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Charter Schools and Military Communities

A Toolkit

National Charter School Resource Center

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Introduction

There are roughly 1.1 million school-age children in the United States whose parents serve in the armed forces, and the majority of them attend public schools.[1] These military-connected students learn a great deal from their parents' work ethic and dedication to duty. Many of them travel the world at young ages, gain a deep appreciation for public service, and bring these traits and their unique perspectives to their classrooms. For these reasons, military-connected children represent an enormous and invaluable resource for any educational community; however, military families often struggle to find excellent education options for their children.[2] Charter schools on military installations can increase the options available to military families. The flexibility afforded to charter schools, moreover, combined with their independent governance structures, makes them well-positioned to develop schools designed specifically to meet the needs of military families.

A series of recently released reports emphasized the importance of education to military families and the role charter schools can play in improving options:

- *The Tenth Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation: Vol. II, Deferred and Noncash Compensation* (2008) identified improving education for children in military families as a key concern. The report highlighted benefits offered by charter schools and encouraged the establishment of charter schools on military installations.
- *Strengthening Our Military Families: Meeting America's Commitment* (2011), a White House-approved report, established the need to ensure excellence in military-connected children's education as a priority and noted that the issue can have a significant impact on the recruitment, retention, and morale of military personnel.
- The U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD's) *Report on Charter Schools on Military Bases* (2012) profiled seven charter schools located on military installations.
- *Charter Schools: Guidance Needed for Military Base Schools on Startup and Operational Issues* (2013), published by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, noted a likely increase in the demand for military installation charter schools.

Charter school development and authorization is governed by state laws. As of 2014, charter schools are now allowed in all but eight U.S. states, and several charter schools have already been developed on military installations to serve military families.[3] These

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[1] U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2011, March). *Education of military dependent students: Better information needed to assess student performance* (GAO 11-231). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/assets/320/316048.pdf

[2] U.S Department of Defense Education Activity. (n.d.). *Military K–12 partners: A Department of Defense Education Activity Partnership program.* Retrieved from http://www.militaryk12partners.dodea.edu/about.cfm

[3] The eight U.S. states that do not allow establishment of charter schools are Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.

schools provide alternatives to traditional district public schools, serve installation housing developments, and offer services focused specifically on the needs of military-connected children. In fact, a recent study focused on school districts with large enrollments of military-connected students found that about 20 percent of military families were opting for schools of choice, and 2.3 percent of these were selecting charter schools.[4]

While several charter school start-ups on military installations have been successful, developing a charter school is a difficult task. Charter school developers must design and document a compelling plan, gain regulatory approval, acquire a facility, and demonstrate capacity to manage a multi-million dollar school enterprise. The work is even more challenging given the high mobility of the population being served, which complicates the task of building support. One key advantage, however, is the military community itself, which offers a substantial and widespread support network, as well as military families that are committed to high educational standards for their children.

This toolkit provides the framework, references, tips, and resources needed by developers of charter schools for military families to understand the critical issues surrounding the charter school option; to see how similar challenges have been met by others; to locate viable sources of support; and to find the means necessary to develop high-quality, military-connected charter schools.

The toolkit is intended to help align key stakeholders to the steps that charter school developers should take when planning to establish successful charter schools. Potential audiences for this toolkit include military families; installation commanders and support personnel; private-sector military partners that see charter schools as critical components of installations' community development; local education agencies (i.e., public school districts) that are interested in seeing military-connected children served by charter schools; local, state, and federal policy makers and agency staff who want to understand the context of military installation charter schools; and charter school support organizations.

This toolkit is organized around nine core elements: (1) Know What a Charter School Is; (2) Focus on Meeting Military-Connected Children's Needs; (3) Establish a Strong Governance Structure; (4) Create an Enrollment Plan That Includes Outreach and Monitoring; (5) Understand the Authorizing Landscape; (6) Write a Successful Charter School Application; (7) Locate the Right Facilities; (8) Develop a Sound Financial Plan; and (9) Select a Strong Founding Head.

