

WHEN FAMILIES SERVE: MILITARY-CONNECTED GIFTED STUDENTS AND SCHOOL TRANSITIONS

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In the United States, there are 200,000 school-aged children with one or more parents in the armed forces (Center for Public Research and Leadership, 2017). When a parent serves in the United States Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, or Navy on active duty or in the National Guard or Reserves, the entire family is impacted. Service members routinely receive permanent change of station (PCS) orders when a job or deployment requires a geographic move. These station changes are usually not permanent, despite the name, and as a result, military-connected students experience, on average, six to nine nonpromotional school transitions during their K–12 education (Center for Public Research and Leadership, 2017). This means that in addition to the transitions from elementary to middle and middle to high school, students from military families who make geographic moves will face additional school changes. Varying identification protocols for gifted and talented services are frustrating for parents and students, and school transitions can cause a loss of educational opportunities for students who might qualify for gifted services in one state, but not in another (Borland, 2005; Center for Public Research and Leadership, 2017).

Although the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) operates schools on the East Coast and outside the contiguous United States (OCONUS), most students from military families attend public schools (Center for Public Research and Leadership, 2017). The most recent military demographics report released by the Department of Defense (2018) estimated that 38.8% of service members have children, many of whom will attend local public schools. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) requires schools to collect data on military-connected students, so families are asked to self-report active duty and National Guard or Reserve status when they enroll their children in school each year. Across Texas, there are 15 military installations, and these Air Force bases, Army Forts and Depots, Naval Air Stations, and Joint Reserve Bases employ more than 100,000 active duty personnel and almost 15,000 National Guard and Reserve personnel (Texas Military Preparedness Commission, 2018). Military-impacted school districts, those with at least 400 military-connected students or 3% of the total student population, may be more aware of the needs of this student population, but there are military-connected students in most public school systems in Texas (Center for Public Research and Leadership, 2017), and there are students from military families who

qualify for gifted and talented services in every education service center region in the state, even in school districts not geographically close to military installations (Rodriguez & Brewer, 2019).

One study found that on Texas state assessments for math and reading, military-connected students consistently met passing standards at higher rates than their nonmilitary peers (Muller et al., 2016a). Using 3 years of achievement data, the same researchers determined that in Texas, military-connected students were less likely to be labeled at-risk than their nonmilitary peers (Muller et al., 2016b). There is a limited amount of research on gifted students from military families, and the existing studies indicate that military-connected students may exhibit higher academic achievement than their civilian peers, but these studies also highlight the fact that military-connected students participate in gifted programs at lower rates. These findings emphasize the need for policies, such as the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (2016) and the Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2019), that support the unique needs of this population of geographically mobile high-ability students.

In the Texas State Plan (TEA, 2019), the stated goal for students who participate in gifted services is to “demonstrate skills in self-directed learning, thinking, research, and communication as evidenced by the development of innovative products and performances that reflect individuality and creativity and are advanced in relation to students of similar age, experience, or environment” (p. 6). This broad goal allows independent school districts throughout the state to maintain local control and to make decisions they feel are best for the academically advanced students in their communities. However, this flexibility also means that within the state, local education agency policies and gifted service models can vary drastically. Portability, or the transfer of gifted identification assessment results and placements, from district to district is limited, so gifted students transitioning into new schools often have to be reevaluated, resulting in the potential for discontinuity of services (Plucker & Peters, 2016). Fortunately, there are specific provisions in place to protect the educational interests of children from military families and to guide school personnel in enrollment and placement decisions.

THE INTERSTATE COMPACT

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (2016) was introduced in 2008 and updated in 2016. Although there are many other interstate compacts in federal regulations, in this article, the terms compact and interstate compact refer to the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The compact is intended to “remove barriers to educational success imposed on children of military families because of frequent moves and deployment of their parents” (§ 89.4). In other words, children and adolescents from military families should not be penalized in educational settings for their parents’ military job requirements, which may include frequent geographic moves.

