



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.

Policy Area Discussion Points and Recommendations for State Enhancements

Advance Enrollment

Advance Enrollment is a valuable tool allowing military families to begin the school enrollment process prior to their arrival on PCS orders – underscoring a shared commitment between the Defense Department and states to educational continuity for highly-mobile students.

Discussion Points

- Military-connected students enrich classrooms across the nation, and states play a critical role in ensuring their smooth transitions during military-directed moves.
- An encouraging 42 states have adopted laws or policies providing for Advance Enrollment.
- To build on this momentum, states have a valuable opportunity to address key implementation challenges such as increasing outreach to families and school personnel, improving data tracking, refining legislative clarity and expanding school and course availability, particularly for midyear transitions and special education services.
- By enhancing these provisions, state leaders can help unlock greater educational stability for military-connected children, while reinforcing their state's role as a national model of military family support.
- The Defense Department stands ready to support states through partnerships that boost awareness and access to these essential resources.



Military-connected students embody resilience, adaptability and a global perspective – qualities that enrich every classroom they enter. As states continue to advance policies that support these students, there is a tremendous opportunity to build on existing momentum by strengthening implementation, increasing awareness and ensuring equitable access to information.

By embracing enhancements across key areas – Advance Enrollment, the Military Student Identifier, the Education Compact and the Purple Star Schools Program – states can create more inclusive, responsive and effective education systems. These efforts not only benefit military families but also elevate the overall quality and equity of education for all students.



Recommendations: Policy Implementation

To facilitate effective implementation of Advance Enrollment, states are encouraged to adopt statutory or administrative enhancements that clarify requirements and procedures, such as:

- Outline clear procedural guidance and use of standardized enrollment applications to operationalize the state's Advance Enrollment provisions.
 - Make it clear that proof of residency isn't required for school enrollment, course registration and program application (i.e., electronic copies of military orders shall substitute in-person and proof-of-residency requirements until a specified period upon arrival).
 - Explicitly include military-connected students with special education needs in Advance Enrollment provisions and require that local education agencies facilitate the timely exchange of information and records for students with special education needs upon notification of pending arrival, leveraging requirements under the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, or Education Compact.
 - Require regular training for school administrators and enrollment personnel on military-specific policies, including Advance Enrollment.
- Designate a state point of contact who can educate enrollment personnel on Advance Enrollment requirements, work with military school liaisons and liaise with local school agencies on behalf of military families.

Recommendations: Information Access

To strengthen local implementation of Advance Enrollment provisions and promote seamless transitions for military-connected students, states are encouraged to consider the following actions through statute or administrative policy enhancements:

- Publish and maintain updated information and related resources about Advance Enrollment on a state education webpage dedicated to military families. Require school districts to post this information on their websites and include it in enrollment materials.
 - Develop user-friendly online resources that clearly explain Advance Enrollment policies and procedures.
 - Clearly define documentation requirements.
 - Include clear information about the process for transferring individualized education programs and 504 plans utilizing Advance Enrollment provisions.

Military Student Identifier

Enhancing the Military Student Identifier, or MSI, ensures better support and educational continuity for military-connected students – an opportunity for states to lead with clarity and commitment.

Discussion Points

- Reliable identification of military-connected students is essential to understanding their academic progress, addressing their unique needs and ensuring strategic allocation of educational resources. Yet, in the absence of consistent methods across systems, too many students remain invisible in the data.



- Since its inclusion in the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, in 2016, the MSI has provided a valuable framework – but recent analyses reveal inconsistent implementation across states, districts and schools, limiting its potential impact.
- Variability in data collection practices, response options for families and the use of MSI data have hindered the ability of educators and policymakers to provide targeted support.
- States have a powerful opportunity to lead by refining legislation and administrative guidance to standardize MSI collection and application, increasing transparency and promoting best practices in data use.
- The Defense Department continues to collaborate with federal partners to streamline definitions and elevate clarity – making it easier for states to align and act.

Recommendations: Policy Implementation

To elevate the effectiveness of the Military Student Identifier 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 disaggregated subgroup ensures a robust, intersectional view across key demographics – including disability status, race, ethnicity and sex – empowering ESSA and Individuals With Disabilities Education Act accountability reporting with more precise insights and actionability.
 - 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 the implementation and effectiveness of various programs and policies aimed at supporting military-connected students.

Recommendations: 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.



Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

The Education Compact provides a powerful framework to ensure educational continuity for military-connected students – but its full potential depends on strong, consistent implementation across states and districts.

