



EDUCATION OF THE MILITARY CHILD IN THE 21ST CENTURY:
Current Dimensions of Educational Experiences for Army Children



Executive Summary

“I am exceedingly proud of our Army Families, especially our children who amaze me with their strength and resilience...”

General Raymond T. Odierno
Chief of Staff of the US Army

EDUCATION OF THE MILITARY CHILD IN THE 21ST CENTURY: Current Dimensions of Educational Experiences for Army Children

The United States Army Installation Management Command, G-9, Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation asked the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) to conduct a study to develop recommendations for both Military leaders and educators on the impacts of school policies, priorities, processes, programs and systems on Military-connected children's education. The results of the Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century Study (EMC-21) are set forth in this report, along with the ancillary publications, under the provisions of Contract NAFBA1-04-D-0043.

All opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendation expressed in this report, as well as in the ancillary publications, are those of the MCEC Senior Research Team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Army.

The EMC-21 Report, as well as ancillary publications, may be used for brief quotations in reviews, scholarly works, education-related presentations/speeches, or administrative procedures/policy development so long as the appropriate credit is given.

To obtain the more information about this report or ancillary publications, contact:

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ABOUT THE MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, world-wide organization. A model of positive leadership and advocacy, the work of the MCEC is focused on ensuring quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition. The MCEC performs research, conducts professional institutes and conferences, and develops and publishes resources for all constituencies.



“...In the 2001 Secondary Education Transition Study, the majority of Army parents who were interviewed reported overwhelming school transition challenges associated with relocation to a new duty station. In response, we placed School Liaison Officers on garrisons worldwide; provided training to school districts and communities; and began using social media and technology solutions for homework support, information and assistance. These initiatives have significantly improved school transitions for military children. In fact, over 75% EMC-21 study participants indicated no school transition issues. This is a significant accomplishment and validates for me the direction the Army has taken to provide school support to our Families. After all, the children of our Military Service members should have access to the best education we have to offer. They deserve nothing less.”

General Raymond T. Odierno
Chief of Staff of the US Army

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- Ft. Riley, Kansas: Geary County USD 475
- Ft. Sam Houston, Texas; Fort Sam Houston Independent School District
- Ft. Sill, Oklahoma; Lawton Public School District
- Ft. Stewart, Georgia; Liberty County School District
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Through the efforts of the commanders and superintendents, we were able to collect over 900 interviews from school and installation administrators, teachers, parents, and students. The collection of data was immense, amounting to over 2.3 million words or over 7,000 pages of data.

Special thanks to Susan Johnson, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs; C. Van Chaney, Management Analyst; and Nanette Pigg, School Support Specialist, Family and MWR Programs for their help on data and project guidance.

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We are sincerely appreciative of our readers/reviewers and the editors of our report. Their contributions were both thoughtful and insightful. The content of the comments by all the reviewers have been candid and extremely helpful to the refinement of the research project as well as to this report. We chose each of these reviewers for their diverse perspective, experiences and technical expertise: Dr. Janice Lawrence, Lieutenant General (Retired) H.G. “Pete” Taylor, Dr. Ken Ginsburg, Dr. Eric Flake and Jill Cone.

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Letter of Transmittal

**General Ray T. Odierno
Chief of Staff
United States Army
Pentagon
Washington, D.C.**

Dear General Odierno,

In October 2007, U.S. Army leadership made a commitment via the Army Family Covenant to ensure excellence in schools serving Army children. In March 2009, cognizant of the challenges that children face with school transitions and separation from parents due to deployments, then-U.S. Army Chief of Staff George Casey initiated the Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century (EMC-21) Research Project with the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). It has been my privilege to be part of the senior EMC-21 research team, along with Chairman of the MCEC General (Retired) Benjamin Griffin and the MCEC Director of Research Greg Cook.

The overarching purpose of the EMC-21 Study was to develop recommendations for both Military leaders and educators on the impacts of school policies, priorities, processes, programs and systems on Military-connected children's education. A special emphasis area was to examine the effects of mobility and deployments. The research is intended to enhance the partnerships between Army installations and their local school systems. Field researchers at 11 installations and 12 supporting local education agencies/school districts conducted 923 interviews with installation leadership, Child, Youth and School Services (CYSS) personnel, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students, with a representative sample from each installation/school system. Responses to these interviews drew from over 90 different questions and resulted in more than 7,000 pages of data for analysis.

I am pleased to report on behalf of the MCEC Board of Directors and the MCEC research team that we have completed the EMC-21 Research Project. In accordance with the Army's charter, guidance, and provisions, this research project is presented for your consideration.

It focuses on the five following areas:

- Follow up on SETS 2001: conducting a comprehensive study of the unique challenges and overall effects of transition on Military children throughout their school experience; a follow-up of the Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS, 2001).
- Unique Learning Needs: considering school program transition complexities related to gifted student and enrichment programs, including advanced academics, as well as special needs; discovering what options and opportunities are available along with barriers.

- Home Schooling: examining homeschooling in the Military community, looking at support programs and available systems; this section focuses on exploring the reasons that Military Families choose to home school, how they undertake the task, and how transition effects their education.
- Deployments: studying the implications and impact of multiple deployments on the educational experiences of Military-connected students.
- National Guard and Reserve Families: exploring the challenges that National Guard and Reserve Families face in regard to the education of their children when their Military Family member deploys.

We trust that we have been faithful in meeting your expectations. We believe that the issues, challenges, successes, and concerns raised in our report can be understood and addressed by all in a united effort for the sake of all highly mobile students.

Throughout this study – and from the voices of the parents and students – the research team saw evidence of many Army programs working. For example, when addressing the issue of transition, over 75 percent of the parents reported no school transitions issues, a change in pattern from parent responses from the SETS 2001 Study when the majority of parents reported transition challenges.