By 2014, all 50 states and the District of Columbia adopted the educational provisions of the compact (Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission, n.d.). When a state adopts the compact, the provisions are added to the educational code, but those provisions do not override state and local education agency policies, nor do they take away local control of education decisions. This means that school districts have the option of applying their local policies instead of adhering to the compact. However, the compact and its provisions can help local school districts

understand the challenges military-connected students face as they transition from school to school and offer guidance on how school personnel can support this special population of students.

WHO THE COMPACT COVERS

The provisions of the compact apply to the children of active duty service members and the children of National Guard and Reserve members on active duty orders. The children of medically discharged or retired service members who were injured on active duty and the children of members who died on active duty also receive single-year provisions (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.3). The compact does not cover the children of National Guard and Reserve members who are not on active duty orders, the children of military contractors, or children making transitions due to voluntary parental separation or retirement from the armed forces. The provisions of the compact include students moving from public or DoDEA schools to other public or DoDEA schools, but they do not cover students transitioning to or from private or home-based education settings. However, local education agencies in Texas have the flexibility to extend the benefits of the compact to military-connected students who are not technically covered. The local control afforded to independent school districts in Texas allows school personnel to act in the best interest of all children from military families.

WHAT THE COMPACT COVERS

The compact addresses how school districts and individual school personnel should approach enrollment documentation requirements (e.g., vaccinations, transcripts), academic placement (e.g., prerequisite courses, advanced courses), student program eligibility (e.g., gifted services, extracurricular participation), transition and deployment-related attendance (e.g., additional excused absences), and measures to ensure on-time graduation (e.g., required course completion, state testing) for military-connected students moving into and out of their school systems. Although the compact does not exclusively focus on students receiving gifted and talented or advanced academic services, many of the provisions can positively impact gifted military-connected students in transition. To maintain local control and independent school district discretion, each of the provisions in the compact is followed by a caveat. Receiving schools are instructed to initially “honor placement,” such as a student’s gifted and talented or advanced academic course enrollment from the sending school, but they “may perform subsequent evaluations to ensure the child’s appropriate course placement” (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.8). This distinction is intended to smooth the initial transition for students from military families, but also to ensure that these students are placed in the most compatible learning environments.

SPECIFIC COMPACT PROVISIONS FOR GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENTS

Early Entrance and Whole-Grade Acceleration

The compact allows students from military families to continue in the grade-level placement from the sending state, or, if a student has “satisfactorily completed the prerequisite grade level in the sending state,” the compact recommends “enrollment in the next higher grade level” in the

receiving state. The compact clarifies that this provision should be honored “regardless of the age of the child” (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.8). For example, if a student is allowed to start kindergarten at age 4 in one state, but moves to a state where students must be 5 to start kindergarten, the compact allows that military-connected child to enroll in first grade, regardless of age, if they have successfully completed kindergarten in the sending state. If a student moves in the middle of first grade, that student should be placed in first grade in the receiving state. However, if the student has successfully completed first grade in the sending state, that student should be placed in second grade for the next school year in the receiving state. Some states and school districts have restrictions on the age at which a student can enroll in kindergarten, stipulations about funding for students entering school early, or minimum ages for placement in particular grades, but the compact addresses potential state-to-state differences in age and grade placement requirements and allows students to continue the educational trajectory they have started.

The Texas State Plan (TEA, 2019) emphasizes that gifted and talented service designs should be “comprehensive, structured, sequenced, and appropriately challenging” (Standard 3.3.1, p. 14). The plan further clarifies that service implementation should include “acceleration and flexible pacing” to allow “students to learn at the pace and level appropriate for their abilities and skills” (Standard 3.8, p. 15). Although school districts do maintain local control over decisions about early entrance and whole-grade acceleration, the compact and the document guiding service design for gifted and talented students in Texas both offer clear support for honoring prior acceleration of students from military families.