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[4] Kitmitto, S., Huberman, M., Blankenship, C., Hannan, S., Norris, D., & Christenson, B. (2011). *Educational options and performance of military-connected school districts.* Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research. Retrieved from http://www.militaryk12partners.dodea.edu/docs/2011-air-report.pdf

CORE ELEMENT 1:

Know What a Charter School Is

Charter schools are self-governing public schools operated under contract with a regulatory body called a charter authorizer. Charter schools offer parents an additional educational option. In order to translate the demand for a public school option into the establishment of an actual charter school, charter school developers need to articulate a vision for the school, craft a detailed educational plan, establish a governing board, and obtain an authorizer's approval to operate with public funding.

Within a public school district, individual schools can also be converted into charter schools, and that process is often undertaken by the district itself. The process is similar to a charter school start-up, although special requirements are common, such as approval of the change by a certain percentage of staff or parents.

Depending on state law, authorizers may be school districts, institutions of higher education, not-for-profit organizations, state educational agencies, independent commissions and boards, or municipalities. After a charter school has been authorized, its authorizers continue to monitor the school's performance and make periodic decisions to renew or close the school depending upon established performance measures.

Charter schools typically draw enrollment based on parental choice and are open to all students. When the number of applicants exceeds the number of available seats, a lottery is held to determine admission. Certain exceptions to open enrollment are allowed, based on state law and federal guidelines. For example, children of charter school founders and staff may be exempt from the lottery. Some states provide exceptions for children in military families.

Charter schools are typically free from many regulations affecting traditional school districts and can define their own approaches to curriculum and school culture, develop their own staff employment contracts and working conditions, and set their own business plans. However, they are required to participate in state academic performance accountability testing and to meet safety and health requirements. They also must be tuition free, nonsectarian, and in compliance with federal civil rights and antidiscrimination laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Charter schools are funded with per-pupil allocations in a manner similar to traditional school districts. However, they are usually responsible for their own facilities and, in many states, they do not receive extra funding for facilities costs.[5]

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[5] Information about state funding for charter school facilities is available through the data dashboard of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, which can be accessed at http://dashboard.publiccharters.org/dashboard/policy/page/funding/year/2010

Charter school performance, like traditional public school performance, varies widely. Recently, the National Charter School Resource Center completed an analysis of five rigorous studies of student achievement in charter schools. The studies found that charter school students—especially low-income students—generally performed as well as or better than their counterparts in traditional public schools in mathematics and reading.[6]

TOOLBOX TIP

CHARTER SCHOOL ORIENTATION

Key resources that help to explain and describe charter schools include:

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001 (No Child Left Behind) Part B—Public Charter Schools outlines the federal approach to the establishment and operation of charter schools and includes definitions of key terms and concepts.
- The Charter Schools Program of the U.S. Department of Education (ED) is focused on high-quality charter school development.
- The CSP Nonregulatory Guidance, January 2014, from ED's Charter Schools Program, addresses questions ED has received about certain provisions of the federal statute.
- Understanding Charter Schools is a section of the National Charter School Resource Center's website offering extensive resources, including research reports and guides.

[6] National Charter School Resource Center. (2014). *Student achievement in charter schools: What the research shows.* Washington, DC: Author.

CORE ELEMENT 2:

Focus on Meeting Military-Connected Children's Needs

Developing a charter school to serve military families takes special consideration beyond an emphasis on providing the high-quality academic and extracurricular programs all students deserve. Military families move frequently, typically every two to three years. For schools, such regular turnover in student enrollment poses significant challenges, including student placement and records management. The disruption of educational continuity can be especially taxing for students with special education needs.[7] Military families can face additional strain if personnel are assigned to locations without high-quality public school options. Families may also undergo significant personal sacrifice to ensure continuous quality education for their children. In some cases, members of the military may move to serve at new duty stations and leave behind their families to enable children to remain in the schools they have been attending.[8] Children in military families can also face unique social, emotional, psychological and academic performance challenges, especially in connection with parental deployments.[9, 10] In particular, extensive deployments of military personnel since September 11, 2001, have put new emphasis on providing appropriate support for the children of military personnel.[11]

National efforts have helped raise awareness of these challenges and have provided avenues to improve conditions. The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (the compact), adopted by all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), enables member states to uniformly address various educational transition issues faced by children of active-duty military families. The goal of the compact is to replace the widely varying policies that affect transitioning military students with a comprehensive approach that provides a consistent policy in every school district and in every state that chooses to join. The compact