Although many individuals have provided constructive comments, support, and suggestions, the responsibility for the final content of this report and the related EMC-21 products rests with the senior research team and with the Military Child Education Coalition.

Thank you, General and Mrs. Odierno, for your unwavering commitment to education and for your confidence in providing us with this opportunity to serve our children and our country.

Respectfully Submitted,



Dr. Mary Keller
President & CEO
Military Child Education Coalition

Executive Summary

Part One:	Introduction	5
Part Two:	Deployment	7
Part Two::	Home Schooling.....	11
Part Two:	SETS Update	15
Part Two:	Education of National Guard and Reserve Students	19
Part Three:	Notes from the Research Team.....	22



Introduction

Family Morale Welfare Recreation Command (FMWRC) asked the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) to conduct an inquiry into the academic and school-related needs, concerns and challenges unique to Military-connected children. Since 1999, the MCEC has been supporting the educational needs of Military-connected children and has conducted a number of studies that have led to both State and DoD policy changes. A portion of this study is an update to the Secondary Education Transition Study published in 2001 by the MCEC.

Given the frequent relocations and deployments experienced by military members and their families, it is imperative to understand the impact of transition and turbulence in military families in respect to the education of their children. Family well-being is crucial to military readiness. Good educational experiences, support, and quality resources are recognized as fundamental contributors to family well-being.

The initial Education of the Military Child-21st Century (EMC-21) meeting was held at then-General George Casey's home in March 2009. At this inaugural meeting, the research constructs were briefed to 14 installation Commanders/representatives and to 13 School Superintendents/representatives. From this meeting 11 sites agreed to support and participate in the research.

Purpose

The primary purpose of the research was discovery in nature: to determine how school policies, practices, processes, programs, and systems impact the education of the military child, with particular emphasis on the effects of mobility and military parent deployments as it pertains to education. The results of this study will be used to make recommendations to both educators and military leadership to support the education of military students. The Education of the Military Child-21st Century study consists of five components:

- **Update of the Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS).** Given the significantly changed landscape for Soldiers and their Families since its data collection in 2000 and publication in 2001, this Phase Two research addresses factors that impact today's transitions, including:
 - ~ the ways in which Federal and State testing requirements affect highly mobile students
 - ~ the impact of high stakes testing as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)
 - ~ the impact that frequent parent deployments have on student education
 - ~ technology advances that have changed communication and the transfer of recordsThis research focused on current challenges for highly mobile secondary students (grades 5 through 12).
- **Enrichment Programs.** One finding of the 2001 SETS study indicated that students who had been identified as Gifted and Talented (known by different names at different locations and referenced as "enrichment programs") often had significant challenges in transition, including program continuity. For able learners in elementary, middle school and high school, there is a need to discover what barriers, options and opportunities, are available. This inquiry considers the range of choices for parents, schools, and military communities to respond to the transition challenges and program access issues for them. This research focuses on students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade.
- **The education-related effects of multiple deployments on school-age children.** Looking at children in grades kindergarten through twelve, this study develops an understanding of school-related issues that are associated with repeated deployments of a parent.

- **Home schooling choices, implications, and transition challenges for U.S. Army Families.** With the implementation of No Child Left Behind, parental choice has opened up many new options for the education of children. A growing area is home schooling. This was an initial exploratory part of the research and examines the reasons that families make the choice to home school, how they undertake the task, what expectations they have for their children’s outcomes, how transition affects home schooled students, and how the military supports this decision.
- **Many National Guard and Reserve Families face challenges** that result from the multiple deployments of their Military Family member. Many Families live far from Military installations and are unable to access services and supports designed to help deal with deployment and reintegration. The study explores the education challenges students face in their “new normal.”

Study questions are threefold:

1. What are the educational barriers and stressors for military families when they transition from one location to another?
 2. What is the phenomenology of the home schooling community within the military environment? What resources could support this population?
 3. Are multiple deployments causing stress on the education of Military-connected students? What is the impact on schools?
-

Method

A combination of qualitative and quantitative data was collected, leading to a mixed methods research design. Mixed methods research has been described as a theoretical lens or perspective to guide a study (Mertens, 2003; Creswell, 2009). The design used quantitative data as variables to further analyze the themes/nodes of qualitative data. As an example, we were able to compare the number of deployments the respondent indicated to the social emotional node of anger/frustration that respondents described in response to questions regarding their reactions to deployment. The mixed methods allowed the research team to look through the quantitative patterns and the qualitative depth and track their interactions. Researchers were able to triangulate the data by interview type (confirming nodes or themes by different groups), literature review, and use variables to yield a finer lens in the analysis. This research is written to support U.S. Army and school leadership. The in-depth research protocol that supports researchers is located in the Appendix of the main report.

“The hardest thing is getting back into the program when you move...When you get here you get your basic education and it will take another month...to qualify for gifted classes. All the schools I’ve been to have qualified me after they got my records, but I would be away from gifted for a few months and I would have to catch up. It’s like a moving train and you have to jump on.”

Student

Deployment

For many Military Families (especially U.S. Army Families) multiple and extended deployments have been a routine part of life since 2001. The U.S. Army has deployed over 1.1 million soldiers since 2001 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation New Dawn (OND) (Casey & McHugh, 2011)¹. This means that approximately 700,000 U.S. Army school-age students have had a parent deployed. Emerging research has begun to look at the emotional and behavioral impact of repeated deployments on students.

