Key Message

States have a valuable opportunity to facilitate improved local implementation of policies designed to support military-connected children and ensure families are empowered with the knowledge they need by clarifying requirements, enhancing communication efforts and streamlining access to information on state and local education websites.

Analysis

Military families face distinct challenges due to frequent moves and varying educational requirements across states, directly impacting service member focus and readiness. When parents lack awareness of state policies intended to support their children, they're left to navigate complex systems during critical transition periods. This avoidable stress undermines family stability and, ultimately, mission readiness.

Best Practices and Innovative Approaches

Military-connected students bring unique strengths and face distinct challenges as they transition between schools and states. By enhancing both the implementation of supportive education policies and the accessibility of critical information, states have a powerful opportunity to reduce barriers, ease transitions and affirm their commitment to military families.

Policy Implementation

To elevate the effectiveness of the Military Student Identifier, or MSI, and drive data-informed support for military-connected students, states are encouraged to pursue the following enhancements through statute or administrative actions:

- Integrate the MSI as a reportable demographic within Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems. Designating MSI students as a separate subgroup ensures a robust, intersectional view across key demographics – including disability status, race, ethnicity and sex – empowering the Every Student Succeeds Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act accountability reporting with more precise insights and actionability.

According to War Department-sponsored research, "State Implementation of Four Initiatives to Support Military-Connected Students," examining the effectiveness of policies that states have enacted to support military-connected students (or in subsequent actions taken), the following states and the District of Columbia have been found to have comprehensive data available at all levels (school, district, state). This data covers both enrollment and achievement and is easily accessible on each state's education agency website:

Alabama, Arkansas*, Delaware*, District of Columbia, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine*, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio*, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia

https://militaryfamilies.psu.edu/wp-content/uploads/clearinghouse_report_speakmc_initiatives_20240220rev-2.pdf

Note: Ease of accessibility is measured by 1) number of clicks from education department homepages to the academic-achievement data system, 2) clearly labeled fields and locations, 3) effort to find data on military-connected students and 4) data located in the main academic-achievement data system.

*Indicates states identified by DSLO as examples for policy implementation and/or information accessibility enhancements

- Leverage the standardized definition of "military-connected student" established by the Common Education Data Standards workgroup. This enables schools to differentiate between students of active-duty service members, reserve component members and members of the National Guard – allowing for more tailored support and transparency.

- Require regular training for school administrators and enrollment personnel on the MSI.

  - Include information on how to interpret and use the MSI data effectively to evaluate implementation and effectiveness of various programs and policies aimed at supporting military-connected students.

✓ **Innovative approach: Use data collected through the MSI and other sources to inform and improve implementation of other related policies and programs to support military-connected students, including the Military Interstate Children's Compact, Advance Enrollment, Virtual School Enrollment and Purple Star Schools programs.**

EXAMPLES:

ARKANSAS
House Bill 1545 (2025)
https://arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2025R%2FPublic%2FACT501.pdf

"Reporting enrollment of children of members of the ~~uniformed services~~ armed forces – Definition
(a) The Division of Elementary and Secondary Education shall require a public school to report the enrollment of a student ~~who is a child of a uniformed services family~~ with a parent who is an active duty or reserve component member of the armed forces as required by the Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6311, as it existed on January 1, 2025:
(1) In the Arkansas Public School Computer Network; or
(2) As established by rule if the public school or public school district does not report information through the Arkansas Public School Computer Network."

MAINE
Maine Department of Education: Military Affiliation Data
https://www.maine.gov/doe/data-warehouse/reporting/military

According to the April 2022 Maine Department of Education Upload Requirements Guide (https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/DATA-MDOEUploadRequirementsGuide-6.1.24.pdf), pages 13-14: Section 20, Military Family Flag

"20.5. Note: Military Connected Student definition has been updated to meet the definition as prescribed by ESSA: 'Students who are military connected. Status as a student with a parent who is a member of the armed forces on active duty or serves on full-time National Guard duty, where ''armed forces,'' ''active duty,'' and ''full-time National Guard duty'' have the same meanings given them in 10 U.S.C. 101(a)(4), 101(d)(1), and 101(d)(5).'''

