Noster R-VIII	72	32
Warrensburg R-VI	75	21
Waynesville R-VI	74	26
<b>Missouri MAP Statewide</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>28</b>

#### COMPARISON TO STATE AVERAGE

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Knob Noster R-VIII	114%	112%
Warrensburg R-VI	119%	74%
Waynesville R-VI	117%	90%

#### COMPARISON TO 2015 MISSOURI NAEP PERCENT PROFICIENT + ADVANCED

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Knob Noster R-VIII	42	36
Warrensburg R-VI	44	24
Waynesville R-VI	43	29
<b>Missouri</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>32</b>



Missouri students have generally scored slightly above national averages in English Language Arts, and equal to or slightly below national averages in math, on the last two NAEP exams. In 2015, 37 percent of fourth-grade students scored proficient or advanced in English Language Arts, and 32 percent of eighth graders did so in math.

The Waynesville R-VI school district serves some 3,500 students connected with Fort Leonard Wood. For Waynesville students, projecting their relative performance on the most recent Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests onto NAEP proficiency levels would mean that 43 percent of fourth-grade students achieved scores of proficient or advanced in English (well above the state average), while 29 percent of eighth-grade students scored at or above proficient in math.

Of the two school districts serving most of the students connected with Whiteman Air Force Base, Knob Noster R-VIII (the district in which Whiteman is located), significantly outperformed Missouri averages in both fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math on the state MAP tests, while students at nearby Warrensburg R-VI scored significantly above the state average in fourth-grade reading, but substantially lower in eighth-grade math.



**“Military kids typically have been exposed to challenging environments, where much is expected from them. When you raise standards you generally get better performance. When you challenge kids to do more, they generally do more.”**

Most of Missouri’s military-connected students are affiliated with two large installations, Whiteman Air Force Base and the Army’s Fort Leonard Wood. Each facility serves diverse missions and diversity is also reflected in their student populations.

Whiteman is best known as the home of the 509th Bomb Wing, which operates and maintains the B-2 bomber. But it also houses a broad spectrum of other deployments, including the 442nd Fighter Wing, teams responsible for Unmanned Aerial Vehicle missions, and some Army personnel. Fort Leonard Wood’s mission is also diverse. As a designated Army Center of Excellence, it is responsible for training some 80,000 uniformed and civilian personnel each year, including the U.S. Army Engineer School.

On the NAEP exam, 37 percent of Missouri’s fourth graders scored proficient or above, slightly above the national average. In math, 32 percent of Missouri’s eighth graders scored proficient or above, equaling the average nationally. Missouri’s scores did not see a statistical change in reading or math between 2013 and 2015.<sup>15</sup>

Academic content in Missouri’s public schools is aligned to Missouri Learning Standards approved by the state board of education in April 2016, following a review and revision process of the Common Core State Standards.

Missouri’s state education laws do not allow for open enrollment and certain designated “critical personnel” are required by military rules to live on base. As a result, families living on base wishing to enroll their children in public schools must do so in the school district in which the base is located. A small number of children are accepted to enroll in a neighboring district through



a waiver process with the permission of that district’s school board.

Missouri’s Military Advocate Joseph L. Driskill points out that because military-connected students experience mobility rates well above those of their peers, maintaining rigorous and comparable content standards is particularly important to minimizing the disruptions associated with a move, and keeping their academic growth on track.

“Military kids typically have been exposed to challenging environments, where much is expected from them,” Driskill said. “When you raise standards you generally get better performance. When you challenge kids to do more, they generally do more.”

Knob Noster R-VIII is Whiteman Air Force Base’s home school district, and operates one elementary school on base grounds. Some 60 percent of Knob Noster’s student population have at least one family member serving on active duty. Meanwhile, approximately 465 military-connected students live in the neighboring Warrensburg R-VI School District, which is a short drive away and offers some additional academic and extracurricular programs.

<sup>15</sup> Missouri’s Scores Hold Steady in Nation’s Report Card, State Rank Improves,” Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education press release, October 28, 2015.



# MISSOURI continued

Because military installations around the country are rarely on or near the largest school districts in a given state, families of children with the highest levels of special needs are more likely to face hardship as a result of the limited capacity of a smaller school district to serve those needs. Access to specialized classes like Advanced Placement courses, as well as availability of desired athletic programs and other extracurricular activities are also reasons an active-duty family might feel compelled to seek alternative school options.