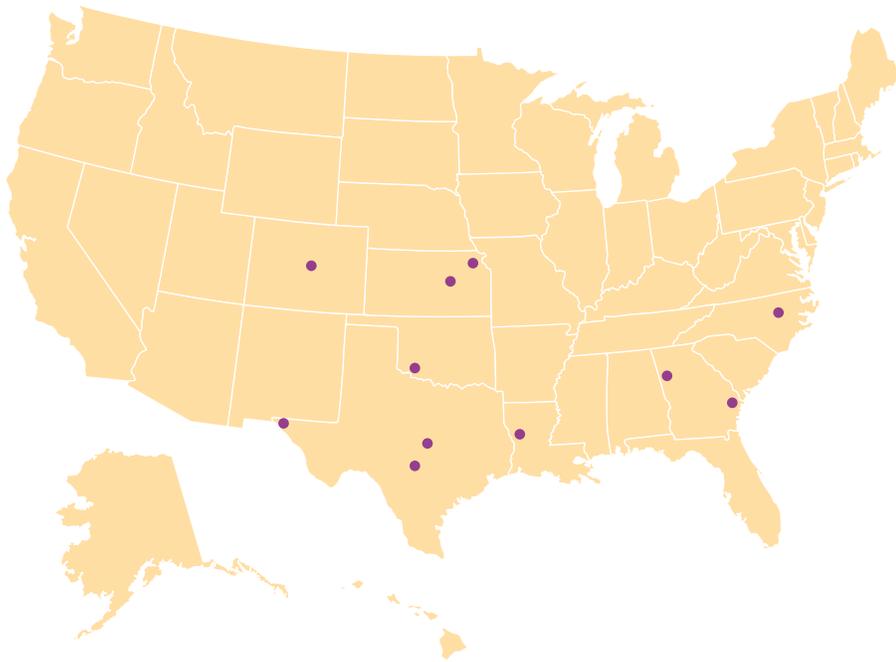


Figure 1: EMC-21 Deployment Response Distribution

Installation	Students	Parents	Administrators	Educators
Fort Benning	31	28	18	17
Fort Bliss	19	27	10	15
Fort Bragg	31	4	10	9
Fort Carson	24	23	13	16
Fort Hood	27	20	18	10
Fort Leavenworth	23	16	19	16
Fort Polk	25	18	21	18
Fort Riley	31	29	21	18
Fort Sam Houston	5	1	9	14
Fort Sill	26	22	22	19
Fort Stewart	16	7	14	10

¹ Effective 1 September 2010, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) transitioned to Operation New Dawn (OND) aligning with the change of mission for U.S. forces in Iraq.

Under the culture of deployments, the EMC-21 Study examines some of the stressors and challenges related to the education of students as well as some of the strengths and resilience characteristics demonstrated by the Military-connected child.

“The first time my dad got deployed I think I was in the fifth grade. I just remember walking into the classroom and putting my head down. I just started crying and crying. The first one, **oh, I was heartbroken;** I was so sad.”

Student

“Deployments aren’t fun. **Everyone gets very stressed.** My mom gets very stressed and everything’s crazy. It’s just having a family member who’s been with you for like your whole life and suddenly they’re gone and it’s a really weird feeling when you can’t see them every day and you can’t talk to them every day...we got webcams to talk to him and webcams don’t work and you can’t get a hold of him and it’s just hard. **It’s just harder without him.**”

Student

“Have someone you can **express those feelings** to because if you keep all those feelings bottled up you’re going to be a mess.”

Student (Parent Deployment Count: Multiple)

“My dad has **been deployed three times all to Iraq.** The last time he was deployed in 2005 it was very hard... I think I was in the sixth grade. It was different. I hadn’t had my dad around in a while because my parents got separated. The second time that he left...I went back with my mom. And I think that that helped because I could relate with my mom better than my step-mom and I could tell her things. ...And it’s easier now because it’s his job and **you just kind of have to deal with it.**”

Student (Parent Deployment Count: 3)

“It requires a lot more work, so say, for instance **a parent is deployed, you obviously have a lot on your mind** and you are distracted.”

Student

Specific topics addressed:

The impact of deployment on the child’s education

•

Families’ experiences with multiple deployments

•

Communication technology and its role in the Family experience

•

The impact of deployments on schools

•

The impact on the day-to-day work of teachers

•

School policies that address situations related to deployment

•

Support programs in schools that address deployment

•

The impact of multiple deployments on stress, resilience, and coping for students, parents, and educators

Deployment Findings and Themes

WHO	THEME	FINDINGS
Students (268)	<p>Support Programs and Services</p> <p>Students Offer Advice and Wisdom that is Realistic and Hopeful</p> <p>Factors that Influence Coping</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less than half of the students interviewed accessed any type of support program. Students who have experienced deployment of a parent speak about the realities of deployment but express a hopeful and resilient attitude along with pride in their service member parent. School-based extracurricular activities, especially sports programs, were most frequently mentioned by students as their venue for finding support during a parent's deployment. A child's response to a parental deployment is determined by a combination of factors-age, environment, previous experiences, and perception-which are constantly evolving.
Parents (195)	<p>The Challenges for the "Suddenly Single" Parent at Home</p> <p>How Students Respond to Deployments</p> <p>Educational Impact of Deployment</p> <p>Use of Support Programs and Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking on the role of a single parent presents challenges that exist and are significant across all ages of students. Some parents observe an adverse change in the behavior of their students, but quick intervention is effective in returning the child to normal. The majority of parents reported deployments had no impact on the education of the child. Parents were cautious about allowing students to participate in support programs citing concerns with victimization of students.
Families (Students and Parents)	<p>Definitions of Deployment are Different</p> <p>Common Threads of Resilience</p> <p>Reintegration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the Family, "Gone is gone." Deployment is not always defined as an assignment to a combat zone; Families consider all separations as a "deployment." The common threads for Families that are coping well with deployments include: connectedness to the community, the maintenance of routines and extra-curricular activities, and the competence and confidence that comes from experience. Reintegration has a unique set of challenges that differ from deployment and affect all Family members. Taking on household responsibilities in the absence of a parent may be beneficial to the student and enhance his resilience.