Advanced Academics

The compact instructs local education agencies to “honor placement of a transfer student in courses based on the child’s placement” from the sending state “as long as the course is offered” by the receiving school (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.8). The chief consideration for placement decisions under the compact is “continuing the child’s academic program from the previous school and promoting placement in academic and career challenging courses” (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.8). So, under the provisions of the compact, if a student was participating in an Advanced Placement course or career and technical education courses, they should be allowed to continue in the course(s). However, it is not uncommon for course offerings (e.g., world languages, computer sciences) to differ between schools, and these disparities may require some flexibility or creativity when military-connected students enroll in new schools. School personnel, the base School Liaison Officer, and other military-connected families may be able to suggest alternate solutions for continuing academic talent development for gifted and high-ability students. For example, advanced world language courses may not be offered at the receiving school, but they might be offered at a local college or in an online course. The Texas State Plan (TEA, 2019) encourages school districts to “enable students to participate in dual/concurrent enrollment, distance learning opportunities, and accelerated summer programs if available” (Standard 3.9, p. 15). The purpose of these provisions is to alert school districts to local barriers to participation in advanced academic or career development courses. Collaboration between families and school personnel can ensure the continuity of advanced academic and career development coursework for students whose parents serve in the military.

GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS

The interstate compact specifically addresses gifted and talented program participation. The provisions give local education agencies the option to accept gifted identification and placement testing from the sending state without reassessment. Schools are encouraged to “honor placement of the child in educational programs based on current educational assessments and placement in like programs in the sending state” (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.8). Districts may also temporarily place the student in gifted services based on the student’s placement in the sending state, reassess the student according to the receiving school’s criteria, and keep or adjust that placement based on the results. Retesting for gifted services is an added strain on a military-connected student who is making a nonpromotional school transition. However, because gifted services can vary drastically between local education agencies, testing that is aligned with the local service model may help ensure appropriate placement in the new learning environment (Peters et al., 2014). The Texas State Plan (TEA, 2019) ensures “equitable access to gifted/talented services for transfer students” (Standard 2.8.1, p. 11), but also acknowledges that reassessment for gifted services can be stressful for students. The Texas State Plan emphasizes that any gifted identification or placement reevaluation should be “based on performance in response to gifted/talented services,” and “if reassessment occurs at all,” it should be limited to “no more than once in elementary grades, once in middle school grades, and once in high school” (Standard 2.11, p. 11).

For example, based on prior testing, a school district may initially place a transferring military-connected gifted student in middle school gifted and talented courses for language arts, history, math, and science. The student may thrive in all of the courses, and if so, the school may opt to leave the student in that placement without further testing. On the other hand, differences in identification, programming, or curriculum between the sending and receiving schools may become evident if the student begins to have difficulty in one or more courses. If the student continues to struggle academically or does not respond to targeted interventions, reassessment may be necessary. When reassessment for services is required, school personnel should communicate with the student and family about the specific differences between identification and services in the two districts and the rationale for retesting (TEA, 2019, Standard 2.1, 2.4). The goal of reassessment should be to “predict success in the program” (Peters et al., 2014, p. 25) and to ensure the most appropriate educational placement for the student.

For students who were enrolled in gifted and talented services in the sending district, the options for receiving districts are clearly outlined in the compact and the state plan. However, due to differences between state policies, school district policies, and local norms for gifted and talented services, students may transition into Texas schools and demonstrate a need for gifted education services in the new context (Plucker & Barab, 2005). For example, a military-connected high school student transferring from a Department of Defense school overseas may be placed in a grade-level math course, but they may very quickly demonstrate content mastery and a need for acceleration. An elementary student who has never been identified for gifted services may move to a new state after a permanent change of station (PCS) and show signs that evaluation for gifted services is warranted. Therefore, school personnel enrolling military-connected students (e.g., registrars, counselors) and professionals who interact directly with transfer students (e.g., gifted coordinators or specialists, classroom teachers, school psychologists) should be aware of the gifted service models used in the

school and the ongoing identification protocols in order to ensure that these students are put in educationally appropriate placements as soon as possible (TEA, 2019, Standard 2.14, p. 11).