Whiteman's commander, Air Force Brig. Gen. Paul W. Tibbets IV, and his wife have been strong advocates for adding quality options for students on the autism spectrum. Smaller school

districts can be limited in their capacities to serve these special needs students. Tibbets knows that this can cause qualified military personnel to request transfers away, which the military will usually honor, but at the cost of qualified personnel for their base.

Whiteman has a full-time official who serves with the active support of the base's leadership as a vigorous advocate for their children with school districts. The base's school liaison officer brings knowledge of systems and priorities on both the military and education side, and thus is able to share insights into practices and policies while providing an institutional knowledge valuable to decision makers and families alike. While this arrangement is common nationally, it is a valuable one other facilities should consider.

Whiteman Air Force Base is typical of many military installations in that on-base parents rarely vote locally. Many military families call states home where they enjoy special tax exemptions, or simply lower taxes generally, and switching residency with every deployment can be problematic for many reasons.

Not participating in local school board elections produces tension between on-base military families and civilian families in the community, all looking to district schools to meet their children's particular needs. Some school districts, including Knob Noster, include a non-voting school board seat for a base official.

Fort Leonard Wood's commander, Army Maj. Gen. Kent D. Savre, has made it a priority for his base leadership to maintain strong communication with the leadership of Waynesville School District. To Savre, "the military community is a lot bigger than service men and women and their families," and success delivering quality educational opportunities to military-connected students depends on contributions from across that community.

The Waynesville District operates five schools on the grounds of Fort Leonard Wood and five off the base. Half of all eighth-grade Waynesville students are military-connected, while 59 percent of fourth-grade students are — a pattern roughly in line with national trends. A 2014 study conducted by WestEd for the U.S. Army found that the Waynesville schools serving students connected with Fort Leonard Wood ranked among the highest in the state for their number of highly-qualified teachers who teach core classes, and generally kept pace with statewide averages.<sup>16</sup>

Changes to military housing on base provide an example of the impact some non-education-related military decisions can have on schools. For example, as part of a broad Army policy to increasingly shift military housing to privatized management, families living on base are less likely to be assigned to neighborhoods as a result of their rank, role or seniority, changing the mix for student populations attending particular schools serving larger bases.

Collaboration between Fort Leonard Wood and Waynesville School District leaders is robust and attentive — taking the form of a friendly conversation following a church service leading to a phone call about how a particular child is doing. This focus on individual children also characterizes the district's approach to education. "We really don't want collaboration to be about focusing on grouping kids and then stop there.... We really need to have real-time data come back to us to support differentiated instruction to drive student growth," Waynesville Superintendent Dr. Brian Henry, who serves as the lead and only currently-appointed member of Missouri's Military Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity, reminds his instructional leaders.

<sup>16</sup> "School Performance in Army-Connected Schools: A Report to the U.S. Department of Army, Child, Youth and School Services-School Support," WestEd, January 28, 2014, p. 48.



## PROFILE I » Saralice Campbell



Saralice Campbell, a fifth-grade teacher at Fort Leonard Wood, attributes her success teaching military-connected students to her own experience as a soldier, the spouse of a soldier, and a mother. As a medical laboratory specialist, she served on bases around the world, one of what today are 41,000 dual-military couples serving active duty.<sup>17</sup> But she set aside her own plans to pursue a medical technology degree and instead started working in schools as a substitute and paraprofessional (a trained, but not fully certified, educator). She pursued a degree in early elementary education and became a teacher in 2003. Today, she teaches fifth grade at Wood Elementary School on Fort Leonard Wood.

Campbell is quick to point out that she loves the diversity at Wood Elementary — not just racial and ethnic diversity, which her students certainly have, but their diversity of needs. As an educator, she thrives on “having the opportunity to meet my students where they are as individuals, and to bring them where they need to be to show growth.”

**“... to meet my students where they are as individuals, and to bring them where they need to be...”**

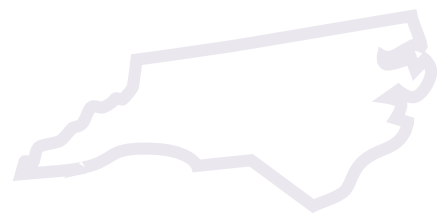


Goal setting is important for students in Campbell’s classroom, and in particular, setting specific and measurable “smart goals,” a practice adapted from the business world. Small group instruction is important, especially when students are struggling. And it is important to her that each child’s parents see their academic growth, and understand the distinct things they can do to help their child push forward to develop content mastery.

“My commitment is to all of my students,” Campbell reminds herself. “Regardless of circumstances, I still have to do my best to get my students ready — not ready for fifth grade, but ready for college, and for life.”

<sup>17</sup> “Military Child,” Policy Leaders’ Guide, p. 41.