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7 U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2012). *Military dependent students: Better oversight needed to improve services for children with special needs.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-680

8 U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2013). *Charter schools: Guidance needed for military base schools on startup and operational issues* (GAO 13-67). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/651951.pdf

9 Richardson, A., Chandra, A., Martin, L. T., Setodji, C. M., Hallmark, B. W., Campbell, F., et al. (2011). *Effects of soldiers' deployment on children's academic performance and behavioral health.* Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation. Retrieved from http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG1095.html

10 Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, & The Brookings Institution. (2014). *Military children and families. The Future of Children, 23*(2). Retrieved from http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/23_02_FullJournal.pdf

11 Office of the President of the United States. (2011). *Strengthening our military families: Meeting America's commitment.* Retrieved from http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0111_initiative/strengthening_our_military_january_2011.pdf

addresses key transition issues encountered by military families, including enrollment, placement, attendance, eligibility, and graduation.

Responding effectively and proactively to the challenges facing military families requires focused effort on the part of a school.

EXAMPLE from the **FIELD**

STRUCTURING SCHOOL SUPPORT FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED CHILDREN

Sigsbee Charter School, a K–8 school with an A rating from the state of Florida and nearly 500 students from Naval Air Station Key West, Florida, has developed a system to support its military-connected student body and smooth the way for transitions. The school, with an estimated 70 percent to 80 percent military-connected students, posts key information and enrollment documents on its website so that prospective students and their parents can orient themselves and get a jump-start on registration.

The school uses a range of techniques to allay concerns and answer questions. "We provide personalized tours to families when they are visiting," says Sigsbee Principal Elisa Jannes. "It helps the students tremendously as they feel more comfortable on their first day." New students are linked to student "ambassadors" at the school who help them with the transition during the first weeks of school.

Class placements of new students are based on a variety of factors. If class records are missing, students are assigned to programs based on parents' choices, and needed adjustments are made later. Students take placement assessments for reading and mathematics so they can be grouped for the most appropriate instruction. Individual education plans are solicited before students with disabilities arrive, and parents are consulted so that connections can be made with the most appropriate specialists.

Sigsbee Charter School has implemented the Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted by most states and DoDEA to provide a consistent set of academic standards that students must be prepared to meet as they move from state to state. For departing students, sealed copies of school records are provided to families to ease enrollment at new schools. This practice, which is also part of the compact, is particularly useful—especially for highly mobile families—because school records can be difficult to obtain and transfer. Sigsbee also offers assistance in new school selection.

The school's community and family engagement efforts include drawing on support from service personnel and building connections with the broader community. Sigsbee Charter School also has a full-time, school-based Child and Youth Behavioral Military Family Life Consultant (MFLC), funded by DoD's Military Community and Family Policy Office. The MFLC augments existing school support by providing private and confidential nonmedical, short-term, situational, problem-solving counseling services. This nonmedical counseling is designed to address issues that occur across the military lifestyle and to help students cope with their normal reactions to the stressful and

sometimes adverse situations created by deployments and reintegration. An afterschool military mentoring program, a project aided by the installation's School Liaison Officer (SLO), enables active-duty military members to provide students with academic and emotional support three times weekly on a volunteer basis. SLOs are employed by the military services and assist military parents of school-aged children on educational issues and needs.

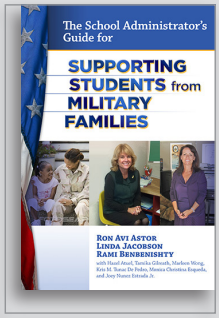
The service careers of students' parents are honored by having students participate in their own service projects. Sigsbee Charter School also publishes weekly newsletters that publicize opportunities to volunteer in the community and encourage military-connected students to participate in extracurricular activities that connect them to the broader community.[12]

TOOLBOX TIP

MILITARY-CONNECTED CHILD RESOURCES

Guidance and programs are available to help charter school developers understand and meet the needs of military family children. Key resources include:

- Military Child Education Coalition provides resources and organizes training to ensure inclusive, quality educational experiences for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition.
- Operation: Military Kids is the U.S. Army's collaborative effort with communities to support children and youth impacted by deployment by connecting them with local resources that can enhance their stability and well-being.
- The Building Capacity project, a consortium of eight military-connected districts, DoDEA, and the University of Southern California, identifies and provides supports for military-connected students. The effort has included the production of four *Resource Guides on Military-Connected Students* for school administrators, teachers, students, and military families .