Extracurricular Talent Development Opportunities

The compact instructs school districts to “facilitate the opportunity for transitioning military children’s inclusion in extracurricular activities, regardless of application deadlines, to the extent the children are otherwise qualified” (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.8). This section of the compact document reminds local education agencies of the importance of the social and talent development opportunities provided by extracurricular participation. This provision allows qualified students to try out for athletic teams or fine arts groups, such as bands or choirs, as soon as they move to the school even if general tryouts have already been held on that campus or paperwork deadlines have passed. For example, the compact does not suggest that a military transfer student who was not previously involved in cheerleading be awarded a spot on the high school cheer team, but it does recommend that a student who was a cheerleader at their sending school should be allowed a tryout even if schoolwide tryouts at the receiving school have already been held. Schools are not required to reserve open slots for transferring students on teams or in organizations, nor are they required to award spots to students whose skills do not meet program requirements. However, this provision does remove some barriers to talent development activities for transitioning military-connected students.

The Texas State Plan (TEA, 2019) explicitly states that school districts should strive to meet the talent development needs of high-ability students by providing “curriculum options in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas; leadership; and specific academic fields” (Standard 4.1.1, p. 16), and by employing “flexible pacing” (Standard 4.6, p. 16) and “scheduling modifications” (Standard 4.7, p. 16). Many school-based talent development opportunities combine in-class training with out-of-class training and competition. However, these offerings tend to vary from district to district and school to school. For example, advanced theater courses might not be available in the receiving school’s fine arts department, but there may be a community theater option. Extracurricular engagement allows students to build both domain-specific skills and relationships with peers and adult advisors. Participation in these types of activities “is closely correlated with children’s futures,” including “educational attainment” and “future earnings” (Snellman et al., 2015, p. 195). The compact and the Texas State Plan both explicitly support the inclusion of military-connected students in talent development programs during the school day and after the traditional school day ends. Locally imposed barriers, such as tryouts and paperwork deadlines, have practical implications for the school personnel sponsoring and coaching the programs. However, the interstate compact and the Texas State Plan both suggest that, when possible, these obstacles should be removed to support the participation of military-connected students.

On-Time Graduation

The compact addresses the fact that students who transfer during elementary school, middle school, and high school have very different school-related transition concerns (Plucker & Yecke, 1999). Military-connected students may begin high school under one set of graduation requirements and be on track to completing those requirements, but move to another school with a vastly different set of graduation requirements they have not had the time nor opportunity to complete. One of the major compact provisions emphasizes the importance of on-time graduation for all students from military-

connected families by specifically addressing required coursework and exit exams. Receiving schools are allowed to grant waivers for required courses in a secondary degree plan if “similar coursework has been successfully completed,” but if a waiver is not granted, the school or district must “provide an alternate means of acquiring required coursework” (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.8). For example, if a local education agency requires a state-specific history course or 3 consecutive years of the same world language, and a military-connected student is transferring from a state where the course was not required and they have a full course load that does not allow them to register for the course in the new school, the receiving school has two options. Option one is to accept similar coursework from the sending school. Option two is to provide a reasonable way for the student to earn credit for the course (i.e., study guide, credit by exam, online course).

Exit exam requirements for graduation are set by individual state education agencies. In Texas, the STAAR end-of-course exams for algebra, biology, English, and U.S. history are administered between eighth and 11th grade. Students transferring from out of state would not have had the opportunity to take these assessments. Local education agencies in Texas can accept exit testing from the sending state or passing scores in completed courses, accept scores on “national norm referenced achievement tests” (e.g., Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Stanford Achievement Test), or provide alternate testing (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2016, § 89.8). For example, an SAT, ACT, or Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) score that shows a student’s college, career, or military readiness might be substituted for the required state exit testing. If it is not possible for a graduating senior to meet the graduation requirements of the receiving state, the receiving school is instructed to work with the sending school to award a diploma under that state’s graduation requirements. Although the Texas State Plan (TEA, 2019) does not specifically address on-time graduation, it does encourage districts to provide “dual/concurrent enrollment, distance learning opportunities, and accelerated summer programs” (Standard 3.9, p. 15), “credit by examination,” and “early high school graduation opportunities” (Standard 3.7, p. 14). For high school seniors from military families, graduation is an important step toward independence and choosing a college, a career, or joining the military to blend education and career development.