# NORTH CAROLINA



## North Carolina Student Performance 2015–16

### END OF GRADE TESTS RESULTS — LEA LEVEL

#### PERCENT COLLEGE/CAREER READY

	Grade 4 Reading	Grade 8 Math
Craven County Schools	42	40
Cumberland County Schools	49	30
Onslow County Schools	46	29
<b>North Carolina Statewide</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>39</b>

#### COMPARISON TO STATE AVERAGE

	Grade 4 ELA Comparison to state avg	Grade 8 Math Comparison to state avg
Craven County Schools	93%	103%
Cumberland County Schools	107%	77%
Onslow County Schools	101%	75%

#### COMPARISON TO 2015 NORTH CAROLINA NAEP PERCENT PROFICIENT + ADVANCED

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Craven County Schools	35	34
Cumberland County Schools	41	26
Onslow County Schools	38	25
<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>33</b>

North Carolina students achieved scores of proficient or advanced in fourth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) at rates above the national average on the 2015 NAEP, and at the national average in eighth-grade math.

Students in the Cumberland County Schools, the district serving most students connected with Fort Bragg, outperformed the state average in fourth-grade English, but significantly trailed state averages in eighth-grade math, as measured on the most recent state End of Grade Tests. Projecting NAEP proficiency levels onto district performance would mean that 41 percent of fourth graders scored proficient or above in English, while just 26 percent of eighth graders did so in math.

In Onslow County Schools, the district serving most students connected with Camp Lejeune, children scored just above average on the state exams for fourth grade English, and substantially below in eighth-grade math. In the Craven County Schools, which serve students connected with Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, eighth-grade math students scored just above state averages, while fourth-grade students scored below average in English.





**“For military-connected students who move frequently between schools in different states, such gaps present indications of disparities between the rigor of content and performance standards from one state to the next, adding complication and confusion to their transitions.”**

The vast majority of North Carolina’s active-duty military-connected families live on or near Fort Bragg, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, Marine Corps Air Stations Cherry Point and New River, and Coast Guard Base Elizabeth City.

Fort Bragg is the nation’s largest Army installation in terms of population, with some 65,000 service members and civilian employees. Its diverse mission includes providing the home to the U.S. Army Airborne Forces, Joint and U.S. Army Special Operations Commands, the U.S. Army Forces Command, and U.S. Army Reserve Command.<sup>18</sup>

More than 45,000 service members and civilian employees are based at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune.<sup>19</sup>

On the 2015 NAEP, 38 percent of North Carolina’s fourth-grade students scored at or above proficient in reading, while just 33 percent of eighth-grade students did so in math.<sup>20</sup> For military-connected students who move frequently between schools in different states, such gaps present indications of disparities between the rigor of content and performance standards from one state to the next, adding complication and confusion to their transitions.

North Carolina adopted the Common Core State Standards in June 2010, and the standards were considered fully implemented during the 2012–13



school year.<sup>21</sup> In the 2015–16 school year, 46 percent of fourth-grade students scored at college- and career-ready levels in reading on the state’s End-of-Grade achievement test. At the eighth-grade level, 39 percent did so statewide in math.<sup>22</sup>

Achievement gaps present another aspect of North Carolina’s education system with which military families must grapple. The overall state proficiency levels described above are the result of averaging particularly uneven proficiency levels based upon students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds. In particular on the End-of-Grade assessments for 2015–16, 59 percent of North Carolina’s white fourth graders scored at levels deemed college and career ready in reading, while just 28 percent of black students and 31 percent of Hispanic students did. In eighth-grade math, 50 percent of white students achieved scores defined as college and career ready, while only 19 percent of their black and 28 percent of their Hispanic classmates did.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> North Carolina Military Affairs Commission, “Strategic Plan for Supporting and Enhancing North Carolina Military Missions and Installations,” February 2016.

<sup>19</sup> North Carolina Military Affairs Commission, “Strategic Plan,” February 2016.

<sup>20</sup> National Assessment of Educational Progress, <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>. Accessed November 28, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Common Core State Standards, <http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>.

<sup>22</sup> North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/>. Accessed November 28, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/reporting/>. Accessed November 28, 2016.

# NORTH CAROLINA continued

Such stark gaps in student achievement are especially concerning for the 17 percent of active-duty military families nationally who are black, and for the 12 percent who are Hispanic.

As military families grapple with the transition to a new school, knowing that schools in their new community use academic content and performance standards that are comparable and similarly rigorous to those in the schools they are leaving behind can prove extremely helpful. It helps educators to more quickly understand what new students have studied in their prior schools, and when. And for military-connected students especially, comparable and rigorous content standards minimize gaps in their learning associated with frequent moves.