WHO	THEME	FINDINGS
Educators (Administrators and Teachers) (337)	<p>Deployments Do Impact Schools</p> <p>Deployments Have Become “Normal” for Educators</p> <p>Educators’ Concerns with their Students’ Home Environment</p> <p>Educator and Support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deployments impact the “business” of running a school and the education of the Military-connected students attending the school. • Teachers expressed their opinion that deployment-related issues were something they had to manage every day. • School Administrators and teachers expressed the phenomenon of “Parentification” – students taking on extraordinary responsibilities at home – as a concern. • Schools offer a variety of support programs and services but educators, specifically teachers, are not always knowledgeable about these resources.
Parents and Students	Technology, Communication and the Deployed Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancement in technology has changed the communication landscape for the good, however, easy access to information without filters can be stressful. • Parents tend to guard the younger students from media coverage on the war but the high school aged students have access to news 24/7.
Overall Finding	Need for Quantifiable Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of quantifiable data to determine where the needs are greatest impedes a school district’s (and to a certain extent, the supported installation’s) ability to maximize the available resources and support currently available for Military-connected students.

Conclusions

While it is difficult to forecast with complete certainty, evolving and diminished missions in Iraq and Afghanistan portend that deployments will be shorter in length with increased “dwell time” between deployments. It is absolutely clear for the near future that Military-connected students, spouses, teachers, and administrators will continue to be affected by deployments.

Defense-related spending will be reduced by at least \$350 billion over the next ten years. It is too early to predict with any precision which, if any, U.S. Army Family Covenant programs will prove to be simply unaffordable given the U.S. Army’s strategic priorities in this new fiscal reality. While the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) missions are changing, operations are not complete, deployments will continue, and comprehensive data is lacking regarding the effects of a decade of deployments on students, spouses, U.S. Army Families, and educational systems that support Military-connected students. Just as the Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm deployments were the catalyst for initiatives such as robust Family Readiness Groups, a thorough “bottom up” objective review of recent deployments can aid both U.S. Army and education leaders to identify long-term impacts on readiness – including Family readiness – and implement measures-based programs to improve the educational system

for Military-connected students. Longitudinal data would aid the U.S. Army in its understanding of where the needs are greatest.

In terms of the specific impact of deployments on the education of Military students, the lack of student identifiers makes it difficult for schools to target resources where they are most needed. The observational data gathered in the EMC-21 Study is not sufficient to assist districts and installations in supporting these students. In order for schools to better serve their Military-connected population, specific, quantifiable data such as parental Military and deployment status, transition history, and academic and behavior indicators would all enable district personnel to substantiate the need for resources and allocation of those resources to better serve and support the Military-connected child.

This information could also lay the foundation to launch a meaningful dialogue between school districts and installations about how they can partner to address the concerns unique to their communities. Despite significant funding challenges both inside and outside the installation fence lines, the EMC-21 research has provided a limited “snap shot” of what “is” and what needs to be done.

Home Schooling

The EMC-21 Home School Study (EMC-21 HSS) is an exploratory study that was designed to examine the current landscape of home schooling and Military Families. There are two areas of interest specific to home schooling for Military Families that the study considered: their education and their response to deployment. EMC-21 Study is the first study on home schooling by the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) and possibly the first study of its kind to look at the Military Child and home schooling. The study is comprised of 40 semi-structured interviews with parents and children who were home schooling at the time of the interview. In addition, questions regarding home schooling were also embedded in the Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century (EMC-21). The responses of 923 administrators, teachers, parents and students from EMC-21 Study are included in order to provide a broader context of education of Military children.

The main subjects of the EMC-21 Study were Active Duty U.S. Army Families who were currently home schooling one or more child and children over the age of 12 who were currently home schooled. A child was considered to be home schooled if one or both of the parents were providing the education for the child at home independent of a public or private school program. Children enrolled in online public school program that they complete at home were not considered home schooled for this study.

The researchers interviewed home schooling parents and children in four communities:

- Fort Polk, Louisiana
- Fort Bragg, North Carolina
- Fort Hood, Texas
- Fort Bliss, Texas

A total of 41 interviews, representing 26 Families, were conducted. Twenty-five adults were interviewed and sixteen children between the ages of 12 and 18 were interviewed. The parents in the study were home schooling as few as one child and as many as five children.

The number of Families home schooling their children has grown considerably in the United States over the past 11 years. The National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), a private research organization,

estimates between 1.73 to 2.35 million children were home schooled during the spring of 2010 in the United States, an estimated two to eight percent per annum growth over the past few years (Ray, 2011). Although there is clear growth, it is difficult to know the exact number of home schooling Families. This is in part due to the fact the many states do not require home schooling Families to register their home school or even report that they are home schooling.

One notable difference that reflects Military life and mobility, "continuity with education during transitions," was mentioned by one-fourth of the EMC-21 Study, but not by the general population. Military parents most frequently mentioned issues surrounding deployment as a special need other than physical or mental. This most likely explains the greater response among Military Families compared to the general population for this category.

"We wanted to make sure they had a good faith-based approach to their education, and **we wanted the flexibility** too."

Parent

"Primarily religious beliefs... we knew that what they were getting was according to our beliefs. Also we could **work with them at their own pace** and challenge them and also instill Godly beliefs and character traits."

Parent

"One of my kids had a hard time in school, did not have a lot of teacher support **during the deployment** of my husband. He's an average student and needed a little bit more attention."

