

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Educational Options and Performance of Military-Connected School Districts
June 2011



Preparation of this study/report cost the Department of Defense a total of approximately \$347,745 in Fiscal Years 2010 - 2011.
Generated on 2011Mar24 1055 RefID: 8-19E210C

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Appendix:

**Section 537 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year
2010, Public Law 111-84**

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I. Executive Summary

Section 537 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, Public Law (P.L.) 111-84, stated that:

[t]he Secretary of Defense shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, conduct a study on options for educational opportunities that are, or may be, available for dependent children of members of the Armed Forces who do not attend Department of Defense dependents' schools when the public elementary and secondary schools attended by such children are determined to be in need of improvement pursuant to section 1116(b) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

To complete the study, in May 2010, the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) contracted with the American Institutes of Research (AIR). The final report, the *Educational Options and Performance of Military-Connected School Districts Research Study* (the Study), examined the educational performance of, and options available to, military-connected children in military-connected local educational agencies (commonly referred to as school districts).

Additionally, in September 2010, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness (USD (P&R)) initiated the *Department of Defense (DoD) Education Review*, consisting of two assessments (facilities and education) to examine the effectiveness of the DoD in meeting the educational needs of military-connected children and ensuring that they are provided a world-class education. Because a major focus of the *DoD Education Review* was the education of military-connected children in public schools, it was evident that the review should inform this report.

For this report, DoD identified and included the relevant findings in the *DoD Education Review* and the Study, including information on the demographics, performance, and educational options available to military-connected children in public schools. A limitation of the studies and impediment to this report are the lack of school-level data on military-connected children. The only data source on military-connected children comes from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) Impact Aid Program, which collects the number of military-connected children by school district.

The following are summary findings from the *Department of Defense (DoD) Education Review* (Muller, Wenger, Miller, Randazzo-Matsel, Atkins, Marr, and Yamasaki, 2011), and the Study (Kitmitto, Huberman, Blankenship, Hannan, Norris, and Christenson, 2011) regarding military-connected school districts¹.

¹ A *military-connected* district, as defined in the *Educational Options and Performance of Military-Connected School Districts* study, is a district that applied for Federal 8003 Impact Aid dollars and either had an average daily attendance (ADA) of military-connected students greater than 400, or had an ADA of whom 10 percent or more were military-connected students. The DoD Education Review examined all military-connected districts that applied for Federal 8003 Impact Aid dollars.

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Demographics of military-connected school districts (Kitmitto, et al., 2011):

- On average, they are more diverse than other districts, but when they are compared to school districts of similar size and location they are not as diverse and had more white students, similar percentages of black students, and fewer Hispanic students.
- They have fewer numbers of students with disabilities, but when they are compared to school districts of similar size and location, this is no longer the case.
- They have fewer students in poverty than districts of comparable size and location.
- On average, they receive slightly fewer dollars per student, although when they are compared to school districts of similar-size and location, this difference is negligible.
- Their student-to-teacher ratios are similar to those of other school districts.

Performance of military-connected school districts:

- They generally performed better than other school districts in mathematics and English language arts (ELA) on state assessments and it appears that the difference in achievement is due to the demographic differences of military-connected and other school districts (Kitmitto, et al., 2011).
- Those districts with the highest concentrations of military-connected children have graduation rates between 61 percent and 89 percent (Muller et al., 2011), while nationally roughly 75 percent of students graduate with their class (Blafanz and Letgers, 2004).

School Choice in military-connected school districts (Kitmitto, et al., 2011):

- Their percentages of students in charter and private schools are similar to those of other school districts.
- They have more students in magnet schools than other school districts.
- Three-fourths allow open enrollment within a school district and nearly half allow open enrollment outside of the school district.
- Over 60 percent offer online courses.

The following are legislative and administrative recommendations that are described in more detail in Section IV (pages 18-19):

- **Improve data collection:** Make a legislative change to the ESEA, which would require school districts to report on the performance of military-connected children, to efficiently and accurately support military-connected children in public schools.
- **Revise ED Impact Aid Program:** To effectively compensate military-connected school districts for the presence of military-connected children, the Administration has proposed changing the Impact Aid program to provide forward-funding for school districts experiencing growth.
- **Adoption of the Common Core Standards for DoDEA Schools**
- **Collaborate with the U.S. Department of Education:** The Department will continue to work with ED to support military families and military-connected school districts to provide actionable results.
- **Support the Implementation of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military-connected children**

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II. Introduction

Section 537 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, Public Law (P.L.) 111-84, stated that:

[t]he Secretary of Defense shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, conduct a study on options for educational opportunities that are, or may be, available for dependent children of members of the Armed Forces who do not attend Department of Defense dependents' schools when the public elementary and secondary schools attended by such children are determined to be in need of improvement pursuant to section 1116(b) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

The DoD is committed to ensuring that all children of military families are provided a world class education that prepares them to be successful in their careers, leading contributors in their communities and productive citizens in the 21st century. There are over 1.2 million school-aged children of military families. The DoD educates a small percentage of students (approximately seven percent, or 86,000 students, with about 25,000 of those students enrolled stateside) in DoD-owned and operated schools. The majority of military-connected children are enrolled in public schools, while others may attend private schools or are home-schooled.