SUPPORT FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED GIFTED STUDENTS

When a parent or guardian serves in the armed forces, their children may experience multiple school transitions. The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (2016) and the Texas State Plan (TEA, 2019) provide guidance for school districts and individual campuses on how to meet the needs of students in transition. Dai (2017) identified “environmental press” and “socio-cultural mediation” (p. 176) as external influences that can support or thwart the development of talent in a domain. In other words, a responsive parent or trusted adult, such as a gifted education teacher or a school counselor, may be able to help children from military families develop coping strategies to ease transition related stress and continue with home- and school-based talent development. Taken together, the compact and the state plan both provide resources to ensure opportunities and remove obstacles for military-connected students. These documents support collaborative mindsets for working with military-connected students in transition, they encourage school-based support measures that can be employed by key personnel, and they identify specific ways to encourage advocacy for military-connected gifted and talented students.

ADOPT A COLLABORATIVE MINDSET

Acknowledge Individual Differences

There are notable differences in the lived experiences of military families based on numerous factors (e.g., duty station, career field, military branch, proximity to a military base). Every military family's situation is individual, so it is important for school personnel to recognize the variety of situations military children face and to design protocols and interventions that account for these individual differences. As a result of military conflicts, beginning with Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 through the ongoing Operation Inherent Resolve, current elementary and secondary students from military families have lived their entire lives with the possibility of a parent deploying to a conflict zone (Torreon, 2018). Some transitioning military students will have to cope with the deployment of a parent, and these students might require additional social and emotional support. National Guard and Reserve service members do deploy overseas, but when they are not activated, many report to their bases monthly and for annual training, so they may live farther from resources (e.g., counseling services, activities) provided on military bases. Active duty members may also be assigned to stations that are farther from military sources of support (e.g., college ROTC units). Children in families who are more distant from military installations may experience “a sense of aloneness” when adjusting to “a community with no military affiliation” (Harrison & Vannest, 2008, p. 19) or to communities that have a limited understanding of the military culture. For these families, military support services may be harder to access, so school-based support structures may be even more important as students adjust.

In addition, students from culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse military families may encounter issues accessing gifted programming or developing a sense of belonging within the program if they transition to receiving schools where gifted programs are not demographically representative or they do not see themselves reflected in the composition of the group or the content of the curriculum (Ford et al., 2018; Grantham et al., 2020). Scholars have noted that “gifted students of color” are “extensively underrepresented in gifted education” (Ford et al., 2018, p. 125). In DoDEA schools, high mobility within the student population is the norm, and high expectations for all students are related to increased academic achievement across demographic groups (Smrekar et al., 2001). So, students transitioning from DoDEA schools may encounter different cultures in receiving schools and their mobility may be viewed as a deficit, rather than a strength. It is critical for schools to create learning environments that are safe, culturally responsive spaces for students with a variety of lived experiences. Although many students from military families are resilient, educators still need to be aware of potential transition related issues at school and at home and have structures in place to assist students experiencing military-related geographic moves (Astor et al., 2012).

