

National Association of State Boards of Education

➔ Policies to Support Military-Connected Students

By William Tucker

Military spouse Maryann Makekau reflected in 2012 on the difference between the lives of civilian and military families. She focused on the day that her eight-year-old daughter climbed her favorite tree and refused to come down. “That day marked our children’s third military move,” Makekau said. “She adamantly opposed us making her leave the place she called home.”¹

With thousands of U.S. troops still stationed in Afghanistan and other posts, the nation’s armed forces continue to make significant sacrifices. So do their families. The impact

particularly on youth in these “military-connected” families has flown under the radar. “They may not stand out the way that their parents do in uniform,” Makekau noted, “but they are serving too.”

Students with one or more parents or guardians serving in the armed forces or reserves face social-emotional and academic challenges their peers do not. While each child may experience these challenges differently, typical stresses stem from the absence of a parent due to deployment, changes in the family dynamic that accompany a parent’s departure, the lack of adult support at home for a student’s academic efforts, and the possibility (or even reality) of the loss of a parent or guardian.

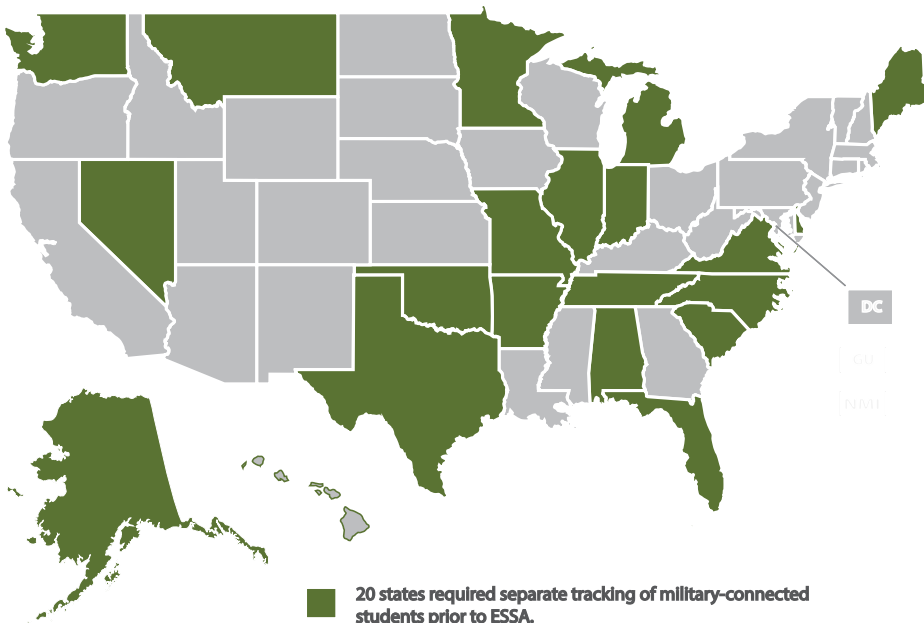
Military-connected children are also among the most mobile of student populations.² They change schools on average three times as often as other K-12 students, which equates to six to nine moves before high school graduation. The resulting effects of student mobility on learning and academic progress are well-documented and can be significant.³

In addition, students who change schools face the social-emotional difficulties that come with new teachers, new friends, and generally new adjustments. For these students, dealing with new surroundings at school may be particularly difficult given the simultaneous changes at home. Moreover, some parents of military-connected students argue that it is wrong to dismiss such dramatic changes as something that gets easier with practice. “Every deployment and move is different, no matter how much ‘practice’ a child has had,” Makekau said.⁴

Schools, districts, and states need to monitor and support military-connected students and their families closely to ensure their success and well-being. Yet until relatively recently, state and school district initiatives to track and help military families were ad hoc. Consequently, critical information about this distinct group of students was substantially limited, a problem no doubt compounded by their transient enrollment. Under Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), that is slated to change. States receiving federal funds under Title I are now required to include information on the academic achievement of military-connected students in their state report cards, beginning with the 2017–18 school year. As of last summer, 20 states were already doing so (see map).

High mobility is likely a key reason for the inconsistent inclusion of military-connected students as a unique group in state student record databases.⁵ To serve these students, schools, districts, and states must be able to consistently and accurately identify and track them. Yet interstate mobility and mid-semester school changes exacerbate the problem, as does some states’ reliance

20 States Requiring Tracking of Military-Connected Students in 2016



Source: Military Child Education Coalition, “Military Student Data Identifier,” Annual Report, 2014.

on families to self-report that their children are connected to the military.