To complete the study required by section 537 of P.L. 111-84, in May 2010, DoDEA contracted with AIR to conduct a study of the educational performance of, and options available to, military-connected children in military-connected school districts. AIR has substantial experience conducting sophisticated descriptive and evaluation research on a wide variety of education-related policies and programs for ED and state education agencies, including school accountability, school turnaround, and school choice policies.

The Study provides and addresses summary findings on the demographics and academic performance of the largest military-connected school districts. It also examines the school choice options that are available in military-connected school districts, such as charter, magnet, private, virtual, and special education schools, as well as inter- and intra-district open-enrollment policies and voucher programs. AIR conducted interviews with 8 school liaison officers (SLOs), two from each of the Service branches, who assist military installations and families regarding school-quality issues.

Additionally, in September 2010, the USD (P&R) initiated the *DoD Education Review*, consisting of two assessments (facilities and education) to examine the effectiveness of the DoD in meeting the educational needs of military-connected children and ensuring that students are provided a world-class education. The DoD contracted with the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), a non-profit research organization that operates the Center for Naval Analyses and the Institute for Public Research, to conduct the education assessment portion of the review.

The first phase of the *DoD Education Review*, completed in January 2011, included developing student educational profiles and demographics and identifying preliminary findings in certain focus areas (i.e., early childhood education, transitions and deployments, foreign languages, science, technology, education and mathematics (STEM), etc.). Regarding military-connected

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children in public schools, the *DoD Education Review* primarily focused on the demographics of all military-connected districts and the performance of states with military-connected children.

Because a major focus of the *DoD Education Review* was the education of military-connected children in public schools, it was evident that the review should inform this report. Thus, the release of the findings from the Congressionally required study was delayed to ensure that this report was informed by, and consistent with, that assessment.

For this report, DoD identified and included the relevant findings in the *DoD Education Review* and the Study, including information on the demographics, performance, and educational options available to military-connected children in public schools. Additionally, this report provides recommendations for legislative or administrative action that the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, considers appropriate in light of the limited data that were available to conduct the studies and anecdotal information about the education concerns of military-connected families and districts serving military-connected families.

A limitation of the studies and impediment to this report are the lack of school-level data on military-connected children. The only data source on military-connected children comes from the ED Impact Aid Program, which collects the number of military-connected children by school district. Each school district collects this data through a voluntary parental survey, and since some parents may not complete the survey, the number of military-connected children may therefore be underrepresented in the data. However, it should be noted, school districts do have an incentive to thoroughly collect this data, because their Impact Aid allotment is dependent on the student counts. Additionally, anecdotal evidence suggests that some school districts do not collect this data, either because of the administrative cost of conducting the survey or because they are unaware of military-connected children enrolled in their school district. For the purposes of this report, the Impact Aid data likely provides accurate information on the school districts with the highest concentrations of military-connected children, which were those examined by both the *DoD Education Review* and the Study.

Without a mechanism for collecting school- and student-level data, it was not possible for the DoD to identify military-connected schools nationwide that are identified as “in need of improvement” under the ESEA. Furthermore, without knowledge of the schools that military-connected children attend, the DoD could not identify with specificity the educational options that military families are choosing for their children. To address these challenges, AIR analyzed the demographics, achievement, and school choice policies and options of military-connected school districts to provide information on the educational options that may be available to military-connected children. AIR also conducted interviews with SLOs to gauge how military families make decisions about education and what decisions they are making.

To develop this report to Congress, the DoD collaborated closely with ED in obtaining data and advice on the research design of the Study.

III. Summary of Findings

A. Demographics

The following are summary findings from the *DoD Education Review* (Muller et. al., 2011), and the Study (Kitmitto et al., 2011) studies regarding military-connected school districts:

- On average, they are more diverse than other districts, but when comparing school districts of similar size and location they are not as diverse and had more white students, similar percentages of black students, and fewer Hispanic students.
- They have fewer numbers of students with disabilities, but when they are compared to school districts of similar size and location, this is no longer the case.
- They have fewer students in poverty than schools of comparable size and location.
- On average, they receive slightly-fewer dollars per student, although when compared to similar-sized and located school districts, this difference is negligible.
- They have similar student-to-teacher ratios as other school districts.

The *DoD Education Review* and the Study analyzed the demographic characteristics of military-connected school districts using data from the ED Impact Aid Program, the only comprehensive source for data on military-connected children in school districts. The *DoD Education Review* examined all military-connected districts (653), while AIR analyzed 214 school districts that fit this definition:

A military-connected district is a district that applied for Federal 8003 Impact Aid² dollars and either had an average daily attendance (ADA) of military-connected students greater than 400, or had an ADA of whom 10 percent or more were military-connected students (Kitmitto et. al, 2011).