Discussion Points

- The Education Compact is designed to reduce barriers for military children transferring between states, addressing challenges such as enrollment delays, placement issues and transferring special education services. Ensuring successful transitions is not only a matter of compliance – it's an opportunity to affirm a state's commitment to military families.
- However, implementation varies widely, and recent studies have highlighted several areas for growth – including addressing inconsistent awareness among school staff and parents, delays in service delivery for students with disabilities and uneven application of the Education Compact provisions across districts.
- States have a critical opportunity to lead by enhancing laws and policies that improve awareness, increase compliance and streamline processes at the local level.
- The Defense Department continues to collaborate with the national Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission, or MIC3, to recommend improvements, provide guidance and support family awareness efforts – offering valuable resources for states ready to amplify impact.

Recommendations: Policy Implementation

To strengthen implementation and ensure consistency of the Education Compact, states are encouraged to adopt statutory or administrative enhancements that reinforce accountability, clarity and educator readiness:

- Build upon the state's Education Compact statute by embedding detailed operational requirements into agency rules or companion statutes. These should:
 - Outline data collection and reporting protocols, define clear accountability measures, establish dispute resolution pathways – particularly for special education – and standardize credit transfer procedures to ensure smooth transitions for military-connected students.
 - Clarify the role of the state's Education Compact council (or equivalent) in educating school districts and military families about the protections and rights afforded by the Education Compact and relevant state and federal laws.
 - Mandate recurring training for school administrators and enrollment staff to ensure consistent, informed implementation of the Education Compact and other military-specific education policies at the school level.
 - Institute annual training for state Education Compact council members to equip them with the knowledge and tools needed to fulfill their responsibilities and engage effectively.

Recommendations: Information Access

To strengthen awareness and accessibility of the Education Compact, states are encouraged to adopt policies that ensure military families have consistent, user-friendly access to accurate information and guidance:



- Develop and maintain a state education webpage dedicated to military families, featuring clear, up-to-date information and resources on Education Compact provisions.
 - Provide step-by-step guidance for addressing concerns, outlining how families can escalate unresolved issues – from initial school-level inquiries to a formal review by the state’s MIC3 council.
 - Publish a statewide directory of military school liaisons, ensuring families and educators can quickly identify local points of contact who offer training, advocacy and support.
- Require school districts to post Education Compact resources on their websites and include them in enrollment packets to ensure widespread visibility at the local level.

Purple Star Schools (or similar military-friendly designation) Program

The Purple Star Schools Program provides a valuable opportunity to recognize and elevate schools that effectively support military-connected students – but its success depends on strong state-level guidance, resources and collaboration.

Discussion Points

- Military families increasingly seek schools that demonstrate a deep understanding of their unique needs, and the Purple Star Schools Program offers a promising model to help states identify and celebrate those schools that go above and beyond.
- While many states have adopted or adapted the program, recent findings highlight opportunities to strengthen implementation by addressing persistent challenges, such as insufficient rulemaking or funding, staffing constraints, inconsistent eligibility criteria and difficulties with application processes and timelines.
- Additional areas for improvement include standardizing professional development opportunities and enhancing peer-to-peer support programs – both vital components to creating welcoming, well-informed school environments.
- States are well-positioned to lead by refining legislation, establishing clear program expectations, investing in sustainability and offering technical assistance to schools. These enhancements can help ensure that the Purple Star Schools Program achieves its full potential as a powerful tool for statewide military family support.

Recommendations: Policy Implementation

To amplify the impact and long-term success of the Purple Star Schools Program (or similar military recognition programs), states are encouraged to consider the following statutory or administrative enhancements:

- Establish a statewide military recognition program – such as the Purple Star Schools Program – to formally designate schools that demonstrate excellence in supporting military-connected students. Program criteria should include:
 - Facilitate professional development and training for school staff to build an understanding of military family needs and transitions.



- Develop a student-led transition initiative that pairs incoming military-connected students with peer ambassadors.
- Implement a dedicated webpage on the school's website providing information and resources for military families.
- Establish a clearly identified point of contact for military-connected families to serve as a liaison between the school and military community.
- Implement a recertification process requiring schools to reapply for designation within a specified timeframe. This promotes program fidelity, encourages continuous improvement and ensures sustained commitment to military-connected students.

Recommendations: Information Access

To increase awareness and accessibility of the Purple Star Schools Program, states are encouraged to adopt policies that promote visibility, transparency and ease of participation for military families and school communities:

- Maintain a dedicated state education webpage for military families that includes regularly updated information and resources about the Purple Star Schools Program.
 - Feature a comprehensive program toolkit for schools and districts outlining eligibility criteria, the application and renewal process, timelines and links to relevant support organizations and military-connected education resources.
 - Publish the current list of designated Purple Star Schools, and spotlight schools that demonstrate exemplary practices in supporting military-connected students. Sharing these success stories helps foster inspiration, replication and continuous improvement across districts.

Conclusion

The Defense Department remains a committed partner and stands ready to collaborate with states, districts and schools to ensure military-connected students thrive academically, socially and emotionally – no matter where their journey takes them.