CLEARINGHOUSE
FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Supporting Military-Connected Students During Geographic Transitions

Evidence-Informed Strategies for Schools

As of October 29, 2025

PennState

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Methods

To identify strategies that support military-connected students during geographic transitions, we employed a mixed-method approach that combined artificial intelligence (AI)-driven text analysis with human verification.

Data Source

The source material consisted of 198 training modules developed by the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State for the School Resources to Support Military-Connected Students website. These modules were designed as evidence-informed microlearning units, drawing upon peer-reviewed research and best practices from education and behavioral science.

AI-Assisted Strategy Identification

AI was used to systematically review the full corpus of 198 modules. The AI was used to extract discrete strategies embedded within the instructional content and to classify them according to their functional focus.

Organization of Strategies

Following extraction, the AI organized strategies into categories aligned with school-level and classroom-level applications. Specifically, strategies were grouped into systemic/district-level approaches and individual/classroom-level supports. This organization reflects both institutional-level practices (e.g., policies, data management, climate initiatives) and instructional or relational practices implemented by educators.

Human Verification

To ensure accuracy and contextual fidelity, the AI outputs were reviewed by a researcher familiar with both the module content and military family transitions. The human reviewer validated the identified strategies against the original module content.

Output

The final output is a curated set of evidence-informed strategies, organized by systemic and classroom-level applications.

District/School-wide (Systemic) Level Strategies

These strategies focus on establishing institutional infrastructure, policies, and broad programmatic supports to facilitate seamless transitions for military-connected students.

Supporting Students Transitioning Into Your School

Administrative, Legal, and Data Management

- **Implement a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Framework:** Adopt a tiered prevention framework like MTSS (specifically MTSS-B) to systematically match academic, social, emotional, and behavioral resources to student needs (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Lewis, Mitchell, Bruntmeyer, & Sugai, 2016). This framework provides universal expectations (Tier 1) and targeted support (Tier 2/3) (Fenning, 2021; Hernandez Finch, 2012; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018; Pullen, van Dijk, Gonsalves, Lane, & Ashworth, 2019).

- **Identify Military Status in Data Systems:** Ensure that military-connected status is included as a demographic data category so MTSS teams can effectively disaggregate data and confirm students are receiving appropriate supports (Fenning, 2021; Gilreath et al., 2014; Hernandez Finch, 2012; Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018).

- **Standardize Data Privacy Practices:** Treat all data from military-connected students with the same professionalism, privacy, and discretion as non-military-connected students' data, adhering to federal regulations like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (Fenning, 2021; The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974).

- **Adhere to Immediate Enrollment Provisions:** Place incoming military-connected students immediately into appropriate educational programs (e.g., gifted and talented, ESL) based on unofficial records provided by the previous school or parents (Jagger & Lederer, 2014).

- **Honor Special Education Documents (IEPs/504 Plans):** Immediately place students needing special services based on unofficial, hand-carried Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans. New schools in states adopting the Interstate Compact must honor the student's existing IEP fully

(Jagger & Lederer, 2014). When consulting prior records for special needs, consider using existing data from prior evaluations unless new information is absolutely necessary to reduce transition stress (Jagger & Lederer, 2014).

- **Ensure Academic Flexibility:** Be flexible with prerequisites and other preconditions to allow incoming students to enroll in desired courses and programs. If students move during high school, grant waivers for course requirements or exit exams, adhering to the Compact provisions (Jagger & Lederer, 2014).

- **Waive Extracurricular Deadlines:** Waive application deadlines and consult with the state high school athletic association to ensure transferring military-connected students can participate in extracurricular activities (Jagger & Lederer, 2014).
- **Provide Immunization Flexibility:** Allow students transferring due to military orders 30 calendar days after enrollment to receive necessary immunizations (Jagger & Lederer, 2014).

- **Designate a Military Parent Liaison:** Consider appointing a military parent liaison to help gather insights and suggestions from the wider military community and facilitate communication (Arnold, Garner, & Nunnery, 2014).

School Climate and Collaboration

- **Foster a Positive School Climate:** Prioritize creating a positive and supportive school climate, perhaps through implementing universal practices like School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS or PBIS). A positive climate can specifically help the adjustment of military-connected students, who may take longer to feel comfortable in a new setting (Fenning, 2021; Fenning, Harris, & Viellieu, 2013; Hernandez Finch, 2012; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013).

- **Offer Comprehensive Prevention Training:** Implement effective crisis prevention components, including training professionals who work with youth and educating parents on detecting suicide risk and mental health needs, starting prevention efforts in elementary school (Berman, Jobes, & Silverman, 2006, as cited in Westfield et al., 2007; Erbacher, Singer, & Poland, 2015).

- **Collaborate with School Liaisons (SLs):** Develop a strong partnership with the installation's School Liaison (SL), who serves as the key point of contact for K-12 school-related questions and can coordinate resources and communication between the family, school, and installation (Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012; Fenning, 2021; Jagger & Lederer, 2014).

- **Utilize Trauma-Informed Systems:** Become knowledgeable about the prevalence of childhood trauma (given that over two-thirds of children report at least one traumatic event by age 16) and implement universal trauma-informed practices across the school to support these students (Finkelhor, 2020).

Supporting Students Transitioning Out of Your School

- **Ensure Prompt Transfer of Records:** Upon request, official records for outgoing military-connected students must be sent to the parents or the new school within 10 business days, adhering to the Interstate Compact guidelines (Jagger & Lederer, 2014).