North Carolina has been ahead of most other states in tracking the progress of military-connected students, having implemented an identifier in 2014, ahead of the provision being instituted in federal law. The state's student information system also includes a number of elements outside of the federal requirement that can be valuable to educators, including siblings deployed on active duty, family member's pay grade, and designations for family members killed in action.<sup>24</sup>



North Carolina's state education law prohibits open enrollment, so families connected with military installations and seeking quality educational opportunities in public schools must enroll in those operated by the districts in which they live. There are also 167 public charter schools operating in North Carolina, including some in school districts near large military installations, which can provide valuable school options for military families.

Public schools serving North Carolina's military-connected students are also impacted by shifts in the broader student population, and subsequently locally-generated tax funding. This trend has occurred to some extent in Cumberland County, whose schools serve a large share of families connected with Fort Bragg. As the number of students in higher-income Cumberland neighborhoods has declined over the past decade, populations in more economically-disadvantaged neighborhoods have grown.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "Children of Military Data Collection: State Approaches and Lessons Learned," National Center for Education Statistics, April 18, 2016, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Unclassified Army assessment, "Cumberland County School District," September 23, 2014.





When DoDEA schools phased in College and Career Ready Standards during the 2015–16 school year, this change helped reduce some challenges in transitioning from DoDEA schools to local North Carolina school districts. Such transitions occur regularly for students connected with Fort Bragg in the Cumberland County School District and with Camp Lejeune and its neighboring districts, including Onslow County Schools.

North Carolina was the 11th state to create a commission on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The state's panel has met at least once annually since 2014, holding substantive discussions on a number of pertinent issues and questions, and starting to build traction in the state policymaking landscape, but not to the same extent as neighboring Virginia.

A recommendation made during the 2016 proceedings of the North Carolina Interstate Compact Commission proposed legislation to allow school districts flexibility to align their academic calendars with community colleges and other higher education institutions. The proposed change, presented as a chance to simplify transitions for military-connected students, has not gained legislative traction.

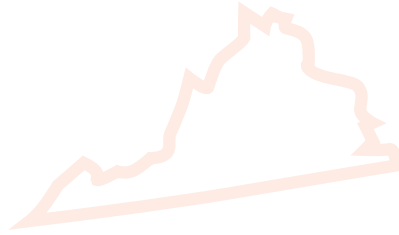
WestEd's 2014 study found that most elementary schools serving students connected with Fort Bragg generally kept pace with statewide averages, but that academic performance at the high-school level was more problematic.<sup>26</sup> Enrollment trends for military-connected students in North Carolina generally track parallel with national trends, with higher numbers at lower grades.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, as other factors not directly related to military-connected students' impact on the academic climates at the schools they attend, North Carolina's education leaders' consistent attentiveness to the specific needs of this important population is likely to continue to improve the quality of their educational opportunities.

<sup>26</sup> School Performance in Army-Connected Schools," WestEd, January 28, 2014, p. 110.

<sup>27</sup> School Performance in Army-Connected Schools, 2014, p. 23.

# VIRGINIA



## Virginia Student Performance 2015–16

### VIRGINIA STANDARDS OF LEARNING (SOL) ASSESSMENT RESULTS

#### PERCENT PROFICIENT + ADVANCED

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Fairfax County	80	82
Virginia Beach City	83	77
Norfolk City	68	51
<b>Virginia SOL Statewide</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>73</b>

#### COMPARISON TO STATE AVERAGE

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Fairfax County	104%	112%
Virginia Beach City	108%	105%
Norfolk City	88%	70%

#### COMPARISON TO 2015 VIRGINIA NAEP PERCENT PROFICIENT + ADVANCED

	Grade 4 ELA	Grade 8 Math
Fairfax County	45	42
Virginia Beach City	46	39
Norfolk City	38	26
<b>Virginia</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>37</b>



Virginia students performed above the national average for proficient and advanced scores on the fourth-grade English Language Arts (ELA) and eighth-grade math scores on the 2015 NAEP. Virginia's fourth-grade ELA and math scores on NAEP are particularly strong.

Fairfax County and Virginia Beach City are above state averages on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) in fourth-grade ELA and eighth-grade math. Norfolk City is lagging well behind in both grades and subjects on the SOLs.