Parent

"The first two years we were supposed to move halfway through the school year, so therefore it was going to work a whole lot **better to home school.**"

Parent

Reasons for Home Schooling Cited in the EMC-21 Study:

A desire to provide religious or moral instruction
32%

A concern about the school environment
20%

A dissatisfaction with the academic instruction in the public school
32%

Provide a non-traditional approach to education
8%

Other reasons (travel, family time, distance to school, financial)
20%

Child has special needs the parents feel the school cannot meet
24%

Child has physical or mental health need
4%

Continuity in education during transition
28%

Home Schooling Themes and Findings

Researchers asked home schooling parents for their advice on home schooling in addition to their ideas on what the U.S. Army could do to support home schooling Families. Answers to the interview questions and the stories embedded in the interviews provided some rich insights into the world of home schooling and Military Families.

In this mixed methods qualitative study, researchers identified several themes and findings related to home schooling and Military Families, including:

THEME	FINDINGS
Home School Decision Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One option considered when seeking an alternative to public schools. ▪ Continuity during transitions. ▪ Cost of Curriculum/Program of Instruction ▪ Legal and regulatory variations between and within states pose challenges.
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Curriculum more accessible, especially at HS level. ▪ Variety of on-line resources available.
Transitions between Home Schooling and Public Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Educators perceive inconsistencies in academic preparation. ▪ Decreased socialization opportunities and “doing school” norms.
Extracurricular Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lower comparative participation rates by Military-connected homeschoolers for a variety of reasons.
Post-Secondary Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ College admissions accommodate home schooled children. ▪ Home schooled children perform academically equal to or better than their non-home schooled cohort. ▪ Military enlistment classification challenges.
Impacts of Deployments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Except for perceived time constraints, deployment impacts are negligible. ▪ The organization/structure of home school mitigates post-deployment reintegration and increases flexibility.
Support and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Families are aware of and accessing deployment support programs. ▪ Home schooling parents don’t expect the U.S. Army to support/assist them, but desire accurate information about regulations and access to standardized testing.

Conclusions

The EMC-21 Home schooling study was an exploratory study. There are many unanswered questions that surfaced as a result of the study which would give a more comprehensive look at the Military home schooling climate. Future studies could consider the following:

How pervasive is home schooling in the Military community and do certain geographical locations have higher rates of home schooling? If so, why? Are Military Families homeschooling long term or for a short period of time?

Transitioning back to public school. What types of challenges or successes have homeschooled students experienced when transitioning from a home school to a public school? What specific strategies have parents found helpful to navigate this transition?

Post secondary endeavors. Are Military homeschooled children attending college, joining the Military, attending vocational training, or seeking employment when they graduate homeschooling? How successful are these endeavors? Are there any road-blocks that have been difficult to overcome? What would help?

Military homeschoolers and co-ops. How do community co-ops and on-post co-ops compare? What type of programs does each of these offer? Why do Families participate or decide not to participate in the different co-ops?

The thoughts and ideas shared by the home schooling Families in this exploratory study provide a glimpse at some of the advantages and challenges Military home schooling Families encounter. They are insightful in helping us begin to understand home schooling and how the U.S. Army Family Programs might engage and support these Families in ways that are meaningful to the education of the children. The landscape of home schooling is changing. It is important for those concerned with the education of the children of our service members to keep abreast of the changes and trends in the home schooling community in order to best appropriate funding for home schooling support in a way that is meaningful and advantageous for the education and well-being of the child.

Research Study Constraints

Dependable estimates of home schoolers are difficult to obtain. Ten states do not require notification from parents of intent to home school their children. Even among those states that do require notification, the requirements may vary from district to district within the state. Surveys from the National Household Education Surveys Program, administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics, are completed on a voluntary basis. Researchers recognize that many home schooling Families will not voluntarily participate in government surveys. As one home schooling mom stated:

“Just because you want to study us doesn’t mean we want to be studied.”

Families may be reluctant to participate because they are concerned about their privacy, they do not want their home schooling practices scrutinized, or even because they do not feel they have the time to participate in lengthy surveys or interviews. The EMC-21 Home School Study researchers also found that Families were hesitant to volunteer to be interviewed. A snowball sampling plan was used to obtain the majority of the interviews for this project. This technique used to survey and interview populations which may be difficult to otherwise access. Many Families in the study identified other home schooling Families from among their acquaintances as potential interview participants. Other interviews were obtained through local home schooling associations and requesting interested volunteers contact the MCEC.

SETS Update

In the decade since the Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS) was completed in 2001, education in the United States has changed dramatically in respect to technology, assessment and accountability. Since then, there have been changes in the Military that have affected Military-connected students, most notably frequent and repeated deployments to combat areas.

In the decade since 2001, school districts and the Military have made many improvements that help to ease transition for mobile students: reciprocal graduation agreements and the use of former schools' test scores in course and program placement among others, and recommendations made in SETS, such as senior stabilization, have been enacted. Not all of these improvements are handled in a standardized manner, many times because of state or district policy or procedure, so there are continuing frustrations. These include testing to qualify for gifted or special needs education when the student has been receiving services in his former district, and the student losing credit or ranking due to course offerings not aligning from one district to another. New frustrations result from the complexity of high stakes testing with each state's widely differing requirements.

One limitation uncovered by the EMC-21 research was quantifying basic school information on Military-connected children. Responses to questions on district demographics found that only 40 percent of the districts had a student identifier that could be used to delineate data on Military-connected students. This lack of information on Military students leaves a large void in the ability to understand this population. The March 2011 GAO report similarly found a lack of information to designate Military students.

