



Fact Sheet

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Department of Defense Support to Civilian Schools Educating Military Children

A significant element of family readiness is an educational system that provides a quality education to military children, recognizing the needs of these ever-moving students and responding to situations where the military parent is deployed and/or in an armed conflict. Children are affected by the absence of a parent and experience even higher levels of stress when their military parent is in a war zone shown constantly on television. The military member deployed to that dangerous place cannot afford to be distracted by the worry that his or her child is not receiving a quality education. Addressing the needs of these children, their classmates, and their parents is imperative in lowering the overall family stress level and achieving an appropriate level of family readiness. But it does not come without cost to the local school system.

NMFA is pleased to report that most schools charged with educating military children have stepped up to the challenge. They are the constant in a changing world and the place of security for military children and their families. The Department of Defense (DoD) is supporting this effort in several significant ways. It has an education website (www.militarystudent.org) to provide information on a variety of education topics to parents, students, educational personnel, and military commanders. NMFA is also pleased to report that other Services are following the Army's lead and hiring fulltime school liaison officers at certain installations. The Army not only has school liaison officers at all locations, but has also expanded to provide these information services to the reserve components, recruiters and other remotely-assigned personnel and their families.

DoD Supplement to Impact Aid

Approximately 80 percent of military children attend school in a civilian school district. These school districts follow the requirements of their states for age of enrollment in kindergarten, testing, and graduation requirements. In most school districts, operating funds are generated by state and local taxes. The presence of a federal military activity in a school district increases enrollment, yet reduces the tax base by the removal of property from the tax rolls. School districts also lose personal tax revenues through the provisions granted the military member by the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act and sales tax receipts when military families shop in commissaries and exchanges.

To compensate school districts for the loss of tax revenue due to the presence of a federal activity or federally-connected students (military, Native Americans, and federal public housing); the U.S. Department of Education provides funding through the Impact Aid program. Approximately 40 percent of Impact Aid funds go to districts educating military children (For more details about the Impact Aid program, see the NMFA fact sheet *Impact Aid*). Impact Aid provides vital operating funds for affected school districts; however, this funding is not enough to support the additional burden placed on school districts educating large numbers of military children. Congress has recognized the needs faced by many school districts educating military children caused by large numbers, frequent movements, and need for additional counseling and other resources to support children during the deployment of their parents. In most recent years, it has added approximately \$30 million to the Department of Defense budget for the DoD Supplement to Impact Aid. This funding is divided among school districts in which military children make up at least 20 percent of the enrollment, the so-called "heavily-impacted" districts.

The DoD Supplement to Impact Aid began in FY 1991. Congress included this funding in the DoD authorization and appropriations bills to help school districts with significant concentrations of military students deal with the consequences of an inadequate local funding base, challenges associated with base closures and realignments, deteriorating facilities, and inadequate Impact Aid funding. The DoD Supplement to Impact Aid is needed to

provide the military child with the level of educational opportunity available in neighboring, non-impacted school districts and in schools operated by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA).

For FY 2006, Congress provided \$30 million for the DoD Supplement and an additional \$5 million for districts educating severely-disabled military children. It also authorized \$10 million, but appropriated only \$7 million, to assist school districts experiencing an enrollment increase or decrease of at least 250 students due to global rebasing, Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), the activation of new units, or an increase of housing units on the military installation. In recognition of the additional demands on schools educating military children caused by higher deployments, new security concerns, higher state accountability standards, and military compassionate assignment policies for families with special needs children NMFA will continue to request at least \$50 million for the DoD Supplement in FY 2007. NMFA will also request additional funding to assist school districts in dealing with an influx of students caused by the movement of military personnel and families.

Privatization of Military Housing

Acting on authorities provided by Congress, DoD is entering into financial arrangements with private developers to speed the process of renovating and constructing military family housing. Some of these arrangements involve turning over family housing and either leasing or transferring land to the private firm. NMFA supports quality housing for military families and understands that privatization is a viable means of reaching that goal. How the privatization of housing is handled, however, dictates whether school districts continue to receive necessary educational funding and whether the district can prepare for changes in enrollment caused by population shifts on installations.

NMFA's concerns as they relate to the privatization of family housing and education include:

- Whether school officials are brought into the discussion of privatization and the planning process early enough to identify the impact on local schools.
- Whether or not land is kept under federal ownership, so that military children are weighted as living on-base in Impact Aid payment calculations.
- Facility issues generated when additional houses or houses to accommodate larger families are constructed under the privatization plans. The timing of the privatization construction process may not mesh with school districts' construction planning and funding process, thus causing the students to arrive in the school before the school has room to receive them.