Monitor Social and Emotional Adjustment

To support the needs of military-connected students, schools must develop strategies tailored to this student population that address practical considerations, social and emotional adjustment, and academic achievement (Garner et al., 2014). Schools can support military-connected gifted and talented students by intentionally addressing social and emotional needs and psychosocial skills development. Social, emotional, and psychosocial skills are necessary for the development of talent (Subotnik et al., 2011; Rinn, 2020) and are the critical factors in performance and achievement (Olszewski-Kubilius

et al., 2019). Schools that have many military-connected students may choose to incorporate social and emotional curriculum (e.g., the Cope and Grow Model; Dai & Speerschneider, 2012) into their daily schedules (Durlak et al., 2011), implement a structured mentoring program (DuBois et al., 2011), and equip teachers and counselors with strategies to coach students' psychosocial skills as proactive measures to support their social and emotional needs (Rinn, 2020; Rinn & Crutchfield, 2020).

Some military-connected children transition from school to school with little difficulty. Others may experience temporary transition-related stress. Still others may require professional intervention. Military-connected children have unique needs, and schools can provide a stable and supportive learning environment as they adjust to nonpromotional transitions (De Pedro et al., 2014) and continue to develop psychosocial skills and talents. Families should keep open lines of communication with children and their classroom teachers. Transitions in academic environments and peer groups can temporarily or permanently influence one's self-beliefs, such as self-efficacy and academic self-concept, which can further impact a student's motivation and achievement, potentially causing more stress for students and their families. Although there will be transition-related stress, particularly for academically advanced students adjusting to new academic programs and services, this stress may subside after an initial adjustment period (Dai & Rinn, 2008). If transition-related stressors begin to impact student well-being or performance, classroom teachers and parents can reach out to school counselors and school psychologists, who can assist with the continuance of proactive support strategies and determine which, if any, reactive intervention strategies would be helpful for the student (Rinn, 2020). For families closer to military installations, the local School Liaison Officer can also provide information about extracurricular and wellness programs in the community for military families and students.

OFFER SCHOOL-BASED SUPPORT

Gifted Program Coordinators and Specialists

When students register for school, data on military-connected status is collected for ESSA (2015) reporting. If registrars share this information with gifted program coordinators and classroom teachers, it may help these educators with placement and instructional decisions. In addition, gifted program coordinators and specialists can communicate program goals and services clearly so that parents and transferring students understand the reasoning behind changes in placement or the decision to reassess for service eligibility (TEA, 2019, Standard 2.4, 2.7). For subsequent school transfers, coordinators can provide families with copies of educational assessments, such as gifted and talented program testing reports (Standard 2.9), to share with their receiving district. Coordinators or specialists can also provide parent handbooks or detailed descriptions of the gifted identification process and local service models, by grade level and subject area, for future enrollment conferences (Standard 1.10).

Ford (2010) identified “deficit thinking” as a systemic practice that is “fueling underrepresentation” of students of color in gifted and advanced academic programs (p. 32). Ford and Grantham (2003) asserted that “deficit thinking exists when educators hold negative, stereotypic, and counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations accordingly” (p. 217). Therefore, it is essential for gifted program coordinators and any other education professionals involved in gifted identification and program planning to carefully evaluate their programs to ensure that they are accessible, equitable, and culturally responsive, and do not have policies grounded in underlying beliefs that reflect deficit thinking (Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2018; Grantham et al., 2020; Patton

Davis & Museus, 2019). Further, these programs also need to be evaluated for inclusiveness and other factors related to the retention of students from diverse backgrounds (Ford et al., 2008).

Classroom Teachers

How classroom teachers welcome new students into learning environments can set the tone for the transition. Routine interpersonal interactions, such as asking a new student where they are transferring from, can be more complex for military-connected students who have lived multiple places. There may be differences between where these students lived most recently and where they identify as home. These initial interactions can cause anxiety or embarrassment for transitioning students and may be best handled privately, rather than in front of the class. In addition, it can be difficult for some transitioning students to make friends and develop academic support networks. Classroom teachers can be proactive about ensuring that new students are paired with helpful classmates, that they have someone to eat lunch with, and that they have someone they can contact with questions related to the course or school activities (Astor et al., 2012; Hébert, 2020).