While high student mobility puts a premium on sound data collection processes, it also calls for data sharing and cooperation across systems and state lines. The ability to accurately and consistently match data with a student becomes particularly critical for those who move as many as nine times during a K-12 experience. But before interstate sharing can occur, local data systems must be able to share subgroup data with the state longitudinal system, and local administrators must understand the importance of doing so.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) already accommodates interstate cooperation to the extent that it does not prohibit sharing of student records between school systems or education agencies when a student transfers schools. However, states will need to act quickly and with purpose to ensure that their student data policies and systems are prepared to account for the million-plus military-connected K-12 students, who migrate with astounding frequency across disparate state and local databases.

POLICIES FOR DATA SHARING

To effectively address this challenge, state and local education agencies will need the support and leadership of their state boards of education to make data sharing and cross-agency cooperation possible. State boards should ensure that their policies promote interstate cooperation and the planning and facilitating of appropriate data sharing practices.

Fortunately, many state boards have the authority to accomplish these directives. Under Virginia State Law, for example, the state board of education adopts regulations concerning “the transfer and management of scholastic records from one school division to another.”⁶ In Arizona, state law similarly empowers its state board to be “the policy-determining body of the department [of education],” a role that includes establishing and setting guidelines for gathering and reporting on student data.⁷ And in Louisiana, the state board is “responsible for

all planning functions for the Department of Education,” which includes the “collection, analysis and interpretation of all data [and] information,” the “assembling of data,” and effectively “providing information about educational needs.”⁸

While not every state board of education possesses this rulemaking authority and policy latitude, the majority do. For those that do not, there are other levers of influence: the ability to convene groups to discuss important issues and advise those with more direct power, such as the state legislature. They can also partner with national forums such as the Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission, an organization that seeks to provide for the uniform treatment of military children transferring between school districts and states.

TRAINING IN DATA MANAGEMENT

Collecting and managing data while protecting student privacy are highly related processes. Some top-level principles apply to both. Effective policymaking on education data requires that state boards avoid unintended harms caused by vaguely worded laws or regulations and avoid fear-based policies that hinder states from collecting and sharing data that will help students.⁹ But given the particular challenges of maintaining privacy while sharing information, state boards of education should be especially active in guiding policy on training. Many states addressed student data protection through new laws in the last few years, but few of those laws addressed the need for training of those who handle the data.¹⁰

State boards are poised to address this gap. In 46 states, state boards have the rulemaking authority to pass such training requirements directly or to compel or guide individual districts in creating a plan to address data management and privacy needs.¹¹ States such as Kentucky, Colorado, West Virginia, and Illinois have made a conscious effort to provide training on management of education data.

All states ought to adopt training requirements as a core component of their commitment to data integrity, student privacy, and public

trust. Devoted engagement in this area, in addition to a renewed zeal for cross-state collaboration, will have a powerful impact on the ability of states to fulfill ESSA’s requirements for tracking military-connected students and ensure proper support for these special students at every step of their academic journey.

William Tucker is NASBE’s project manager for education data and technology. He can be reached at william.tucker@nasbe.org.

NOTES

1 Maryann Makekau, “The Challenges of Raising Military Kids,” *Time.com* (Oct. 22, 2012), <http://nation.time.com/2012/10/22/the-challenges-of-raising-military-kids/>.

2 The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education defines military-connected students as “children in P-6 schools, adolescents in Middle and High School and students who are adolescents or young adults in Trade Schools, or Institutions of Higher Education (two- or four-year schools) that are official dependents of a Military Service member.” AACTE further notes that the “military-connected student has one degree of separation from their military sponsor; the connection may be biological, because of an adoption, through foster parenting, or with in loco parentis authorization.” AACTE, “Who Are Military-Connected Students?” (November 29, 2011), https://secure.aacte.org/apps/rl/res_get.php?fid=1256&ref=rl.

3 See, e.g., S. Beth Ruff and Michael A. Keim, “Revolving Doors: The Impact of Multiple School Transitions on Military Children,” *TPCJournal.org* (2014), <http://tpcjournal.nbcc.org/revolving-doors-the-impact-of-multiple-school-transitions-on-military-children/>; Debra Viadero, “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow,” *Edweek.org* (September 4, 1996), <http://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/1996/09/04/02find.h08.html>.

4 Makekau, “The Challenges of Raising Military Kids.”

5 U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Education of Military Dependent Students: Better Information Needed to Assess Student Performance,” GAO-11-231 (Washington, DC: GAO, March 2011), <http://www.gao.gov/assets/320/316048.pdf>.

6 VA. Code Ann. § 22.1-289.

7 A.R.S. § 15.231.

8 LA. Rev. Stat. § 17:7.

9 Amelia Vance, “Policymaking on Education Data Privacy: Lessons Learned,” *Education Leaders Report* 2, no. 1 (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, April 2016).

10 Amelia Vance, phone call with author and Future of Privacy Forum K-12 Working Group, May 5, 2017.

11 Wisconsin and Minnesota do not have state boards of education, and New Mexico, North Dakota, and the District of Columbia lack such authority.