

Military OneSource Podcast — School Liaison's Role in Supporting Military-Connected Students With Postsecondary Readiness

School Liaison Program

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department, with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. Military families move a lot, and so for military parents, that means their kids are changing schools a lot. To help with all of this change is the school liaison. That's what we're going to talk about today with our guest, Kristen Acquah. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Kristen Acquah:

Thanks, Bruce. Yes, I'm Kristen Acquah. I am a school liaison at Headquarters Marine Corps, and previous to that, I was a installation school liaison for the Army.

Bruce Moody:

Well, great. It's great to have you with us. This is a really wonderful program. So let's just start at the very start. What is the school liaison program?

Kristen Acquah:

Thank you, Bruce, so much for asking. The school liaison's roles are really to promote awareness of those unique differences or challenges that our military-connected students face as they facilitate some of those school transitions because most of our military families, of course, move so frequently. The great thing about our school liaison program is that there's a school liaison located at each installation, regardless of branch of service, and we're there to serve as a main contact or that primary contact for our military families as well as our local school systems. We also are there just doing the legwork, kind of doing more of the field work, educating schools, as well as educating families about the military interstate compact and how that can help with supporting and leveling the playing field, as well as just engage in a lot of our community partners to supporting those transitioning military families.

So a lot of us like to refer to ourselves as bridge builders or connectors between installation leadership and our LEAs, which are those local educational agencies. But our primary focus is

really just supporting those families through the transition, being that hub of resources for everything that they need to be successful in their pre-K to 12 education.

Bruce Moody:

So for this episode, we're going to focus on the postsecondary education goals for military-connected students. So how are we defining this?

Kristen Acquah:

So when we're talking about those postsecondary education goals, we're talking about life after high school. So what is the path that our military-connected students are going to take? Are they going to take going into a university? Are they going to go into a community college? Are they going to go into a trade school or vocational school? Are they going straight into the military? Are they going straight into workforce? Are they doing some entrepreneurship? So really just preparing them and providing all the resources available for them to be confident in whichever path they choose to take.

Bruce Moody:

So why should families who are preparing for postsecondary opportunities get to know their school liaison?

Kristen Acquah:

So as they're preparing for their postsecondary opportunities within the school liaison office, we have a very long withstanding relationship with our installation education centers and collaborate on various workshops. There's a lot of information within our ED center that are applicable to our military-connected students since they are dependents, such as the GI Bill, Yellow Ribbon Programs that are in some of our universities. And some of those programs can also just be used not just in a university or going off for college readiness, but also for postsecondary readiness, which could be taking up a trade or vocational schools. So some of those same grants or bills, as far as the Yellow Ribbon Program and the GI Bill, can also be applicable to there. We also have firsthand knowledge of schools, of scholarships opportunities, connections for career pathways, workforce preparation opportunities that are specific to military-connected students.

So a lot of our local installations also have scholarship opportunities that are specific for their local community, their local military group. So it's great for families to connect with your local school liaison because they'll have that information as well as some of the partners that we partner with. Some of our national partners have different scholarship opportunities for our military-connected students as they're preparing for their postsecondary opportunities. So the school liaison is a great hub and a source to assist and facilitate a lot of that and market that. So I would say that would be my first stop is reaching out to the school liaison and seeing what is available out there for my student. How can I get access to these supports and these resources?

Bruce Moody:

So for the benefit of those who are new to the military or new to being parents, what is on-time graduation as a challenge for military families? And then, how can a school liaison help with this?

Kristen Acquah:

So we support through a continuing advocacy of the interstate compact educational opportunities for Military Children's Compact Commission, which is also known as our MIC3. So what we do and how we support that on-time graduation is really just educating families and school professionals about the compact and what that is, and what does it mean by on-time graduation. What did their state legislation and all 50 states sign when they develop this compact? So as an installation school liaison, we're very versed in the local education graduation requirements and similar coursework. And then we have a community of us where we can engage and partner and collaborate together to ensuring that we're supporting those transitioning families so that regardless, they will graduate on time, whether it is in their receiving state or from the sending state. So we work with the family, the LEAs, previous LEAs to support our military-connected students to ensure on-time graduation.

Bruce Moody:

So what postsecondary resources do school liaisons offer to military families?

Kristen Acquah:

School liaisons collaborate with our installation and community stakeholders to host like series of workshops, resume writings, tours, whether it's college tours or career tours, mock interviews. What do you wear? How do you present yourself when you're going into an interview? Different referral programs, and then on-the-job experiences. So oftentimes, as a school liaison, we get engaged on and off the installation. So many of our organizations are looking for various apprenticeships, so they can start recruiting early. And what we'll see is there's a lot of families that are out there also that's looking to see have their student take a taste of what else is out there, what their niche may be, or just really exposure to find what they really enjoy doing or where they want to go. And so what tends to happen is the school liaison office is asked for assistance with marketing or starting up a program. So in the state of Virginia, where I was an installation school liaison, there was a program called Project Search, and that helped a lot of our military-connected youth learn those vocational skills on the job and get that on-the-job experience.

Bruce Moody:

So with the support and the assistance that you provide, you do this with a lot of community help. So who are the partners that you're working with? The school liaisons have a number of partners that they reach out to with regard to postsecondary opportunities.

Kristen Acquah:

So yes, that's a great question. Our local education agencies are our huge partner of the school liaison that consists of our educators, school counselors, our administrators and district personnel, as well as the installation education centers, local governments, organizations that are on and off the installation, and anyone that really has a buy-in to military-connected youth are partners of the school liaison. We really are not discriminatory. We're like, whoever wants to help us with the mission, we are welcome. We're welcome to all.

Bruce Moody:

So it's great to have you with us. We really value having you on the podcast. We've already covered a lot of material, a lot of important information for military families, but there is a lot

more. What we want to do is come back to this topic in future podcasts. Just give us a sense of some of the topics that we'll be getting into with future episodes.

Kristen Acquah:

Yes. So we'll be talking about how does the local district and the school liaison program collaborate to supporting military-connected on-time graduation, and as it relates to postsecondary planning and readiness, how that collaboration strengthens those military-connected students so that they are great for life after high school.

Bruce Moody:

Excellent. Well, we thank you today, and we look forward to having you back at another time. And want to remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department, and we want to hear from you. So we have a link in the program notes. You can go ahead and click on that, send us a note, a comment, a question or an idea for a future episode, and be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to your podcast because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks so much for listening. Take care. Bye-Bye.