

## 5 Things School Leaders Can Do To Build Connections

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The average military family moves three times more often than its civilian counterpart, according to the Department of Defense. This transiency often disrupts a military family child's friendships, academic progress, and sense of connectedness. School leaders can ensure that during the time military children are in their schools—however short that time—these students have a sense of stability and safety and stay on track toward graduation. Here are 5 things school leaders can do to build connections:



**1. Develop a welcome packet for military children.** Include information about the mission of the school district, graduation requirements, curriculum requirements, attendance requirements, dress code requirements, immunizations, and school calendar, as well as school-specific information about clubs and organizations, a map of the school, and bell schedule. Also include information about resources for military families, including special workshops, orientations, and transition activities. (See a sample Checklist for Transferring Students on the Military Child Education Coalition website at <http://www.militarychild.org/military-parent/checklist-for-transferring-students>.)

**2. Establish a buddy program for military children at each school.** The buddy is a friendly face; a key source of information about the school, its programs, extracurricular activities, sports, expectations, and traditions; and someone to sit with at lunch and at athletic events. The Junior Student to Student and the Student to Student transition programs developed by the Military Child Education Coalition are effective models ([www.militarychild.org](http://www.militarychild.org)).

**3. Encourage parents and guardians to be active in the school.** Their presence in the school may provide a sense of comfort to ease their child's transition. Encourage their involvement in the PTA, on committees, and on school and district planning teams. In addition, parents may be able to share some insights into how the school can make their child feel more connected. Publicize volunteer opportunities in school newspapers and on the school and district websites.

**4. Promote student participation in extracurricular activities.** Extracurricular activities are an excellent way for students to meet classmates and quickly feel a part of the school, so help them explore all the options. Military students may come to the school after the deadline for signing up for activities, auditioning for drama productions, or trying out for sports—encourage teachers and coaches to find a place for them anyway.

**5. Encourage parents, guardians and students to become involved with national organizations.** Involvement in national organizations such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and 4H will help families connect to the community. Association with national organizations also will pave the way for continued connections when the families move to a different community, where the organization can provide a sense of continuity.