- Students at the Center synthesizes and adapts for practice current research on key components of student-centered approaches to learning and deeper learning outcomes. The goal is to strengthen the ability of practitioners and policymakers to engage each student in acquiring the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed for success in college, career, and civic life.

[12] Information provided by Elisa Jannes, Principal, Sigsbee Charter School (personal communication, March 16, 2014).

CORE ELEMENT 3:

Establish a Strong Governance Structure

Charter schools on military installations are not overseen by DoD. The charter school governing board, which is granted a contract to operate by a civilian authorizer, carries the legal responsibility for overseeing the school. The governing board is responsible for ensuring that the school is of high quality, that it is financially viable, and that it fulfills all of its obligations.

The duties of the governing board are critical and wide-ranging. They include tasks such as school leader selection and evaluation; monitoring of academic, financial, and general organizational performance; overseeing facilities development; and ensuring compliance with laws covering conflicts of interest, access and education for students with disabilities, civil rights protection, and open records laws.

Recognizing the span and importance of the governing board, charter school developers should recruit board members who are committed to the school's mission and who bring the skills and experience needed to provide direction on matters such as program evaluation, performance management, real estate transactions, fundraising, legal matters, accounting, and communication. Although charter schools have wide latitude when qualifying their board members, prospective directors should be vetted to ensure that they understand their responsibilities and can make the necessary commitment.

Charter school developers must also educate themselves on and comply with any applicable laws that dictate board composition. For example, some states (e.g., Minnesota) require that teachers and parents from the school be included on the board.[13] The size of a governing board may also be dictated by the state, and developers should carefully check the laws and regulations for charter schools in the state in which they plan to operate. In general, charter school boards range from five members to 15 members. It is important that a governing board have sufficient school community representation but not be so large that making decisions becomes a challenge.

[13] Minn. Stat. §124D.10 (2013). See Office of the Revisor of Statutes. (n.d.). 2013 Minnesota statutes: 124D.10 charter schools. Retrieved from https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=124d.10

TOOLBOX TIPS

BUILD THE RIGHT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

- Finding, Recruiting, and Retaining Outstanding Board Members, a webinar and slide deck presented by the National Charter School Resource Center, covers the components of effective governing boards. Presenter Marci Cornell-Feist, CEO and Founder of The High Bar charter school governance consulting firm, recommends that a charter board of 11–15 members is optimal to support an effective committee structure.

WRITE AN INSTALLATION-SCHOOL MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

- Installation leadership changes regularly. A memorandum of understanding between the charter school and the installation provides a tool to clarify priorities, policies, and use of resources, as in this example: Belle Chasse Academy-Naval Air Station/Joint Reserve Base, New Orleans Cooperative Endeavor Agreement.

THE BOOK OF GOVERNING

- Charter Schools: Creating Effective Governing Boards, a guide developed by the Charter Friends National Network, covers the field, including member recruiting, training, governance structures, legal and financial responsibilities, procedures for meetings, fundraising, and accountability.

STEPS TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

- Governance Best Practices are summarized and explained by Charter Board Partners, a charter school board development group based in Washington, D.C.

BRIEFINGS ON GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

- Two newsletters from the National Charter School Resource Center provide detailed information about recruiting charter school board members and the governance challenges that go with overseeing a school.

PROTECT AGAINST CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- Guidance on understanding where to draw the line in governing board relationships and interactions is offered in Conflicts of Interest: Matters to Avoid and Manage for Charter Schools, a National Charter School Resource Center newsletter.

ETHICS REGULATION

- The Department of Defense Joint Ethics Regulation provides a single source of standards of ethical conduct and ethics guidance, including direction in the areas of financial and employment disclosure systems, enforcement, and training.

EXAMPLE from the **FIELD**

FOCUSING CHARTER GOVERNANCE ON COMMUNITY

A charter school governing board that understands and supports the mission of the school is essential. The founders of Belle Chasse Academy, a charter school with an A rating from Louisiana that is located on a military installation near New Orleans, took care to ensure that the composition of the school governing board reflected the school's focus on military-connected children. The founding board of 11 directors was comprised of civic leaders, educators, parents, military spouses, and reserve and retired military personnel, with each board member possessing "a strong understanding of the unique nature of military children and a deep commitment to meeting their distinct needs," according to the school's charter application.[14] The school also values the voice of parents, reserving three governing board seats for them.

