

5 Things School Leaders Can Do To Promote Academics

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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 in the area of academics.



1. Promote a district policy that supports military students' academic success. This policy encompasses a variety of issues, including ensuring seniors who transfer during the year are allowed to enroll in classes necessary for graduation; providing methods for students to preserve credits already earned (credit by exam, reciprocity of diplomas); and allowing students in kindergarten to continue their enrollment at the same grade level in a new school, regardless of age.

2. Maintain a district webpage specifically for military families. Include the information military parents need about transfer of academic records, enrollment procedures, graduation requirements, immunization requirements, academic counseling, college admissions, and other support resources. (Examples include the "Military Connect" page on the Geary County, Kan., Schools website at <http://www.usd475.org/military.htm> and the "Information for Military Families page" page on the San Diego Unified School District website at <http://old.sandi.net/parents/military/index.html>.)

3. Schedule workshops for educators that focus on understanding the unique challenges of military children. Topics might include establishing a safe and stable classroom environment, recognizing signs of stress, and sending positive messages.

4. Ensure students with special needs have comparable services. Ensure district and school personnel have the most current IEP and can provide reasonable accommodations to address the needs of incoming students with disabilities.

5. Make exceptions. Be compassionate. For example, allow additional excused absences for children to visit with a parent or guardian who has just returned from deployment, is on leave, or is getting ready to deploy. Understand that student misbehavior may be a response to stress or anxiety about the safety of a parent in combat.