- **Provide Transition Checklists and Resources:** Offer families a checklist or packet detailing necessary information and unofficial educational records (like recent IEPs or 504 Plans) to carry with them, smoothing the transition to their next location (Jagger & Lederer, 2014).

- **Facilitate Communication with New SLs:** If possible, contact the School Liaison (SL) at the family's destination to help the family connect with schools and necessary services preemptively (Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012; Fenning, 2021).

Individual/Classroom Level Strategies

These strategies are implemented directly by teachers, counselors, and support staff to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of individual students during transition phases.

Supporting Students Transitioning Into Your Classroom

Academic and Instructional Supports

- **Employ Instructional Strategies to Address Learning Gaps:** Recognize that frequent moves can lead to gaps in learning due to varied curricula (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Use effective instructional strategies such as cooperative learning (Capodieci, Rivetti, & Cornoldi, 2019; Gillies & Ashman, 2000), utilizing cue questions and advance organizers (Lunenburg et al., 2011; Shihusa & Keraro, 2009), creating nonlinguistic representations (e.g., graphic organizers, visuals) (Boyle, 2010), and teaching summarizing/note-taking strategies (Boyle, 2013; King, 1992).
- **Provide Immediate and Formative Feedback:** Give specific formative feedback to help new students fill instructional gaps rather than immediately penalizing them for missed knowledge (Fluckiger et al., 2010).
- **Maintain Rigorous Expectations with Support:** Avoid assuming academic difficulty is solely due to the move and provide necessary support, modifications, and academic coaching while maintaining rigorous expectations (Elias et al., 1997).
- **Offer Homework Modification and Support:** Use homework modifications or self-monitoring supports to increase homework completion for students who may be distracted or have organizational issues due to transition stress (Stockall, 2017; Harper et al., 2017). Ensure assignments are efficient regarding student time (Vatterott, 2010).

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Supports

- **Build Relationships Immediately:** Dedicate time early in the transition to building rapport with the student and establishing an appropriate teacher-student relationship, recognizing that a sense of belonging is a protective factor (Fenning, 2021; Holley & Steiner, 2013; Mmari et al., 2010).
- **Implement the "Two by Ten" Strategy:** Use strategies like the "Two by Ten" method (spending two minutes for ten consecutive days talking casually about anything of interest to the student) to intentionally build and improve relationships (McKibben, 2014; Gutierrez & Buckley, 2019).
- **Maximize Structure and Predictability:** Establish reliable classroom routines and predictable procedures to reduce anxiety and foster a feeling of safety, recognizing that military students benefit from consistency during relocation (Simonsen et al., 2008). Define and teach behavioral expectations explicitly (Alter & Haydon, 2017; Gable et al., 2009).
- **Promote Emotional Awareness:** Help students label their feelings, such as through discussions of emotions found in literature or conflicts, linking emotions

to appropriate coping strategies (Murray et al., 2015; Sutton & Harper, 2009; Joseph & Strain, 2003).
- **Provide Peer Connection Opportunities:** Implement strategies to support students' ability to make friends, such as initiating cooperative learning groups (Capodieci, Rivetti, & Cornoldi, 2019; Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2003). In communities with large military populations, consider starting a student support group (Fenning, 2021; Novotney, 2019).

Communication with Parents and Stakeholders

- **Use Varied Communication Methods:** Communicate frequently with parents using multiple methods, such as email (Thompson, Mazer, & Flood Grady, 2015), phone calls (Romano, 2012), or text reminders (Bergman & Chan, 2021), as different methods may be more accessible depending on the family's schedule and location (Thompson, Mazer, & Flood Grady, 2015).
- **Maintain Digital Communication:** Use a classroom website or online platform to share the daily schedule, assignments, and class news. This allows military-connected students who arrive mid-year to access information they missed, and parents to stay informed remotely (Baker, 2007; Piper, 2012; Tingen, Philbeck, & Holcomb, 2011; Jensen, 2006).
- **Provide Timely Feedback to Parents:** When discussing academic or behavioral concerns, reach out promptly, emphasizing concern rather than anger, and aim to return parent communications within 24 hours (Hawes, 2020; Loughran, 2008; Miretzky, 2004).

Supporting Students Transitioning Out of Your Classroom

- **Encourage Hand-Carried Records:** Encourage parents to carry unofficial copies of vital records, such as recent Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Title II Plans, or 504 Plans, to ensure continuity of services at the next school (Jagger & Lederer, 2014).
- **Advise on External Supports:** Remind families about the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and School Liaisons (SLs) for guidance regarding special education or navigating the transition process at their new location (Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012; Jagger & Lederer, 2014;).
- **Grant Excused Absences for Deployment/Reintegration: I**nform school administrators that under the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, children of military-connected families are eligible for attendance flexibility, including excused absences, when a Service member

parent deploys, is on leave from deployment, or returns from deployment. The superintendent or principal should exercise discretion consistent with district policy and the Compact's provisions (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, 2009).

- **Facilitate Academic Continuity:** If a student is moving from a Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) elementary school to a public middle school, offer support for organizational skills needed to manage multiple classrooms and teachers (Bradshaw et al., 2010).
- **Maintain Psychological Presence During Deployment (if moving during deployment):** If the family is moving while a parent is deployed, encourage continued attachment maintenance through photographs or videos of the Service member parent that can be incorporated into the child's daily routine, as instant communication may be difficult due to schedules (Louie & Cromer, 2014).

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