The importance of the board's constitution comes into play in a variety of ways, including when reviewing the school's budget, according to School Leader Jane Dye. For example, the school pays $24,000 per year to have a child psychologist available once a week. "It's never been a point of contest with the board," says Dye. "But it might be if the reason for the budget line wasn't understood and money was needed elsewhere." For example, someone who is reviewing the school's spending but who is unfamiliar with the needs of military-connected children might decide the money could be better used elsewhere, not realizing the strong need for psychological support services faced by military children.

The K–8 school, which opened in 2002 on Naval Air Station/Joint Reserve Base, New Orleans, posts its commitment to military-connected students on its website: "We are extremely sensitive to the particular needs of the military child."[15] Dye ensures that students with parents who are deployed have stars that hang in the lobby of the school.

Belle Chasse board members with strong community ties help the school navigate complex development issues. For example, the local school district was concerned that it would lose students to the Academy. At the same time, installation housing construction was expected to

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[14] Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatves. (n.d.). *Charter application, Belle Chasse Academy, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana.* Retrieved from http://www.coweninstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/CH-Applications-2002-2-BELLE-CHASSE-ACADEMY.pdf

[15] Belle Chasse Academy. (n.d.). *Guidance department.* Retrieved from http://www.bellechasseacademy.org/services.cfm?subpage=5173.

add military family students whom the district was not equipped to accommodate, and Belle Chasse was being opened specifically to serve these students. Having members of the governing board with the ability to clarify the situation, answer questions, and resolve conflicts was crucial to clearing the path for a successful start-up.

The school also uses its governance structure to cultivate effective relationships between the school and installation authorities. The school's governing board includes the installation executive officer, who is second in command, as a nonvoting ex officio member. The executive officer's presence provides an avenue for the school to inform installation leadership of major school initiatives and to reach out for assistance when issues arise that require installation action.[16]

Options for Charter School Management Structures

Following through with a charter school development effort can be especially difficult in highly mobile military installation communities. Parents who might be interested in a charter school start-up may not be in the location long enough to build the expertise and backing for the project or to see it to completion.

Two broad options exist for developing and managing charter schools:

1. **Go alone:** Many charter school founding board members develop and launch charters on their own. For example, a community group in Key West, Florida, developed Sigsbee Charter School on its own in the wake of the Monroe County School District's action to consolidate its elementary schools and to close the public elementary school on Naval Air Station Key West.

2. **In partnership with a management company:** Charter school founding board members may also decide to hire management companies, depending on circumstances such as the preferences and capabilities of the founders. For example, at Joint Base Andrews in Prince Georges County, Maryland, Imagine Andrews Public Charter School was an outgrowth of a partnership between military stakeholders and the installation housing developer, and the charter management company Imagine Schools, Inc. was chosen to develop the school.

Charter school developers should know that even if a charter school governing board contracts with a management company, responsibility for the school remains with the authorized school governing board.

[16] Interview with Jane Dye, School Leader, Belle Chasse Academy, March 27, 2014.

TOOLBOX TIP

UNDERSTAND WHAT IS INVOLVED IN CONTRACTING WITH A MANAGEMENT COMPANY

The Principles & Standards of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers address key practices and relationships, including how charter school governing boards should preserve their independence when contracting with management companies. Examples include the following:

- The governing board should not include members who represent the management company, and materials purchased or developed with public funds should be the property of the school.
- Contracts between the governing board and the management company should clearly spell out one another's roles and responsibilities as well as agreed-upon procedures to maintain accountability.

TOOLBOX TIP

LOOK BEFORE SIGNING AND ASK AROUND —SEEK MULTIPLE OPTIONS

Governing board members considering partnerships should consult with charter school support organizations that can provide insight into the performance landscape of charter school operators and management companies. The review should include the company's performance overall and should not be limited to certain data or schools presented by the company.[17]

[17] Charter school operators can be for-profit or nonprofit organizations, depending on the dictates of state law, which are described in the model state law section of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools website. For example, Arizona law provides that a charter school is under the control of a charter holder that can be for-profit or nonprofit. Mississippi law describes charter schools as independently operated nonprofit organizations and specifies that a services provider that provides comprehensive school management must be a nonprofit organization.