Other data sources for both studies included the Common Core of Data from the National Center for Education Statistics, ED and the U.S. Census Bureau's Public School Finance Data. The Study includes two sets of analyses. The first compares unadjusted averages of military-connected and other school districts, which addresses how military-connected school districts compare generally to all other school districts. The second method compares adjusted averages, which take into account and control for geographic size and school district size. With unadjusted averages, some of the differences might be explained by these factors, so the adjusted means compare military-connected school districts to other school districts of similar size and location (urban, suburban, and rural) in the same state.

The Study first compared districts' sizes and locations and found that, on average, military-connected school districts were larger and more urban than other school districts. Second, comparisons of demographic characteristics, educational inputs, and finances, were made both

² Section 8003 of the Impact Aid Program provides "Basic Support Payments" to help local education agencies that educate federally connected children. These may be the children of members of the uniformed services, children who reside on Indian lands, children who reside on Federal property or in federally subsidized low-rent housing, and children whose parents work on Federal Property.

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with and without adjustments for size and location. Across the two sets of results, the following observations can be made about military-connected school districts (Kitmitto et al, 2011):

- They are more diverse overall (fewer white students and more black students) but, when compared to other districts with similar size and location this was not the case (they had more white students, similar percentages of black students, and fewer Hispanic students).
- They have similar or fewer special needs students (English language learners and students with disabilities).
- They have fewer free- or reduced-price lunch eligible students when compared to similar sized and located school districts.
- They have similar student/staff member ratios to other districts.
- They have fewer cost-adjusted expenditures per pupil but much of this difference was negated or accounted for when location and size were considered.³

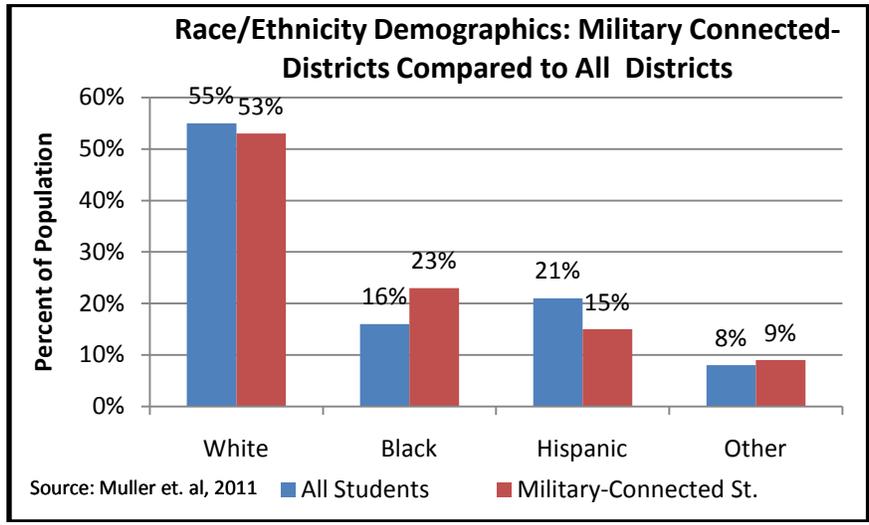
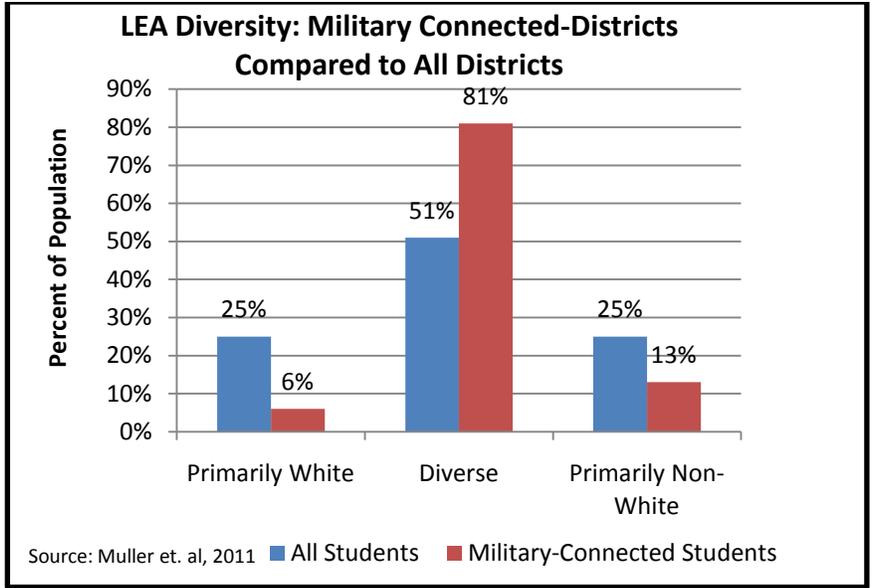
The *DoD Education Review* compared unadjusted averages for all military-connected school districts also using data from the Common Core of Data, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and a study on dropout rates (Blafantz and Letgers, 2004). The findings were generally similar (Muller et al., 2011):

- Military-connected children are more likely than other children to attend urban school districts.
- The vast majority of military-connected children attend neither the lowest- nor the highest-poverty school districts.
- Military-connected children are less likely than other children to attend school districts in which many children are eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch (FRPL).
 - Twelve percent of military-connected children attend school districts with “high” FRPL enrollments, while nationally 26 percent of students do.
 - Nationally, 41 percent of students attend a Title I school district, while only 37 percent of military-connected children attend these schools.
- Compared to other students, military-connected children are likely to be in school districts with relatively diverse student populations.
- School districts with military-connected children have slightly lower levels of students with disabilities and English language learners.

