

Operation Educate the Educators: Who Are ‘Military-Connected’ Students?

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Over the next few months, Advisor will feature a series of articles that document the challenges that military-connected students face and highlight the work of schools of education that are engaged in addressing these challenges. This first article describes the military-connected student population.

Earlier this year, AACTE announced a new partnership with the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) to raise awareness among AACTE members of the social, emotional, and academic challenges that military-connected students face in schools and to strengthen the preparation of educators to meet these needs. [“Operation Educate the Educators”](#) is part of a larger initiative overseen by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden called “Joining Forces,” which calls on the federal government and public and private organizations to find ways to better support military families.

Military-connected students are children, adolescents, and young adults in PK-12 schools, trade schools, and institutions of higher education who are official dependents of a military service member. While all students come to school with different needs, the children of the armed forces might be viewed as carrying an invisible backpack that is full of unique challenges and yet empty at the same time—requiring purposeful academic and social emotional support.

There are currently 2 million U.S. military-connected students, whose parents are members of the active-duty military, National Guard or Reserves, or veterans. Approximately 13% of these students are identified as having special needs. Some 60% of the children of military families in the United States are school aged, and the majority of them—nearly 80%—attend public schools. The average military-connected student will attend six to nine different school systems, worldwide, from kindergarten to 12th grade; most military-connected teenagers face transition challenges more than twice during their high school careers.

Military-connected students face various challenges in their schools. Many experience anxiety and depression because of parental deployments or following injury to or death of a parent. Elevated stress is common regarding making new friends, adjusting to new schools and communities, and understanding and interpreting new school regulations and policies. Because of frequent moves, students also face academic challenges from adjusting to new curricula, instructional methods, and school climates/cultures. In addition, the school experience can be particularly challenging for military-connected students with disabilities as they navigate the regulations, testing, and resources that vary from district to district.

AACTE invites its members to become part of Operation Educate the Educators. Through the [AACTE web site](#), members can sign on to the recently released [“Guiding Principles for Preparing Educators to Meet the Needs of Military-Connected Students.”](#) To support AACTE members as they raise this topic in their courses and clinical components, the web site features [resources](#) on military-connected students and professional development for educators. AACTE and MCEC are also sponsoring a preconference workshop at the AACTE Annual Meeting in February that will provide additional resources for faculty. For details and to register, visit www.aacte.org/2012.

Jacqueline Matlock, an intern with the Military Child Education Coalition, contributed to this article.