The Current Landscape of General Academics:

- Based on the data, school districts are much more aware of issues and responsive to transitions of Military children as compared to the SETS 2001 study.
- The business of education under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has become more complex in the areas of assessment and accountability requirements.
- The use of assessments has greatly increased since SETS and is commonly used for state accountability, program/class placement, gauging progress, and graduation requirements. Some Military impacted states are moving toward end-of-course exams in an effort to align academic curricula to assessment.
- Technology has greatly assisted school systems: through online options, student information systems have assisted students in respect to learning options, opportunities, and credit recovery.
- The lack of a student identifier creates a void of information on Military-connected students.
- States are moving to curriculum that provides a stronger base for college and career readiness, and many states are increasing and changing credit requirements for high school graduation.
- Increased use of credit-based transition programs at high school, for example, Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate, are being widely implemented, allowing students to graduate with college credit, decreasing time to and lowering costs of college graduation.
- Students are still required to retest in many districts to qualify for gifted and special needs programs.
- While the MIC3 is in place in 40 states and Washington D.C., many school districts are not aware that their state has signed the Interstate Compact for Educational Opportunities for Military Children and the provisions made through this compact.

Taken in its totality, the EMC-21 Study validates that student and parent perspectives and attitudes are generally positive. A wealth of "promising practices" was uncovered by the research in each area of the study.

The overwhelming majority of Military-connected children who participated in the research have adopted effective strategies to build and sustain resilience. Ten years of war and multiple, repeated deployments, and numerous school transitions have exposed these children to some risk, which has in turn, allowed them to develop a panoply of coping skills.

“We have a pretty decent policy parish-wide if they’re Military. If they’re Military...they’re not bound by those same district guidelines as if the move from school to school within the district. They come in. They can try out. They can play. **They can do all of that good stuff.**”

Administrator

“If the child has some type of special need, it may be a question of services and what kinds of services are available; that seems to be **a big transition glitch.**”

Administrator

“We’ve just instituted what we call the “integrationist” which is through a Department of Defense Educational Activity grant. That person is a bridge between what the counselors do to get the student adjusted, and then, **from day one, we get the kid adjusted.** And then from day three to maybe week three or four, to follow up with that student and that Family.”

Administrator

“If they come from a **district that didn’t require four years of math or four years of science, that can be a problem** – especially if they’re seniors trying to graduate.”

Administrator

“I’ve worked in a high school, and when somebody comes from a seven-period day to a four-by-four... **that’s a nightmare...**”

Counselor

“Flexibility is probably the biggest issue in all aspects whether it is academics or extracurricular behavior. You have to be flexible.”

Teacher

“It’s important to know the requirements of the state that they’re going to. One student leaving here had already passed all the aspects of the state test, but our testing requirements did not transfer with him. He was going to have to take all parts of their test and that could be devastating. First, because they’re Military; second, he’d been to three different high schools; third, he’s a student with special needs. Somebody has got to come up with **something that is transferable across state lines**

where they don’t have these different testing requirements in every state.”

Administrator

“The Military installation has been awesome, and we have an absolute very good connection with them. Our school liaisons... serve on our school improvement team, and they do a very good job helping us stay connected with Families...”

Administrator

SETS Themes and Findings

THEMES	FINDINGS
Calendars and Schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The different ways schools structure their time can amplify transition challenges for students. • School calendars are inconsistent and can vary even within a district. • Moving between a traditional or block schedule can cause loss of credit. • Loss of credit may be mitigated by credit recovery classes, especially online classes in which a student may work at his own pace.
Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families who have children with special needs are particularly affected by mobility, and each move entails a level of complexity in resetting Family life activities that other Families will not have. • There is inconsistency in programs and services available to students with special needs from state to state and district to district. • Educators are concerned that delays in receiving records may result in delayed initiation of services and can cause students to lost learning time.
Extracurricular Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data from the study shows the value of extracurricular activities for the mobile student and supports the literature. • The study indicates that, while schools may understand how important extracurricular activities are to mobile students, extracurricular activities are governed by state associations, thus limiting their flexibility to work with the mobile student. • In 40 states, this flexibility has been enhanced by the Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission rules. • Activities that are portable, such as band and choir, can provide a broad and instant group of friends at a new location. • Students and parents look to all forms of extracurricular activities as a means of keeping students actively engaged and of obtaining scholarships. Being denied access to scholarships can affect post-secondary options.
Enrichment Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who are served by enrichment programs often have challenges in transition, as well as program continuity. • These challenges include different programs in the new location, having to re-qualify for inclusion in a gifted program, and differing program requirements such as some states identifying able learners as special needs students and requiring an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to receive services. • Elementary students are particularly affected by those barriers, since identification as a gifted student affords them entrée into specialized services.
Academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data from the study points to a range of experiences and perceptions regarding students’ ability to be successful academically when they enter a receiving school’s classroom from prior settings. • Some teachers report students entering their class underprepared for the local academic requirements, while others speak about students come in ahead. • Curricula differed from school to school with differences in scope and sequence the most commonly discussed; mathematics, specifically as it leads up to algebra and higher level mathematics coursework. • Middle schools offering algebra and geometry courses to advanced students along with the mechanics of awarding credit for those courses was a concern mentioned frequently by school personnel. • Few states require a state history course in high school to graduate. • The MIC3 placement provision gives the receiving school flexibility to waive prerequisite courses and other preconditions to enrollment in courses as well as the ability to place the student who transfers into classes based on the student’s enrollment in the sending state, including enrolling in similar courses in other schools if the receiving school does not offer such coursework.

Graduation

- Graduation requirements, tiered diplomas, prerequisite courses, grading variations, and state high stakes testing are all challenges to the student in transition.
- The majority of school personnel participating in the study showed their understanding that incoming high school students may have additional needs that those who have attended their school long-term may not have.
- The Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission has three provisions affecting graduation for mobile Military-connected students: a waiver requirement, an exit exam requirement, and a transfer during senior year requirement that make a formal structure of reciprocal graduation agreements.