For Fairfax County students, projecting their relative performance on the most recent SOL tests onto NAEP proficiency levels shows that 45 percent of fourth-grade students achieved scores of proficient or advanced in ELA (above the state average and well-above the national average), while 42 percent of eighth grade students scored at or above proficient in math (again above the state average and well-above the national average).

Virginia Beach City, when projecting NAEP proficiency levels based on SOL performance, has strong results in fourth-grade ELA.



“Traditionally, military-connected parents have viewed a Virginia-based assignment positively as a result of the state’s reputation for having high standards and solid outcomes.”

The Commonwealth of Virginia is an important state to consider in regard to the experiences of military-connected families, with its very large population of active-duty service members, generally strong overall academic outcomes, and its own approach to standards and assessments. Virginia has the second largest population of military personnel of any state in the country. There are approximately 122,000 active-duty service members in the state, with more than 178,000 dependents — about as many as California.<sup>28</sup>

The Hampton Roads region on Virginia’s Atlantic coastline is home to the state’s largest concentration of active-duty service members: nearly 70,000 personnel with more than 96,000 dependents. The school systems of Virginia Beach and Norfolk collectively serve Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Naval Station Norfolk, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth, and other, smaller sites.

Northern Virginia, near Washington, D.C., has significant numbers of active-duty service members and dependents, with the presence of Marine Corps’ Quantico, the Army’s Fort Belvoir, and the Pentagon, along with several other installations, most of which are served by the Fairfax County School District.

Unlike other states, Virginia has a wide distribution of military families. There is a military-connected student in every district<sup>29</sup>, and many districts struggle to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of these students. With such breadth and depth of military-connected students, the state has taken the challenges and opportunities of serving these students seriously.



Virginia joined the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children in 2009. Virginia’s Compact Council is perhaps the most engaged council in the country, with a wealth of resources publicly available and tangible activities addressed. For example, it was instrumental in the state’s creation of a military student identifier in 2015 — before a similar requirement was added to the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.<sup>30</sup>

Traditionally, military-connected parents have viewed a Virginia-based assignment positively as a result of the state’s reputation for having high standards and solid outcomes. On the 2015 NAEP, Virginia students scored well above the national average in fourth-grade reading and math, as well as in eighth-grade math. Virginia also scored better than Colorado, Missouri, and North Carolina in fourth-grade reading and math.

On Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL) exams, Fairfax and Virginia Beach students scored above the state average of 77 percent proficient or advanced in fourth-grade reading. On eighth-grade math, both districts exceeded the state average of 73 percent of students scoring proficient or advanced. But other local

<sup>28</sup> 2014 Demographics Report: Profile of the Military Community. Accessed October 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Melissa Luchau, Virginia Department of Education, presentation to the Virginia Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Accessed October 2016 at [http://www.pen.k12.va.us/support/student\\_family/military/va\\_council/meetings/2014/091514\\_unique\\_needs\\_of\\_military\\_children\\_and\\_working\\_with\\_military\\_families.pdf](http://www.pen.k12.va.us/support/student_family/military/va_council/meetings/2014/091514_unique_needs_of_military_children_and_working_with_military_families.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Virginia Department of Education, Presentation to the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Accessed October 2016 at [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student\\_family/military/va\\_council/meetings/2014/091514\\_overview\\_of\\_military\\_student\\_identifier\\_policies.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_family/military/va_council/meetings/2014/091514_overview_of_military_student_identifier_policies.pdf).



# VIRGINIA continued

districts serving significant military-connected student populations, including Norfolk, Newport News, and Suffolk, continue to trail state averages.



For a state that has not adopted the Common Core State Standards, these rates of success sound impressive. However, the percentage of

students scoring proficient or advanced on the SOLs is 30 to 40 points higher than on NAEP, perhaps creating a misimpression of achievement and preparedness. Scoring proficient or advanced on NAEP is a commonly accepted proxy for being college and career ready; it seems there are far fewer college- and career-ready students than the SOLs indicate. This gap may be addressed as Virginia revamps the SOLs.<sup>31</sup>

Virginia's 91 percent on-time graduation rate is well above the national rate of 83 percent. Fairfax, Virginia Beach, and Norfolk all have graduation rates above the national average, with Fairfax and Virginia Beach (but not Norfolk) exceeding the state's rate. These high rates are in spite of the many complexities of state policies around acceptance of assessments for credit, which vary based on whether students meet certain testing requirements in the sending state.<sup>32</sup>

Another challenge for military families moving to Virginia involves the identification of gifted students. Amanda Woodyard, military student transition consultant for the Military Child Education Coalition, noted that "Parents often don't understand why their students who have been identified as gifted in another state have to be re-assessed in Virginia. Or, they are frustrated that districts take too long in even addressing the needs of their gifted students." Military-connected students need additional supports and those on both sides of the

performance distribution — gifted and special needs — require even more support.