Response options: Active Duty, Full Time National Guard, National Guard or Reserve, Not Military Connected, Unknown

Information Access

To ensure military families can easily access and understand the Military Student Identifier, state education agencies are encouraged to adopt policies that prioritize clear communication and transparency:

- Create and maintain an accessible state education webpage specifically for military families, featuring up-to-date information and resources on the MSI. Require school districts to prominently post MSI information on their websites and include it in enrollment materials to ensure consistent visibility at the local level.

  - Clearly communicate the purpose and benefits of the MSI, such as improved educational continuity, targeted support and informed resource allocation.

  - Provide reassuring guidance on data privacy protections, helping families feel confident that their information is handled securely and respectfully.

EXAMPLES:

OHIO
Ohio Department of Education and Workforce: Identification of Military-Connected Students
https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Other-Resources/Military-Resources/Schools/Identification-of-Military-Connected-Students

Ohio maintains an excellent, comprehensive webpage on its state education department website – providing detailed information on the MSI, including definitions, best practices, guidance for school districts and how to best utilize the data to support military-connected students.

"Supporting Identified Students
Military-connected students face unique challenges compared to other students and families. Active Duty service members typically change duty stations every two to three years. Reserve and National Guard members can be activated for time frames stretching from months to years at a time. Active, Guard, and Reserve members can be deployed out of the state or country for months at a time. The average military family moves six to nine times over the course of their time in school. This video outlines the importance of the Military Student Identifier and its impact on schools.

Through identification, schools can better serve and support the needs of military-connected students. Identification supports military-connected students in many ways:

- **Promotes visibility of military-connected families and students.** Identification of military-connected students is the first step for school staff to understand how their unique circumstances may be

impacting academic performance and overall well-being. Identification also allows school staff to communicate with families about any concerns. Schools should have regular contact with military families to support upcoming activations, deployments, and transitions.

- **Allows for implementation of the [Interstate Compact for Military Children](#).** Ohio is part of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The compact eases educational barriers for military families that transition due to military service.

- **Helps determine if schools and communities are eligible for financial aid.** Communities and schools that are directly impacted by military installations receive [Federal Impact Aid](#) to offset these costs and lost tax revenue. That funding is determined by the number of students a district identifies.

- **Facilitates continuous improvement in serving military-connected students.** Information on the identification of military-connected students can be used by schools to improve and personalize academic and whole child responses for the unique military student population. Schools can create welcoming practices and transition plans for military-connected students.

- **Meets an eligibility requirement for schools to earn the Purple Star Award.** Identifying military-connected youth is one of the requirements to earn the Purple Star Award. The award is open to schools that identify and develop programming for military-connected students. Visit the Department's [Purple Star Designation](#) webpage for more information."

ARIZONA
Arizona Department of Education: Module 2 Topic 2, Identifying Military Students in Schools
https://www.azed.gov/teach/module-2-topic-2

The Arizona Department of Education includes information on the MSI within online training modules available to school personnel.

DELAWARE
Delaware Department of Education: Education for Military-Connected Youth
https://education.delaware.gov/educators/whole-child-support/family-services/military-connected-youth/

Delaware maintains a comprehensive webpage of resources on the state department of education website, including detailed information and links on a variety of military-specific provisions and programs such as MIC3, the MSI, and the Purple Star Schools Program.

"Military children, youth and their families are a special part of Delaware's population. On average, military students will attend six to nine different school systems from kindergarten to 12th grade. Our schools play an important role in providing supports to students during transitions and difficult times."

Conclusion

The best practices and innovative approaches outlined in this document demonstrate that meaningful progress is already underway across the country. States that prioritize clarity, consistency and communication are not only improving educational outcomes for military-connected students – they are also strengthening family stability and contributing to mission readiness.

Continued collaboration between state education agencies, local school districts and the War Department is essential to enable us to collectively build on existing progress and further improve consistency in implementation and awareness of key initiatives designed to support military-connected students. Together, we can ensure that every military-connected student is welcomed, supported and empowered to thrive – no matter where their journey takes them.