Due to potential differences between the sending and receiving districts' curriculum, it is important for schools and individual educators who receive military-connected students in gifted and advanced academic programs to focus on student strengths (Baum et al., 2014). Discontinuity of curriculum between schools can create the perception of gaps in student knowledge and skills. Therefore, it is critical for classroom teachers to remember the dynamic nature of student learning and not to engage in deficit thinking or focus exclusively on perceived student skill gaps (Ford, 2010; Ford et al., 2018; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Patton Davis & Museus, 2019). Instructors can adopt strength-based intake protocols. These protocols can be used with all incoming students to gather data on current cognitive abilities, to create flexible instruction plans, and to select domain-specific mastery-learning approaches. Proyer et al. (2017) identified four steps for strength-based interventions, which include "knowing one's strengths," "sharing common experiences," "implementation of interventions," and "evaluation" (as cited in Rinn & Crutchfield, 2020, p. 89). Educators can prepare diagnostic assessments that allow students to demonstrate mastery of a sampling of skills and concepts throughout the whole academic year of content to identify strengths. Perhaps a military-connected student has not mastered content from the first unit, but they may have mastered content from a later unit, so the time earmarked for the later unit can be used to return to the first unit concepts and skills. In addition, students may have areas of strength and interest that can be used as a vehicle for guided and independent investigations that facilitate content mastery.

It is also important to keep in mind that military-connected students may experience subsequent school transitions, so educators can provide syllabi and scope and sequence documents, including detailed course descriptions and reading lists, for future transitions. Military-connected students tend to reach college entrance milestones at a rate comparable to their peers, due in large part to academic socialization in the home (e.g., talking about college and career goals) and the military culture of mission-readiness (Cabrera et al., 2018). High school teachers who work with older students experiencing school transitions can provide additional college readiness support by providing recommendation letters or by giving contact information to request letters for admissions and scholarships at a later date (Meyer & Cranmore, 2020).

Encourage Parent and Student Advocacy

For many military families, students will make multiple nonpromotional school transitions. As parents and students are gathering information for a current move, they can also be proactive in thinking about subsequent moves and important considerations at different grade levels. Families who live closer to bases can contact the School Liaison Officer from the military installation to discuss any special situations, such as deployment or school enrollment difficulties, the family might be facing. For families who live farther from on-base supports, in addition to resources available through the school district, the Texas Education Agency and other community organizations (e.g., Military Child Education Coalition, National Military Family Association) can offer additional resources.

Parents can also involve children and adolescents in the record-keeping process so they can advocate for themselves in enrollment meetings, especially those that impact course credit, grade point average, and class rank calculations. Families and school counselors may want to encourage secondary students to choose courses that are more likely to transfer across schools and districts (e.g., Advanced Placement courses) when possible (Center for Public Research and Leadership, 2017). For families with students who have been receiving gifted education services, it is important to document and communicate to the new school information about the specific services the child was receiving at the sending school in order to help with appropriate placement, particularly if the program models differ. In addition, receiving schools can communicate with sending schools to obtain gifted program descriptions or handbooks to facilitate the enrollment process.

Teachers should focus on student strengths and talents in their between-school communication and identify specific ways to help support transitioning children as they cover missed content. Families and school personnel can also encourage children to explore a broad range of extracurricular activities, in and out of school, especially when activities in which they have previously been involved are not available in the new community. Student organizations can also create programs to actively recruit transitioning students who have not yet engaged in extracurricular activities to help these students begin to develop a sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

For students making nonpromotional school transitions as a result of parental military service, there are policies at the federal, state, and local level to support the education of gifted and academically talented students. School personnel need to be aware of the transitions associated with military life and the policies intended to ease school transitions for these students. Transition support, particularly for students receiving gifted education services, should go beyond administrative tasks (e.g., reviewing testing records, making course placement decisions) and include academic, social, and emotional support measures. School personnel can support highly-mobile students, including students from military families, by allowing access to high-quality academic services, by providing opportunities for enrichment activities and socioemotional support, by scaffolding the curriculum to meet current academic needs, and by helping with record keeping for future transitions.

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