Tables 1 and 2 were taken from the *DoD Education Review* and provide the demographic unadjusted averages for all military-connected school districts compared to other school districts (Muller et al., 2011).

³ Kitmitto et al. note that “To account for differences in costs between districts expenditures per pupil were adjusted using an index of labor costs across districts. The Comparable Wage Index (CWI) uses the average of non-teacher, college graduate salaries in a local area as an index. This cost adjustment of expenditures per pupil should not be confused with the location and size adjusted means that are calculated. The cost adjustment was executed by dividing the expenditures per pupil variable by the CWI index to create a new variable, cost-adjusted expenditures per pupil, whose variation across military-connectedness was then further adjusted for location and size, as discussed above.”

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The NAEP (2009), among other assessment and research studies, has consistently shown that student performance is closely tied to socio-economic status and that low-income students do not perform as well those who are not low-income. The demographic findings reveal that military-connected school districts serve fewer poor students than other similar school districts, and, according to these findings, should therefore be higher performing.

In relation to school funding, there is little disparity in the amount of funds that military-connected school districts receive, especially when compared to similar school districts. A RAND study in 2001 and an evaluation of the Impact Aid Program conducted by AIR for ED in 2007 each found that the Impact Aid program effectively equalizes funding for school districts

⁴ “Primarily White” is defined as those districts that are 84 percent or more white, while “Primarily Non-White” is defined as 70 percent or more non-white students. “Diverse” is defined as anything between 16 and 70 percent non-white.

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serving children from on-base military families (Budding, Gill and Zimmer, 2001 and Kitmitto, Sherman and Madsen, 2008). The findings also suggest that military-connected school districts serving on-base students receive more funding compared to other school districts. The contrary is true in relation to school districts that serve primarily students who live in off-base housing in that they are undercompensated. Overall, military-connected school districts receive about the same amount of funds as other school districts.

B. Educational Performance of Military-Connected School Districts

The following are summary findings from the *DoD Education Review* and the Study of military-connected school districts:

- They generally performed better than other school districts in mathematics and ELA, and the difference in achievement is due to demographic differences⁵ between military-connected and other school districts (Kitmitto et al., 2011).
- Military dependents are concentrated in school districts that have graduation rates between 61 percent and 89 percent (Muller et al., 2011), while nationally roughly 75 percent of students graduate with their class (Blafanz and Letgers, 2004).

The primary data source used in the Study to compare the educational performance of military-connected school districts with that of other school districts was federally mandated district and school-level accountability measures obtained from *EDFacts*. *EDFacts* is an ED initiative that centralizes performance data submitted by K-12 state education agencies with other data assets, (such as financial grant information) within the Department to enable better analysis and use in policy development, planning, and management. The primary measures used were the percentage of students scoring at the "proficient" level on state assessments in each district in mathematics and ELA in grades 3-8. Secondary measures used were the "adequate yearly progress" and "in need of improvement" indicators that are included in the ESEA.

The research study compared the educational performance of military-connected and other school districts made again using unadjusted numbers and again controlling for various influencing factors. The study found that:

- Military-connected school districts had equal or higher performance, on average, in both unadjusted and adjusted comparisons of percent of students who are "proficient" in mathematics and ELA (Kitmitto et al., 2011).

The Study also compared the performance of military-connected school districts to other "similar" school districts (location and demographics). Factors used to define "similar districts" were: the percentage of students who are eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch, the percentage of English language learners, the percentage of students with a disability, the percentage of students in various race/ethnicity categories, and indicators of district location (city, suburb, town, or rural area).

⁵ AIR defined "demographic differences" as "a vector of district characteristics, including percentages of students' race/ethnic backgrounds, percent eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, percent that are English language learners, percent that have disabilities, and percent that are classified as 'migrant'" (Kitmitto et al., 2011).

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AIR stated that:

Adding background factors into the regression model as controls changed the results: using this specification, the difference in mathematics achievement was close to zero and the difference in ELA achievement was smaller than the initial estimate with no control variables. Both differences were no longer statistically different from zero. These findings suggest that while military-connected districts performed better than other districts without controls, differences in district characteristics—in particular, student demographics—accounted for enough of the observed difference that the difference was attenuated and no longer statistically significant. Thus, in a straight two-way comparison of military-connected and non-military-connected districts, the former perform no better or worse than the latter once background variables are controlled for in the analysis.