An analysis from Virginia's Old Dominion University found that more than three-fourths of educators working in schools serving significant populations of military-connected students reported they had not received preparation connected to serving these students.<sup>33</sup> This is a significant finding in a state like Virginia, which is widely regarded as a national leader serving the nation's second largest population of military-connected students.

Military relocations don't neatly follow a school calendar or coincide with application deadlines, such as special district academy schools or the prestigious Governor's Schools. These timing challenges are heightened by the state's lack of an open enrollment policy among districts to facilitate public school choice and less than ten public charter schools.

Military families often choose long commutes, homeschooling, or living apart, rather than enrolling children in schools that aren't performing or meeting their unique needs. In the immediate Hampton Roads region, there are 10 schools whose performance falls within the lowest five percent of schools statewide, which is one-third of the state's total.<sup>34</sup> Given Virginia's constraints on school choice, this means military families may need to live multiple school districts away from their base posting in order to find schools that meet their standards.

Far fewer military-connected children attend Norfolk Public Schools than are eligible, likely due in part to the high numbers of Norfolk schools that have lost state accreditation. Indeed, Norfolk held a "Military Child Convening," with a focus on attracting military and veteran families to "Choose Norfolk" instead of neighboring communities.<sup>35</sup> Across Virginia, base housing is being leased to private citizens because military families will not live on base if they have to attend the local schools. While Virginia has made great strides in better meeting the needs of military-connected students and families, it still has room to improve in consistently and comprehensively serving these students in all schools and districts.

<sup>31</sup> Virginia Secretary of Education, SOL Innovation Committee. Accessed October 2016 at <https://education.virginia.gov/initiatives/sol-innovation-committee/>.

<sup>32</sup> Virginia Department of Education, Presentation to the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Accessed October 2016 at [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student\\_family/military/va\\_council/meetings/2016/update\\_on\\_issues\\_raised\\_2015\\_jan\\_6\\_16.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_family/military/va_council/meetings/2016/update_on_issues_raised_2015_jan_6_16.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Virginia Department of Education, Presentation to the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Accessed October 2016 at [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student\\_family/military/va\\_council/resources/teams\\_va\\_interstate\\_compact\\_07182012.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_family/military/va_council/resources/teams_va_interstate_compact_07182012.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Virginia Department of Education, news release. Accessed October 2016 at [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/news/news\\_releases/2016/09\\_sep14.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/news/news_releases/2016/09_sep14.shtml).

<sup>35</sup> Virginia Department of Education, Presentation to the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Accessed October 2016 at [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student\\_family/military/va\\_council/meetings/2016/052316-combined-norfolk-military-child-convening-for-interstate-compact-mtg.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_family/military/va_council/meetings/2016/052316-combined-norfolk-military-child-convening-for-interstate-compact-mtg.pdf).



## PROFILE II » Amanda Woodyard



Amanda Woodyard, advocate for military-connected families, Military Student Transition Consultant for the Military Child Education Coalition, and former active-duty service member, observes, “Low-income parents don’t necessarily know how to advocate for their kids. This is much harder when students are military connected because of the challenges with transitioning to a new community and school, and not knowing what resources are even available.”

She understands that poverty can be a significant barrier to educational success for all students. Some studies show 10 percent or more of those who enlist come from families in the bottom 20 percent of incomes.<sup>36</sup>

**“Communication is critical. We have to understand their story a little bit differently.”**



Woodyard has seen the shifting demographics in Virginia’s student population, which has experienced a large increase in the number of economically disadvantaged students — about 146,000 since 2008.<sup>37</sup>

This makes her efforts all the more important, as achievement gaps related to poverty are pronounced in many Virginia districts, presenting another challenge to military families attempting to find the best educational opportunities.

As Woodyard explains, “Communication is critical. We have to understand their story a little bit differently.”

<sup>36</sup> “The American Prospect, Soldiering on an Empty Stomach. Accessed at <http://prospect.org/article/soldiering-empty-stomach>.

<sup>37</sup> Balingit, Moriah. “Commonwealth Institute says Virginia is short-changing its poor students,” *Washington Post*. June 4, 2016. Accessed at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/commonwealth-institute-says-virginia-is-short-changing-its-poor-students/2016/06/04/52a6be48-2903-11e6-ae4a-3cdd5fe74204\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/commonwealth-institute-says-virginia-is-short-changing-its-poor-students/2016/06/04/52a6be48-2903-11e6-ae4a-3cdd5fe74204_story.html).