Partnerships

- Data indicates that partnerships between school districts and installations have developed unevenly since the 2001 SETS publication.
- In many of the locations of the EMC-21 Study, deployments have been frequent, and Military focus and resources have been directed to mission.

Technology

- The Internet is beginning to free education from the traditional constraints of resources, specifically books, buildings, and time.
 - Most virtual schools are structured like traditional schools with a central office, administrators, teachers, professional development, curriculum, daily attendance, grades, report cards, and parent conferences.
 - Online learning gives students the opportunity to have individualized, interactive, and self-paced instruction.
 - Children of high-mobility Military Families are served well by the flexibility and portability made possible by virtual schools.
 - Gifted students benefit from the availability of higher level coursework that might not otherwise be available because of the lack of demand for those classes.
-

Conclusions

In the ten years since SETS, education professionals have become sensitive to the need of Military children, and parents have become more aware of school business. The business of education has become more complex, especially so for mobile Military Families who can be highly affected by the complexity. At the same time that there are growing national initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that are moving towards more shared standards across states, Military Families may be still fall into the frustrating gaps across state policies, especially for families with children with special needs. Advocates for mobile Military-connected students need to press for national initiatives that create standards across states such as the CCSS. It is evident in the research that CYSS efforts in many initiatives, especially the School Liaison Officer Program, and the availability of technology have eased the turmoil caused by transition that SETS 2001 pointed out.

“We find that participating in extracurricular activities helps the academic side. Involved students are happier, adjust better, and make social contacts faster.”

Teacher

Education of National Guard and Reserve Students

More than 670,000 Army Reservists have mobilized and deployed in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001.² This means that over 205,000 “suddenly Military” children have been impacted by the absence of a parent due to at least one deployment.³ These children, who prior to 2001 may have never identified themselves as a Military-connected child, now have a parent who has deployed in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Enduring Freedom (OEF), or New Dawn (OND) one or more times. The Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century (EMC-21) Study included a component of research that examined the academic concerns, challenges, and school-related needs of children whose parents serve as our nation’s citizen Soldiers.

Participants in this study were members or family members of the North Carolina National Guard (NCNG) and the 63rd Regional Support Command⁴ (63rd RSC). The NCNG has seven units located throughout the state of North Carolina and the 63rd RSC, headquartered in Mountain View, California, supports

over 40,000 U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers who reside in seven states (California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas). Ten service members, 30 spouses, and 18 children between the ages of 11 and 17 were interviewed. All participants were recruited at Yellow Ribbon events, a series of events organized to prepare activated members of the Reserve Force and their Families for deployment. The interview participants attended one of the events in California, North Carolina, or Texas. Attendees at Yellow Ribbon events were given information about the study and interested participants volunteered to be interviewed at the event or agreed to be interviewed via telephone at a later time.

The primary focus of this exploratory study was to identify the stressors and challenges related to the education of children that result from being part of the U.S. Army Reserve Military culture as well as some of the strengths and resilience factors demonstrated by children whose parents serve in the U.S. Army Reserve Forces.

The parent interviews spanned a wide range of their children’s grade levels starting in pre-kindergarten or younger and advancing to the post-secondary level. The students involved in the interviews had to be at least 11 years old; however, the lowest grade level represented by the students was fifth grade.

The 58 interviews represented a variety of family structures:

- Single mothers
- Blended Families with parents or stepparents
- Single fathers service members
- Dual Military couples
- Married couples with either the father or mother as the service member

Table: Grade Level of Students Interviewed

5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
1	5	5	3	2	2

² U.S. Army Reserve 2011 Posture Statement, page 6 states more than 196,711 USAR Soldiers have mobilized since 9/11/2001; National Guard News (www.ng.mil/news/archives/2011/09/090711_Families.aspx) reports “more than 475,000 citizen-Soldiers deployments since 9/11/2001.

³ According to the Defense Manpower and Data Center (DMDC) Contingency Tracking System Deployment File (as of 31 December 2010) 45% of Army National Guard Soldiers and 41% of U.S. Army Reserve Soldiers with children have deployed at least once. There are 306,230 Army National Guard-connected children, and 164,464 U.S. Army Reserve-connected children (Table 5-20, 2009 Demographics Report, www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil).

⁴ The 63RD Regional Readiness Command was de-activated in December 2009 and the lineage was passed to the 63rd Regional Support Command.

Both parents and children who were interviewed mentioned using formal support programs. Several parents and children responded they had accessed Our Military Kids for scholarship money to pay for private lessons (dance, music, martial arts).⁵ Military One Source was frequently cited as a resource that provided helpful information and directed Families to local agencies when they need assistance. A few of the parents participated in Family Readiness Groups. Parents also reported their children had attended the National Military Family Members' Association's Operation Purple Camp, and Operation Military Kids 4-H camps.

Both the responses to the interview questions and stories of the parents and students provide insight into the some of the unique challenges for the "suddenly Military" children (i.e. children whose parents serve in the U.S. Army National Guard or U.S. Army Reserve and who are mobilized for a deployment).

"I didn't know anybody [here]. I didn't know any kids that went [to the school] so **I just felt uncomfortable.**"

Student

"It was positive in a way that **she was focused more on school...**It's showing her that she can be independent or responsible. Maybe there's a challenge for her; 'while my daddy's away, I'll do better'."

Parent

"I think that my **friends helped me out a lot.** Whenever your friends are there for you, it makes you feel like really good, that really helps."

Student

"My church...if we needed them **they were there for us.**"

Parent

Specific topics addressed:

Transitions

Is the education of children whose parents serve in the Reserve Forces impacted by mobility?