CORE ELEMENT 4:

Create an Enrollment Plan That Includes Outreach and Monitoring

The unique circumstances presented by military families have led to revisions in some state laws to allow charter school enrollment preferences for military-connected children. For example, the start-up in 2002 of Belle Chasse Academy charter school on Naval Air Station/Joint Reserve Base New Orleans faced an obstacle in a state rule that required a charter school's enrollment of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch to match the percentage of the general school population in the area. An exception granted under Louisiana law for a charter serving military children allowed Belle Chasse to proceed, even though its enrollment of qualifying students would be lower than enrollment in the surrounding area.[18] Belle Chasse was allowed to institute an enrollment preference for military-connected students with top priority to children of active-duty military because of its explicitly stated mission of educating the military-connected child, although the school maintains open enrollment, with a small percentage of civilian-family children attending.

In recent years, the pace of change has quickened as more laws have been amended. Florida, Illinois, Maryland, and South Carolina have followed Louisiana by passing laws allowing preferences, each with unique elements.

Florida law allows a "charter school-in-the-workplace" preference when a business partner provides the facility and students are enrolled in a random lottery involving all children of employees. Florida law also includes a provision allowing charter schools to give enrollment preference to children of an active-duty member of any branch of the U.S. armed forces (Fla. Stat. § 1002.33, retrieved from http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=1000-1099/1002/Sections/1002.33.html).

Illinois law, adopted in 2013, allows charter schools in a district that includes a federal military installation to set aside up to 33 percent of its enrollment for students whose parents are assigned to the installation. Priority to replace installation-connected students who leave during the course of the year is given to other students whose parents are assigned to the installation, according to the act. The law requires that the balance of seats in the school (i.e., at least 66 percent of enrollment) be subject to the general enrollment and lottery requirements (Ill. Comp. Stat. § 5/27A-4 (h)2, retrieved from http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs4).

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[18] La. Rev. Stat. Ann. § RS 17:3991 (2012). Retrieved from http://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/Law.aspx?d=80976

Maryland law, adopted in 2010, provides for an exception to the state's open enrollment law for charter schools located on federal military installations. The State Board of Education is empowered to grant a waiver, but the public charter school must admit students with parents who are not assigned to the installation to at least 35 percent of its total available space and must admit all students on a lottery basis (Md. Code, Com. Law §9–102.1, retrieved from http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2015RS/Statute_Web/ged/ged.pdf).

South Carolina law, adopted in 2013, allows a charter school located on a federal military installation to give enrollment priority to dependents of military personnel at the installation. Priority may be granted to a maximum of 50 percent of the charter's total school enrollment (S.C. Code Ann. § 59-40-50 (8), retrieved from http://www.scstatehouse.gov/code/t59c040.php).

TOOLBOX TIP

STATE LAW RESEARCH

The Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute provides links to state education laws.

Allowing a preference does not guarantee that a charter school established to serve military families will meet its enrollment targets. Military-connected families might choose to send their children elsewhere if they do not know about the specialized services offered by the charter school or if the performance of the charter school falls short of expectations. Charter school leaders should conduct the appropriate outreach to inform the community about the school. Examples of outreach include communicating with the installation community and talking with local leaders and parent organizations about the school, as well as promotion in local media.

It is important for charter school leader to keep their governing board informed of enrollment changes, particularly in charters serving military families that historically have high rates of mobility. Many schools prepare monthly enrollment reports that include overall enrollment and any changes, as well as breakdowns by grade and by minority and gender subgroups. If there are waiting lists for the schools, changes in these are also reported.