While these data show that military-connected districts have performance levels that are somewhat better than other districts, it is important to note what these numbers might and might not reflect. First, as discussed above, these data may reflect the fact that military families, when locating near a military installation, can choose the district they live in and may choose a district with better schools. In this case, districts with better schools will be more likely to be identified as “military-connected” than districts with poor schools that are similarly near an installation. Second, the data do not reflect cross-state differences. These data tell us that military-connected districts perform better than other districts in the same state; however, military families may still face challenges if asked to relocate to a state that has poor overall performance. Because they were standardized within state, the data used did not allow cross-state comparisons (Kitmitto et al., 2011).

While the Study used *EdFacts* data where cross-state comparisons were necessarily removed to make the data comparable, the *DoD Education Review* examined state-level differences using data from the NAEP to make these cross-state comparisons. The *DoD Education Review* also analyzed school district-level data on graduation rates from a 2004 study (Blafanz & Letgers, 2004). The main findings include (Muller et al., 2011):

- Students in states with military-connected children score essentially the same as their peers in reading and math in both 4th and 8th grade.
- At the high school level, military-connected children are concentrated in school districts that graduate between 61 and 89 percent of students, while nationally roughly 75 percent of students graduate with their class (Blafanz and Letgers, 2004).
- Ten school districts that have military-connected children enrolled have an average freshman graduation rate of less than 50 percent.

The findings indicate that military-connected children generally attend school districts that perform better than similarly sized and located school districts. However, the difference in achievement scores is explained in part by demographic differences; military-connected school districts have fewer students in poverty.

C. District Adequate Yearly Progress and "in Need of Improvement" Status

The following is the summary finding from the Study of military-connected school districts:

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- Military-connected school districts are less likely to be making adequate yearly progress (AYP), yet are also less often identified as in need of improvement as defined by the ESEA (Kitmitto et al., 2011).

Using *EDFacts* data, the Study examined the AYP rating and "in need of improvement" status of school districts as mandated by the ESEA and implemented by each state (definitions vary). The status of schools identified as "in need of improvement" was an important aspect of the Congressional requirement for this study but, as noted earlier, the only available data on military-connected students is by school district as presented in Table 3:

The percentage of students enrolled in a military-connected district that was making AYP (a positive indicator), 32.2 percent, was lower than that enrolled in other districts, 37.5 percent—but this difference was not statistically significant. For districts in need of improvement (a negative indicator), 42.0 percent of military-connected district enrollment was in a district that was in need of improvement, compared with 44.9 percent of non-military-connected district enrollment. This difference was also not statistically significant. (Kitmitto et al., 2011).

Table 3: Percent enrollment in districts and schools making AYP and in need of improvement

<i>Accountability Measure</i>	Non-military connected	Military-connected districts	Difference	P-value
	districts			
	Mean	Mean		
Percent of students in districts making AYP	37.5 (48.4)	32.2 (46.7)	-5.3	0.101
Percent of students in districts in need of improvement	44.9 (49.7)	42.0 (49.3)	-3.0	0.392
N	10,617	214		

* Significant difference ($p < .05$). Statistical testing was performed using a t-test and Satterthwaite approximation of the degrees of freedom when calculating the p-values with the assumption of unequal variances.

NOTE: N counts vary slightly for each variable due to missing data.

Source: Kitmitto et al., 2011.

The findings related to AYP and "in need of improvement" status of military-connected school districts are somewhat contradictory. Military-connected children are more likely to be in a district that is not identified as in need of improvement (two consecutive years of not making AYP on certain performance criteria), but are also more likely to be in a school district that fails to make AYP. It should be noted that these results were not statistically significant, meaning that the differences could be the result of random error rather than a real difference in performance.

DoDEA is providing resources to military-connected school districts and schools, including many that are missing AYP and/or are identified as in need of improvement, through the legislative authority granted originally in the 2007 National Defense Authorization Act and later codified in 20 USC 7703b note. The authority expires in 2013. The goals of the grant program are to improve the academic achievement and enhance the educational experience of military-connected students by funding professional development opportunities for teachers, educational

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programs in core content areas, and support and transition services for students. Since 2008, DoDEA has awarded 105 grants to 94 districts, impacting 697 schools and 139,455 military children. The grant program is addressing the needs of military-connected schools that have not made AYP and/or are identified as in need of improvement. For example, in the 2009 grant cohort (298 schools), nearly 30 percent of the schools did not make AYP and about half of these schools are identified as in need of improvement. In the 2010 cohort, 40 percent of the participating schools (412) did not make AYP for school year 2009-2010. Data show that grantee project goals align with one or more of the DoDEA Educational Partnership program goals, indicating that the grant program is enhancing student learning opportunities and student achievement as intended.