# Conclusion

The challenges and opportunities facing states and school districts in effectively serving military-connected students span policymaking at federal and state levels, to organizational leadership at the district level, to culture development at the school level, to responsive teaching and learning in the classroom.

Leaders and practitioners who work with military-connected families and students on the ground are focused on a number of critical realities highlighted in this four-state analysis. These include the availability of quality school choices and options, the impact of uneven district performance, and ramifications of federal, state, local school district, military service, base, and other policies.

A number of the well-documented education issues affecting military students also surfaced, including frequent transitions to new school settings; transfer of services for special education students; incompatible graduation requirements; overlapping or missing coursework, grades, or credits; comparability of state standards; the transfer of records; and social-emotional needs.

**“These students are a real value-add to districts, with their adaptability, resilience, service mindset, and wealth of experience.”**

The underlying causes driving the quality of educational experiences for military children are largely consistent and cluster around four key areas: uneven ability to participate in available educational options; inconsistent content and achievement standards from state to state; limited support for military-connected students; and less effective state and school district policies to identify and support military-connected families and students.

Our military services have long recognized that the satisfaction and quality of life of service members' families hold real implications for the strength and effectiveness of the fighting force.

For all the challenges presented, policies needed, and support required, military-connected students are “an honor to serve,” said Melissa Luchau, the military family liaison for the Virginia Department of Education. “These students are a real value-add to districts, with their adaptability, resilience, service mindset, and wealth of experience.”



# RECOMMENDATIONS

The awareness of the unique experiences and needs of military-connected students is increasing and important steps are being taken. There are several specific recommendations that, if implemented, could improve the day-to-day educational lives of military-connected families.

1

**Military-connected families should have access to more educational**

**options.** Many state laws, including Missouri's and Virginia's, do not allow open enrollment to a nearby school district, so a family must attend school in the district where they live. Families able to live off-base often make schools a top priority in deciding where to live, sometimes pursuing long commutes and non-public options.

Open enrollment laws provide some valuable flexibility for families connected with a military installation to cross district boundaries to take advantage of other opportunities that can better meet their needs. Charter schools, especially those on-base, can also provide a valuable public educational opportunity offering school models designed to meet the specific needs of military families. Virtual school options, like the Virtual Virginia Initiative, can help bridge learning gaps from one state to another, or allow for mastery-based approaches around times of transition. Supporting access to non-public, including faith-based, schools, for families for whom that is a priority is an approach which has proven popular in some jurisdictions.

Where these opportunities are not available, access to specialty offerings for older students, like Advanced Placement courses, can be improved through use of technology in smaller districts that may lack qualified teachers. The National Math and Science Initiative, a national organization based in Dallas, has proven to be a valuable resource to districts serving military-connected students through its support of college-readiness programs. In September 2016, the Initiative awarded \$400,000 to Missouri's Knob Noster School District, allowing Superintendent Jerrod Wheeler to establish seven new Advanced Placement courses that will benefit military-connected students.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Hope Lecchi, "Knob Noster Schools Receive \$400,000 National Math and Science Initiative Grant," *Sedalia Democrat*, September 29, 2016.

# RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED

In addition, better supporting parents of special-needs students, and particularly those on the autism spectrum, would be valuable, which is advocated by Brig. Gen. Paul W. Tibbets IV, commander of Whiteman Air Force Base, and his wife. A lack of quality local options, with limited ability to make other choices, means qualified military personnel request transfers away, which the military will usually honor, costing qualified personnel.

2

**State decision makers must continue to strengthen the rigor, specificity, and comparability of content standards.** For military-connected students, educational interruptions are a profound obstacle to classroom success. Rigorous and comparable content standards, especially in core subjects, are important to minimizing the disruptive impact of transition issues. Many states are already heading in this direction by incorporating Common Core State Standards or standards that are markedly similar.

Within states, education agencies and districts must ensure standards are implemented with fidelity; professional development for teachers and access to high-quality curricular resources are necessary to ensure every student can reach their full potential under more rigorous standards. Best practices addressing the types of resources that are most helpful for military-connected students must be developed, analyzed, and shared across and within states.

3

**States must commit to fully implementing the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.** The Compact is designed to resolve recognized education transition issues, but is not intended to impact curriculum or local standards of education. It addresses mobility-related challenges by helping states to harmonize and adapt state laws to include transfer of records, course placement, graduation requirements, exclusion from extracurricular activities, redundant or missed entrance or exit testing, entrance age variations, and more.