•

Reintegration

Does the reintegration of a service member back into the home and life of the child have any impact on the student's education?

•

Deployment

How has the deployment of a parent impacted the child's education?

What avenues of support are available?

What type of support programs or service would parents and children like to have available?

⁵ The Our Military Kids foundation gives up to \$500.00 per child for participation in extra-curricular activities to Families that have deployed parents.

Education of National Guard and Reserve Children Themes and Findings

THEME	FINDINGS
Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Though they may not move as frequently as their Active Duty counterparts, many members of the Reserve are mobile and their children encounter school transition challenges.
Deployments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents are informing the schools about the deployment status of the service member parent.
Support During Deployments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The parent’s perception of the way the child’s school supported and helped the child during a parent’s deployment correlates to the overall view of how the parent sees the impact of deployment on the child’s education. Parents who reported highly supportive schools or teachers also reported positive or no impact of the deployment experience on the student’s education, while parents who reported schools were not helpful or ambivalent to the child’s situation were more likely to express that their child’s education was negatively impacted by the deployment experience. ▪ School support differs depending on the school level (elementary, middle, or high school). Students who attend elementary school and their parents develop personal relationships with the child’s teacher that facilitates this support. ▪ More Families receive support from their church during a deployment than any other community resource, including extended Family.

Conclusions

Multiple and frequent deployments over the past ten years have been a big change for the Reserve forces. Children who may have never recognized themselves as connected to the Military have a new normal that includes the extended absence of a parent, communicating with that parent via email and video chats, attending camps with other Military-connected children, and Yellow Ribbon events. Though they may not maintain this connection throughout childhood, Guard and Reserve-connected children deserve the attention, recognition, and resource investment of their Active Duty-connected peers. All of these Military-connected children serve too. The Army Reserves have recognized the impact of over ten years of deployment and the need for school transition support for Families. In 2009, the Army Reserves initiated a School Support Services Program to provide transition, deployment, and reintegration support for its Families.

“Our goal was not to survive,
it was to thrive.”

Parent

Notes From the Research Team:

Perserverance, Pride and Dedication

Since the inception of EMC-21 in March 2009, the research team has collected over 900 interviews and hundreds of supporting documents. Six hundred hours of recorded interviews have been transcribed to create over 7,000 pages of written text. We have been honored to see students, parents and educators supporting one another during transition and deployment. The research team cannot express how humbling an experience it was to read the stories of students, parents and educators, each of whom plays a critical role in support of the Army's soldiers and their loved ones.

We would like to thank the U.S. Army for creating the opportunity that allowed us to carry out this essential research. We would also like to thank the participating school districts. Without their partnership, the MCEC would not have been able to complete the interviews and hear the stories of students, parents and school personnel who are so touched by transition and deployment.

Exploratory research of EMC-21 led to profound findings.

Students portrayed pride in their parents; many spoke with wisdom of the multiple deployments they experienced and talked frankly about how their behaviors changed during their adolescent growth from shock and dismay to acceptance and helping. Researchers in some cases were touched by the words of children speaking with the wisdom of adults. When the team saw this we realized that military education systems about deployment and separation were filtering down through the stay at home parent to the children. When asking students what advice that they would give other students they would talk about "keeping the faith" and "sticking it out", words that typically come from Military Family values and culture. With the separation of loved ones came increased levels of stress, and it was highly evident from the research that children are serving to support the family unit along with their parents.

Parents overall were not negative about the multiple deployments and transitions rather they displayed attitudes of acceptance, perseverance, and commitment. Researchers could see weariness from parents who had experienced multiple deployments. There is controversy on whether multiple deployments build resiliency. From the EMC-21 research we saw that resiliency depended on many factors: the number and ages of children, surrounding support structures, and the environment of the deployed love one. We can draw on the wisdom of those parents who have experienced multiple transitions and deployments to help other military-connected parents work through the complexities they face.

Educators are faced with many pressures when faced with school polices, fluid education environments, and accountability. The research team observed a strong commitment to serve students; they showed a wiliness to support when they were aware of a problem. The research found that two-way communications between parents and educators, required constant attention from both parents and educators and was critical to the educational success of the children. Researchers found and affirmed (current research) that schools and educators play a critical role in the normalcy of military connected student's lives. Social connections such as clubs and sports are hugely important for students. Educators fill a critical role of not only teacher, but mentors, coaching and guiding adults.

A Sampling of Voices from the Field

“This is his third deployment and he’s somewhere in Afghanistan. I have three little brothers and I know it’s affected them and me because the war did change my father and he came back different. I know that there is counseling that Soldiers and their Families can have when they come back, but my dad’s stubborn and he doesn’t think we need that. So I’m going to try to ask him if we can get counseling when he comes back, just to readjust.”

Student

“[Deployments have] demanded for me to be more compassionate, and identifying the difference between an excuse and reason. We talk a lot about that in my class... excellence, consistency, not over reacting without knowing what’s going on.”

Teacher

“We didn’t stop just because he left or came back: if you’re handling it well, doing things, and showing your children they are gone but life doesn’t stop.”

Parent

“I think that year he missed two of my birthdays and all of the holidays in between. He’d been to every one of my football games - and then all of a sudden not to see him there... But I never felt upset, more pride that he was doing something better than most people had ever done in their lives, and that’s what helped me get through it.”

Student

“It took a while, but he finally got used to it and we got into a routine. The second time he deployed it was a little bit better since they were in high school. I kept them involved. You need to do something. I keep myself busy and the boys active. We just stay active to make time pass.”

Parent

“We really forged a strong partnership with the installation.”

Teacher



U.S. Army

EDUCATION OF THE MILITARY CHILD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

2012