D. School Choice Options in Military-Connected School Districts

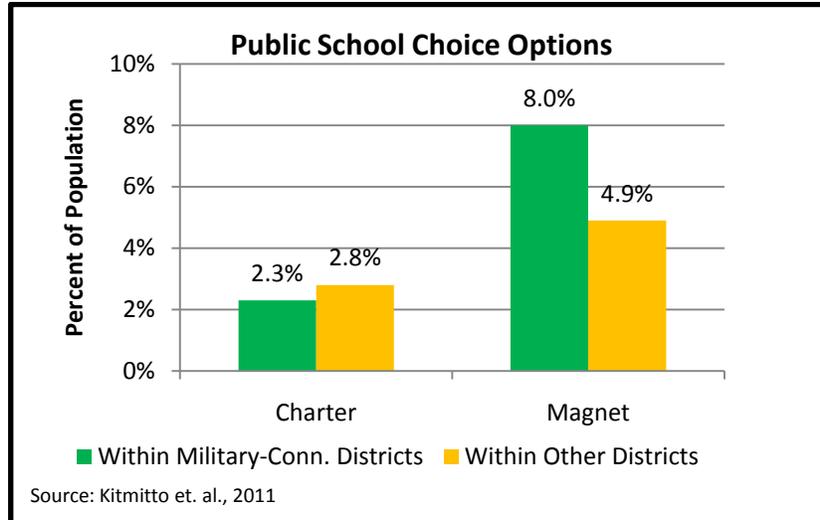
The following are summary findings from the Study of military-connected school districts (Kitmitto et al., 2011):

- They have similar percentages of students in charter, special education, and private schools as other school districts.
- They have more students in magnet schools than other school districts.
- Three-fourths allow open enrollment within a school district and nearly half allow open enrollment outside of the school district.
- Over 60 percent offer online courses.

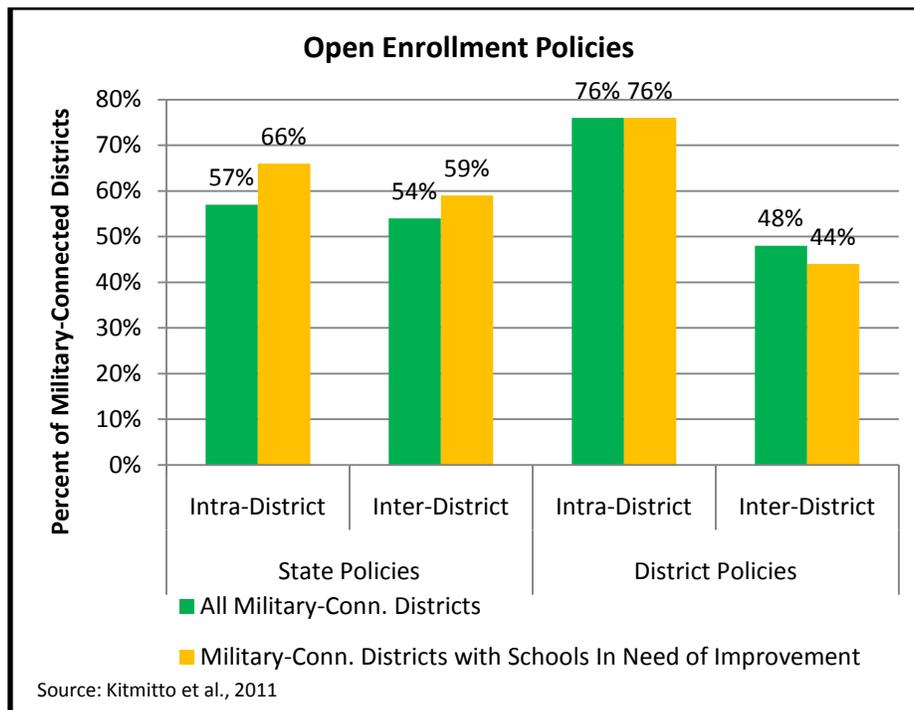
In the Study, AIR compiled data on the prevalence of various school choice options within military-connected school districts, paying particular attention to those that applied to gifted students and students with disabilities. The researchers used data from the National Center for Education Statistics for the 2008–09 school year, which allows for geographic linking of private, charter, magnet, and special education schools to school districts. They also collected data through the review of websites, including state education agency websites, school choice interest groups, news articles, and the websites of individual school districts. Unfortunately, data on home-schooling were not available, and this choice option was not included in the analysis.

The average percentage of students in private schools in military-connected school districts and other school districts is essentially the same at 9 percent. Table 4 shows the percentage of students in military-connected school districts and other school districts in public school choice options (Kitmitto et al., 2011):

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The number of students who take advantage of inter- and intra-school district transfer programs (open enrollment) could not be calculated, since that data is not systematically collected. However, the researchers did determine through their analysis the percentage of school districts that had either state or school district open enrollment policies. Table 5 shows these percentages (Kitmitto et al., 2011):



From examination of military-connected school districts' websites, the researchers also found that (Kitmitto et al., 2011):

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- Almost all military-connected school districts provided information on programs for advanced coursework or options for gifted students (94.6 percent) and students in special education (98.6 percent).
- While many students were in states that had some sort of policy for vouchers or tuition tax credits (23.0 percent), the proportion of students enrolled in school districts that had implemented and provided information about such policies was small (2.6 percent).
- Most students in military-connected school districts were in states that had a state virtual schools initiative or an online initiative (86.4 percent), and most were in districts that offered information about online courses (62.4 percent).