While all 50 states have adopted the Compact, few have truly integrated it into their state policymaking and systems of support like Virginia.<sup>39</sup> States could, for example, work toward a common transcript program, with common qualification for high school progress and credit. For the Compact to be effective, and therefore improve the experiences of military-connected youth, the spirit and effort around the Compact must be fully embraced by all states.

<sup>39</sup> Military Interstate Compact Commission, <http://mic3.net/pages/resources/documents/MIC3-History.pdf>. Accessed October 2016.



**Districts should provide military-connected students with high-quality personalized learning opportunities.** Military-connected students coming to a new school can face challenges in quickly getting up to speed. The right educational support interventions as part of a traditional educational experience can yield improved results, but often over the course of many years. Military-connected students seldom have that kind of time.

As former superintendents Dan Domenech and Morton Sherman, now the executive director and associate director of the AASA, the national superintendents' association, recently wrote, "In our version of personalized learning, we envision a transformation in how children are taught and how the system organizes for learning. Each child is treated as a unique individual and his or her education begins with the development of a personalized education plan."<sup>40</sup>

Nationally, some of the most impressive gains in student outcomes in recent years have come in districts and schools that thoroughly integrate computers and state-of-the-art software to support teachers trained in individualizing the learning experience for all students.<sup>41</sup> Leveraging technology, and supporting teachers with strategies and actionable information on where students are in relation to state standards, personalized learning can cut through lost time and angst. Providing students access to their digital content at home outside of school hours is also an option military families are often quick to utilize. Every student — particularly those that are military connected — would benefit from the systematic integration of technology tools by teachers to customize instruction to each student's individual needs and pace.

<sup>40</sup> Dan Domenech, Morton Sherman, John L. Brown, "Personalizing 21st Century Education: A Framework for Student Success," pg. 6. 2016, Jossey-Bass (Wiley).

<sup>41</sup> Doug Mesecar, *New Evidence That Personalized Learning Can Produce Powerful Results*, September 2016. Accessed at <http://lexingtoninstitute.org/new-evidence-personalized-learning-can-produce-powerful-results/>

# RECOMMENDATIONS CONTINUED

5

**States and districts must leverage the Every Student Succeeds Act's requirement for a military student identifier to improve the educational experience of military-connected students.**

The new federal requirement for a military student identifier means all states will have to improve their identification of, and reporting on, military-connected students in order to better meet those students' needs. Without data, decisions about military-connected students, and the programs, staff, and funds that support them, are operating on intuition alone.

With data about the numbers, locations, and academic performance of military-connected students, states and districts will be better equipped to address needs and improve policies. States have a valuable opportunity to analyze student performance using this new identifier to support plans of action informed by the information it provides. Currently, the military student identifier in ESSA applies to students with a parent who is a member of the Armed Forces on active duty. However, there are more than 500,000 military-connected school-aged students of the National Guard and Reserve components in all fifty states. The parents of these children deploy domestically and globally in response to our nation's call. Regardless of the reason for parental absence, these children live with continual stressors and transition adjustments that their civilian classmates do not experience and they should be included in the military student identifier as well. As Christi Ham, chairwoman of Military Families for High Standards, observed earlier this year, "Knowing where military-connected students are and what kind of education they are receiving provides federal, state and local leaders with information necessary to direct resources to the schools that teach them — an important milestone in ensuring that these students have the same chance to succeed as every other student."<sup>42</sup>

6

**Military leaders should prioritize families' education considerations where possible.**

For example, the Armed Forces should continue working to improve the timing of personnel transfers to minimize education disruptions. Clearly, it is not possible for services to completely coordinate deployments and transfers, but they can be much improved, as the Army has done. This would go a long way toward easing some of the challenges with transitioning military-connected families. As Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter described last year, "To give service members and their families greater choice, we are overhauling the way we place personnel, to offer more options and... potentially fewer moves, meaning fewer first days as the new kid in school."<sup>43</sup>

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**School districts should consider all options to improve the educational experience for military families.**

Because elected representation on school boards is rare for families living on base, the inclusion of a non-voting school board trustee with a strong understanding of issues important to these families can be helpful. Districts near military installations are often smaller, so pursuing innovative solutions to maximize extracurricular and athletic programs is important. Working to build and maintain strong working relationships between school district officials and base administrations is another, often irreplaceable, strategy.

<sup>42</sup> Christi Ham, "Three Cheers for the Military Student Identifier," The Huffington Post, September 21, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter remarks before the Military Child Education Coalition – <https://youtu.be/SJogJyKvyxs>. July 31, 2015.

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