

AFTER-ACTION REPORT
Roundtable on the Education of Military Families
Building a Grad Nation Summit

Washington, DC
March 23, 2011

It is a special kind of pride and a special kind of fear military children labor under. Like the children of police officers and firefighters, they do not know whether Mom or Dad will survive the day. ... But unlike those other children, military kids face this fear over prolonged periods of time. The ache doesn't go away when Dad walks through the door at night, because he won't walk through that door for more than a year at a time.

And when he does, it's a pretty safe bet he won't be quite the same guy he was when he left.

-Deborah Mullen

Background

More than one million young people drop out of high school every year. As part of the America's Promise Alliance 10-year campaign to mobilize Americans to end this crisis, the Alliance convened its First Annual Building a Grad Nation Summit March 21-23 in the nation's capital. The event was co-hosted by Civic Enterprises, Johns Hopkins University's Everyone Graduates Center, and the Alliance for Excellent Education.

One highlight of the conference was its Roundtable on the Education of Military Children. There now are 1.9 million U.S. children in military-connected families, and 1.2 million are school-aged. The vast majority of these young people are growing up in civilian communities, where it's critical that educators and other who work with youth understand the issues facing military families.

In addition to changing schools an average of 6-9 times before graduation, research now shows that many children of deployed parents are at risk for emotional and behavioral problems; that their reading and math scores are a lower during parental deployment; and that some struggle with attendance, homework completion, and engagement in classroom activities. In fact, nearly one-third of children and youth in military families have higher rates of mental health problems than those in the general population. And children and youth with untreated mental health problems are more likely to suffer from lower educational achievement.

Roundtable Audience

Education stakeholders – including school officials and leaders of community-based organizations from communities across the country.

Roundtable Objectives

- Increasing education stakeholders' knowledge about military-connected children
- Informing education stakeholders about federal and other efforts to support military children
- Informing education stakeholders about promising practices to support military children
- Encouraging community-based organization to investigate and adopt promising practices
- Broadening support for federal, state, and local policy initiatives affecting military children

Roundtable Presenters

- Alma J. Powell, Board Chair, [America's Promise Alliance](#) (welcome)
- Deborah Mullen, military families advocate (keynote)
- Robert Gordon, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for [Military Community and Family Policy, US Department of Defense](#)
- Kelly Hruska, Deputy Director of Government Relations, [National Military Family Association](#)
- Angela Huebner, Associate Professor, [Department of Human Development, Virginia Tech](#)
- Marcia Kropf, Chief Operating Officer, [Girls Inc.](#)
- Charles Patterson, Director of Training and Transition, [Military Impacted Schools Association](#)
- Dave Splitek, Vice President, Programs and Services, [Military Child Education Coalition](#)
- Terrill D. Wicks, Vice President, Military Services and International Projects, [Boys & Girls Clubs of America](#)

Key Statistics

- 1.9 million children have one or more parents in the military
- 630,000 children of Active Duty
- 480,000 children of Reserve or Guard
- 40,000 families have two military parents
- 75,000 single parents serve in the military
- 900,00 military children have had a parent deployed multiple times; a significant number of these parents have been away from their children for as long as 48 months

Key Research Findings

- Total months that parents were away mattered more than number of deployments.
- Children in Reserve and National Guard families have more difficulties because of disconnections from military community supports; their teachers less likely to know/understand their issues.
- At-home parents are consistently evidencing more stress; their feelings of isolation are beginning to emerge.
- “Stress” does not always translate to negative outcomes; many military families are resilient.
- Families’ perception of “support” appears to be a key factor in promoting resiliency.
- Support is defined as: 1) belief that the deployed soldier is making a difference; 2) having a strong family and a strong non-deployed parent; 3) belief that America supports the war.

What Boys & Girls Clubs of America has learned from military youth

- They want a voice – to express their needs and be part of planning services developed for them.
- They want to mentors/staff to be able to relate to their needs.
- They also want to be young people in gathering spaces that do not define them and constantly remind them that they have one/two parents deployed.

What Girls Inc. has learned about military daughters

- The most common difficulties occur during reintegration; at this point, girls are more likely than boys to worry about their parents getting along, about their parents’ mood changes, and the next deployment.
- Military daughters may be at higher risk of pregnancy than previously known. A survey of high school age females in military adolescent medicine clinics indicates that 20% to 33% dated active duty males; nearly 15% of these relationships progressed to sexual intercourse – frequently without the use of contraception.

What the federal government is doing

- DoD has commissioned a 270-day review to ensure world-class educational opportunities for all military children, including the impact of transitions and deployments, curricula and facilities in DoD-run schools.
- The Department of Education will prioritize military families in grant opportunities for local school systems and public schools on military bases.
- DoD and the Department of Education are seeking an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requiring schools to count the number of military-connected students as a “reportable subgroup” to the National Center for Educational Statistics; this would allow policymakers to better track their achievement.

Takeaways/action items

What additional research is needed?

- Longitudinal whole-family research (not parent- or child-specific)
- Evaluations of the many programs in place to support military families (most programs measure satisfaction but not efficacy at competency building)
- Better tools to identify families in need (families who seek services and participate in surveys are generally the higher functioning families)

What can schools, community-based organizations, and child advocacy organizations do?

- Include military children in discussions about all policies that address child well-being.
- Understand military families better – including strengths and weaknesses – avoid painting military children in a deficit mode.
- Engage military children in community service.
- Engage in community dialogues with the military – these are critical to advance the perception of community support.
- Implement only programs that are proven effective.
- Build partnerships across organizations to avoid redundancy in programs and services
- Create mechanisms to help families when they need it – pre-deployment, during deployment, or post-deployment.
- Expand conversations about the military beyond schools/communities with military-connected children.
- Don't stop talking about these issues – even when the wars are over.

What can states do?

- Pass the Common Core State Standards Initiative, a state-led effort to establish a single set of clear educational standards for K–12 English, language arts, and mathematics that states can share and voluntarily adopt; this would ease military transitions.
- Sign the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children Education to ease the transfer of school records, course sequencing, and graduation requirements for military children.

For more information

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