The Department is considering ways to expand the DoDEA Virtual High School to military connected-school districts.

Gauging whether or not any of these choices provided a meaningful option for military-connected children was again limited by the lack of data at the school level. Additionally, data on private schools' achievement and home-schooling data are not collected, which adds another challenge to effectively identifying the viability of these options. A survey of military parents that provides a representative sample of military installations would prove to be valuable in identifying how many parents are taking advantage of these options and the priorities parents place on education and school choice.

E. Perceptions of School Liaison Officers

To address the challenges presented by the lack of data, AIR conducted interviews with a limited number (8) of SLOs. The mission of the school liaison officer is to provide military commanders with the support necessary to coordinate and advise military parents of school-aged children on educational issues and needs and to assist in solving education-related problems. They work to identify barriers to academic success and develop solutions; promote parental involvement in their children's education; develop and coordinate partnerships in education; provide parents with the tools they need to overcome obstacles to education that stem from the military lifestyle; and to promote and educate local communities and schools regarding the needs of military children.

Each of the Military Services was represented in the sample, which was small and limited due to time constraints. SLOs reported the following related to school quality (Kitmitto et al., 2011):

- Three of the eight SLOs, located in Arizona, Louisiana, and Mississippi, explicitly mentioned that the perceived quality of schools in their area affects families' decision to relocate to their installations.
- Six SLOs also reported on overcrowding or lack of capacity of schools in their areas.
- Four SLOs explicitly mentioned that some military parents at their installations choose home-schooling because they are not satisfied with the quality of education in their areas.
- To improve the quality of schooling for their children, parents are deliberately choosing their place of residence to get access to better quality and take advantage of inter- and intra-school district transfer options.

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- All eight SLOs worked with districts that have private schools, special education schools/programs, and gifted programs. Furthermore, more than half of the SLOs' locales have dual-enrollment programs (7), magnet schools or programs (5), online programs (5), and charter schools (5). Only one SLO worked with districts that provide students with school vouchers.
- Half of the eight SLOs expressed concern about the quality of special education in their area or state, and almost all of the SLOs indicated that families with special education children presented the most challenges for them because of the amount of time they require, compounded by the high number of cases in some locations.
- SLOs had mixed opinions about the quality of programs for other special needs students, in particular those programs for gifted and talented students.
 - Two SLOs commented on the high quality of programs for gifted students in their areas, whereas three others reported the opposite.

Although it is difficult to extrapolate that a small group of SLOs is representative of all military families, the findings do confirm anecdotes from some areas about the concerns around education, especially as it relates to special education and the importance of high-quality educational options for military families. However, the results of this study as presented above indicate that on average, military-connected school districts perform just as well as comparable school districts.

IV. DoD Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided. Some of the recommendations were influenced by the fact that the *DOD Education Review* and the Study were significantly limited by the lack of school-level data on military-connected students.

A. Legislative Recommendations

The findings of the *DoD Education Review* and the Study were significantly limited by the lack of school-level data and parent input. Section 537 of P.L. 111-84 requested an examination of schools in need of improvement that educate military-connected children, but the only data available on these students are limited to school district level information obtained through the ED Impact Aid Program. The Impact Aid data only identifies the percentage and number of military-connected children by school district and not by school. Two recommendations are outlined that would mitigate: 1) the limitations in data available on the educational opportunities; and 2) the range of educational options available to military-connected children. The Administration recommends:

- **Improve data collection:** Make a legislative change to the ESEA, which would require school districts to report on the performance of military-connected children, to efficiently and accurately support military-connected children in public schools. Creating a subgroup for military-connected children under the ESEA would provide the opportunity to identify where the military-connected children attend school, and would provide performance data that is needed to identify, evaluate, and, ultimately, improve the educational outcomes for military-connected children. It would also:
 - Reveal their academic performance in reading, math, and science;
 - Shed light on how well public schools are educating military-connected children and their career readiness;
 - Provide critical information for military families as they choose schools;
 - Assist DoD and researchers in evaluating the needs of military-connected children and target resources effectively; and
 - Inform programs that support military-connected children.

(Note: The proposal does not request that schools and school districts be held accountable for the academic performance of the military subgroup, only that it be reported to the public.)

Although the data suggest that the ED Impact Aid program adequately compensates school districts that serve on-base students, DoD is aware of significant problems related to increases in military-connected children on some installations. To address concerns around growth, the Administration recommends the following:

- **Revise ED Impact Aid Program:** To effectively compensate military-connected school districts for the presence of military-connected children, the Administration has proposed changing the Impact Aid program to provide forward-funding for school districts experiencing growth. Currently, Impact Aid funds are distributed based on data from the

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previous year, rather than on current numbers. This change would allow school districts experiencing growth to apply for Impact Aid funds based on current year data.