Meeting Enrollment Objectives Through Community Engagement

Determining demand and understanding the landscape for starting a charter school is a critical first step. A school might be able to fill its enrollment with installation housing residents at one site, while another site might need to draw from across the school district or from within other jurisdictional boundaries. Engaging the community early and often can provide a strong foundation for the new charter school. For example, at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, leaders established the following process to determine support for a charter school, keep stakeholders informed, and achieve the objective of starting a school:

- A survey of parents showed overwhelming support for the creation of a new school on the installation.
- A working group was formed that included installation experts in law, engineering, contracting, and security.
- Town hall meetings were held, and there was transparent communication with parents and Air Force leadership.
- A request for charter school proposals was produced, and the Arizona Charter School Association was tapped to raise awareness of the project.
- Final selection of a charter operator was coordinated with the Air Combat Command, the Air Force Real Property Agency, the Secretary of the Air Force, and Congress.[19]

Use of the charter option enabled the creation of a new school, Sonoran Science Academy Davis-Monthan, on the installation and provided military families with an alternative to the local school district's middle school and with a new high school option. The charter school opened in August 2009, starting with middle school grades, and over time it expanded through Grade 12.

[19] National Charter School Resource Center. (n.d.). *Charter school start-up summary, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Tucson, Arizona.* Retrieved from http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/resource/charter-school-start-summary-davis-monthan-air-force-base-tucson-arizona

CORE ELEMENT 5:

Understand the Authorizing Landscape

Developing a high-quality charter school is a complex task. Navigating regulations and gaining support to start a school can be daunting. There is no simple formula for success and, therefore, proposers of charter schools for military installations should not expect to take a cookie-cutter approach to the development process.

The relationship between a charter school and its authorizer is critical to the success of the new enterprise, and developers are advised to examine all available facility options. In one location, it might be most appropriate to pursue approval by a state authorizer. In another, the local school district might be the best or only authorization option. In a few states, universities are eligible to serve as authorizers.

Working With a School District

In Key West, Florida, an agreement between the local school district and the charter school developers paved the way for starting the charter school. The charter option came into play at Naval Air Station Key West in Florida, when the local school district decided to consolidate its elementary schools and either close the installation school (Sigsbee) or convert it to a charter school. A founding group was formed in 2008 to develop the charter school, and the plan gained approval from the school district. Uncertainty about the timing of the district's closure of the Sigsbee school and its reopening as a district-authorized charter school was settled with a memorandum of understanding adopted by the district, the installation, and the founding charter group. The agreement allowed the school to remain open for an additional year (operated by the district) to enable its smooth transition to charter status in 2010. In 2009, the Florida Department of Education awarded Sigsbee a start-up grant totaling $325,000 over three years.[20]

Working With the State

A school district may not always accept initiation of a charter school, and sometimes extraordinary action is required. For example, a charter school at Naval Station Great Lakes, in Illinois, was conceived to provide a high-quality, K–8 school option to children of military personnel assigned to the installation. In addition, the initiative presented

[20] Sigsbee Charter School. (n.d.). *Our history.* Retrieved from http://www.sigsbee.org/resources/Our%20History.doc

an opportunity to strengthen district enrollment of military-connected children to protect against loss of federal Impact Aid, a federal program that provides funding to compensate districts for loss of tax revenue or added responsibility due to a federal presence, such as a military installation.[21] The Illinois State Superintendent of Schools had the authority under state law to take action to improve a district's performance, including overruling the local school board. Pursuit of a charter school came after meetings that included school district administrators, installation representatives, and staff of the Illinois State Board of Education. A charter school request for proposals from the district drew three responses. A review panel recommended that the proposal from a Chicago-based charter school organization, LEARN Charter School Inc., be approved by the district school board to start the school. The district board voted to deny the application. The board's decision, however, was overruled in an order issued by the state superintendent.[22] The LEARN 6 charter school opened in 2012, and an independent authority, appointed by the state to oversee the district, serves as the charter's authorizer. Overall performance of the charter students on state tests is twice as high as the district's performance and slightly exceeds that of the state average, according to the school's 2013 state report card.

TOOLBOX TIP

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM AN AUTHORIZER

Developers of charter schools on military installations can see what to expect from authorizers under model circumstances by reviewing the *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing,* published by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). The document outlines what authorizers should do to carry out high-quality reviews of charter school applications and effective monitoring for school performance. NACSA's *Principles and Standards* are focused on maintaining high standards for schools, upholding school autonomy, and protecting student and public interests.