Because of the effect privatization projects can have on school funding and facility needs, it is imperative that community leaders, especially school district administrators, are consulted early in an installation's privatization discussions. Close cooperation with community leaders will help to ensure that the effects of privatization on educational facilities and services can be considered in time to address potential areas of concern.

Transformation, Global Re-basing, and BRAC

As DoD plans to bring servicemembers and families back from overseas, realign units, and implement the upcoming round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), school districts must begin planning on how to handle resulting enrollment changes. In the case of shifts in troop populations because of Service transformation initiatives, such as Army modularity, or the return of servicemembers and families from overseas bases, community members at receiving installations are concerned that existing facilities and programs may be overwhelmed by the increased populations. Schools generally top the list of military families' concerns. Families already at the affected installations, as well as those who may be moving in, worry that overcrowding will affect the quality of education provided to their children.

As currently designed, the Department of Education's Impact Aid program cannot respond to sudden increases in school population. Funding for the current school year is provided based on the student count made during the previous school year. Therefore, it will usually be two years following the arrival of the additional students before the school district receives the Impact Aid payment that includes the funding for those students. Impact Aid is also designed to support operating costs and not fund large construction projects, which means districts needing new school buildings because of an influx of military students must look for other options. It is also important to remember that Impact Aid is not forward funded: the funding it receives in the annual appropriation is for that school year, not the coming year. If Congress is delayed in passing an appropriations bill, school districts can face temporary shortfalls as they wait for their Impact Aid payments. These shortfalls will have an even greater impact if the district is also trying to accommodate growing enrollments.

Ensuring the availability of quality of life programs, services, and facilities at both closing and receiving installations and easing servicemembers' and families' transition from one to another will take additional funding and personnel. The DoD Office of the Military Child in Transition and Deployment is working with the military Services, school districts, NMFA, and other organizations to develop tool kits for commanders, schools, and parents to identify the needs of military communities and supporting school systems and to ease the transition of military students from one district to another. These tool kits and other helpful information will be available at www.militarystudent.dod.mil.

Military Child Initiative Supports School Connectedness for Military Families

Military parents understand the importance of ensuring their children become quickly connected with their schools—even if those students are only attending a certain school for a short time. Parents work hard to ensure their children are able to settle in to a school routine and quickly get involved in school activities and programs. The Department of Defense recently launched a partnership with the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health to develop a new program designed to assist school districts and military parents in their efforts to help their children become more connected with their schools. DoD has funded the Hopkins Military Child Initiative to address the needs of the more than one million military children in U.S. public schools as they deal with the challenges of frequent moves and the deployment of their military parents. Research done at Johns Hopkins and other universities has shown the importance of students' connectedness to their school in their overall health and well-being. This research can be used to guide better support programs for students and to encourage the involvement of parents in their children's education. The new initiative focuses on these areas of activity:

- Apply lessons learned from a well-established body of research on school connectedness to children in military families.
- Serve as a clearinghouse for research on school connectedness.
- Provide technical assistance to school systems that want to strengthen their connections with military children.
- Serve as an advocate with policymakers regarding issues affecting military students.

Among the recommendations for schools provided by Johns Hopkins University researchers are:

- Know your students: Children of military families tend to be hard-working, focused, and goal-oriented. Schools need to provide opportunities for them to excel.
- Set up strategies to welcome new students.
- Be flexible when students move in or out to assist them in fulfilling graduation requirements and becoming involved in school activities.
- Engage parents: Military parents understand how their children respond to the challenges of military life. Consulting parents increases student success by meeting students' needs and by building parent confidence and trust in the school.
- Be creative in finding ways to develop partnerships between the community, the school, and the military installation.

Military Child Initiative staff will work with school districts on request to assist them in improving student connectedness and supporting military families. For more information on the initiative, go to:

<http://www.jhsph.edu/adolescenthealth/Products/Military%20Child%20Initiative/index>.

Additional Information

For more information on the DoD Supplement to Impact Aid and DoD's support to school districts educating military children, see:

- NMFA's website, www.nmfa.org.
- Military Impacted Schools Association (MISA) www.esu3.org/districts/bellevue/misa/misahome.html.
- National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS): www.sso.org/nafis.
- Department of Education Impact Aid Program Office: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/ImpactAid/>
- Department of Defense Office of the Military Child in Transition and Deployment: www.militarystudent.dod.mil
- Department of Defense Education Activity (DoD schools): www.dodea.edu