B. Administrative Recommendations

To address the challenges faced by parents of military families in securing quality educational options for their children, DOD will take a number of administrative actions. The research findings suggest that military-connected school districts have educational performance levels that are somewhat better than other districts in the areas of mathematics and ELA. While these data tell us that military-connected districts perform better than other districts in the same state, military families may still face challenges when they relocate to a state that has overall poor performance. To mitigate the challenges that military families encounter when relocating, there is a need for rigorous and consistent content standards across states to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce.

- **Adoption of the Common Core Standards for DoDEA Schools:** The Common Core Standards are a set of K-12 mathematics and ELA content standards that are research and evidence-based, internationally benchmarked, aligned with college and work expectations, and infuse 21st century competencies. The adoption of the Common Core Standards by DoDEA would provide a number of advantages for military-connected children, such as:
 - A more seamless transition of students between and among states;
 - Consistent assessments and resources;
 - More meaningful state-by-state comparisons;
 - A more consistent benchmark for student expectations.
- **Collaborate with the U.S. Department of Education:** The Department will continue to work with ED to support military families and military-connected school districts to provide actionable results. ED has already responded by supporting a reportable military student subgroup, grant priorities, increased communication and solutions around district attendance policies for military-connected school districts, and student financial aid policies for service members.
- **Support the Implementation of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military-connected children:** Continued support by the Department as appropriate to States in implementing the Interstate Compact is important to addressing the needs of military families with school age children.

V. Conclusion

The analyses used in this report provide valuable information on the demographics, performance and school choice options in military-connected school districts. They reveal that those school districts with 10 percent, or 400 or more, military-connected children in average daily attendance perform better on average in mathematics and ELA than other school districts as well as have fewer students in poverty, Hispanics, and students with disabilities. Additionally, at least 20 percent of the students enrolled in these districts are enrolled in a school of their choice whether public (specifically magnet or charter schools) or private, while virtual learning opportunities are available at the state level for 86.4 percent and at the school district level for 62.4 percent of students in military-connected school districts.

DoD recognizes that school-quality issues remain in some locations that affect military families, even though the most heavily military-impacted school districts perform better, on average, than other school districts. The quality of the education afforded military-connected children affects enlistment, retention, and morale, and has a role in operational readiness. The partnership with ED, established through a memorandum of understanding, has allowed DoD to work closely with ED to address the educational concerns of military families, especially the recommendations on data collection and Impact Aid. The lack of a mechanism to collect data on military-connected schools is the single greatest hindrance to fully understanding the needs of, and better supporting, military families.

DoD will continue its concerted efforts to build relationships between local communities, military installations, school districts, and our state and federal partners to address issues that affect the education and well-being of military-connected children and their families.

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Appendix

SEC. 537. STUDY ON OPTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES WHEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ATTENDED BY SUCH CHILDREN ARE DETERMINED TO NEED IMPROVEMENT.

(a) STUDY ON OPTIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.-

(1) STUDY REQUIRED.-The Secretary of Defense shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, conduct a study on options for educational opportunities that are, or may be, available for dependent children of members of the Armed Forces who do not attend Department of Defense dependents' schools when the public elementary and secondary schools attended by such children are determined to be in need of improvement pursuant to section 1116(b) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 6316(b)).

(2) OPTIONS.-The options to be considered under the study required by paragraph (1) may include the following:

(A) Education programs offered through the Internet, including programs that are provided by the Department of Defense through the Internet.

(B) Charter schools.

(C) Such other public school options as the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, considers appropriate for purposes of the study.

(3) ELEMENTS.-The study required by paragraph (1) shall address the following matters:

(A) The challenges faced by parents of military families in securing quality elementary and secondary education for their children when the public elementary and secondary schools attended by their children are identified as being in need of improvement.

(B) The extent to which perceptions of differing degrees of quality in public elementary and secondary schools in different regions of the United States affect plans of military families to relocate, including relocation pursuant to a permanent change of duty station.

(C) The various reasons why military families seek educational opportunities for their children other than those available through local public elementary and secondary schools.

(D) The current level of student achievement in public elementary and secondary schools in school districts which have a high percentage of students who are children of military families. The educational needs of children of military families who are required by location to attend public

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elementary and secondary schools identified as being in need of improvement.

(F) The value and impact of other alternative educational programs for military families.

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(G) The extent to which the options referred to in paragraph (2) would provide a meaningful option for education for military-connected children when the public elementary and secondary schools attended by such children are determined to be in need of improvement.

(H) The extent to which the options referred to in paragraph (2) would improve the quality of education available for students with special needs, including students with learning disabilities and gifted students.

(I) Such other matters as the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Education consider appropriate for purposes of the study.

(b) REPORT.-Not later than March 31, 2010, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate, the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate, the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Education and Labor of the House of Representatives a report on the study required by subsection (a). The report shall include the following:

(1) A description of the results of the study.

(2) Such recommendations for legislative or administrative action as the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, considers appropriate in light of the results of the study.