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[21] United States Government Accountability Office. (2013). *Charter schools: Guidance needed for military base schools on startup and operational issues* (GAO 13-67). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/651951.pdf

[22] National Charter School Resource Center. (2012). *Illinois State Board of Education superintendent's order approving charter school proposed for navy base site.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/resource/illinois-state-board-education-superintendents-order-approving-charter-school-proposed-navy

TOOLBOX TIP

WATCH OUT FOR MISCUES THAT CAN DERAIL CHARTER APPLICATIONS

Understanding what is required to start a charter school and the process that must be followed is critical. On at least two occasions, charter schools proposed for military installations have failed to gain authorizer approval because school leaders failed to meet these key needs.

- A 2012 proposal for a charter high school to serve Fort Bragg in North Carolina failed to gain approval from the North Carolina Public Charter School Advisory Council. The project hit a snag when Fort Bragg officials withdrew from the organizing board after concerns were raised about a conflict of interest between official military duties and the charter school project.[23]
- In 2013, a proposal for a charter elementary school at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, was turned away by the authorizer, the Hillsborough County School Board. Reasons for the denial cited by district officials included concerns about the proposed management company's "F" performance grade from the state for one of its three district charter schools; the preferential enrollment described in the application, which did not align with state statutes; the application's lack of a specific focus on addressing the needs of military-connected children and families; and insufficient clarity about governance structure.[24]

[23] DeVane, S. (2012, June 22). North Carolina advisory committee says no to plans for charter schools at Fort Bragg and Fayetteville. *The Fayetteville Observer.* Retrieved from http://www.fayobserver.com/military/north-carolina-advisory-committee-says-no-to-plans-for-charter/article_c1253659-ceb6-5bfe-a5fa-e95d16af19f9.html

[24] Hillsborough County Public Schools, December 12, 2013, letter of denial of application.

CORE ELEMENT 6:

Write a Successful Charter School Application

A charter school application tells the authorizer what the charter school developers want to achieve and how they will reach the goal. The authorizer decides whether to grant a charter. Studies by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University, including The Road to Charter School Quality, indicate that the performance trajectory of charter schools tends to be set from the start. This finding places increased emphasis on the quality of applications and the role of authorizers as gatekeepers to the application process.

Charter school applications that are authentic and thorough and that cohesively and cogently describe the proposed school require substantial effort, and submittals in some states can run to more than 200 pages. Key elements of an effective application for a charter school serving military families include:

- A description of the school and its mission, including how the needs of military families will be met
- A complete description of the proposed school's governance structure and the credentials of the developers
- Evidence of community demand for the school and expected school enrollment demographics
- Enrollment and lottery policies and procedures, including detailed rationales for any military-connected student preferences
- Explanation of the proposed school's academic and cocurricular education programs
- Job descriptions for administrators and teachers, including plans for recruitment
- Staff professional development plans
- Program plans for meeting the needs of students with disabilities and other special populations
- Student behavior-management plans
- School budgets and plans for annual independent financial audits
- Short- and long-term plans for school facilities
- Transportation and food service plans
- Student performance standards and accompanying accountability evaluation plans
- Programs for community and parent engagement

State and city charter school support organizations, national charter school organizations, and state and municipal departments of education often can provide a wide range of resources to help orient charter school developers. They offer state-specific toolkits for starting charter schools; sample applications, guides, and manuals about tasks such as preparing to serve students with disabilities; orientation for governing board development; and other resources.

Examples of resources include:

- Colorado Department of Education: Charter School Development Best Practice Resources
- California Department of Education: Charter School Best Practices Project
- State Connections, a website section of the National Charter School Resource Center that provides contact information for state department of education charter school offices and charter support organizations across the country.

TOOLBOX TIPS

BE THOROUGH

- Charter school developers who are submitting applications should be sure to read the requirements completely, understand what is being asked, and fully respond. A common reason for a charter application's rejection is an incomplete submittal. Some charter school support organizations offer classes in preparing applications. Some states offer workshops on charter school application requirements, and founders are well advised to attend such meetings.

PUT A "FACE" ON THE APPLICATION

- The Sigsbee charter application contained letters of support from parents, who described in their own words the challenges children face with frequent moves and the importance of being made to feel welcome and of making connections with those with similar experience. In-person testimony and input at public meetings or hearings can also help.

TOOLBOX TIPS

ONLINE EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

- Online programs can be valuable resources for students who are moving frequently and trying to stay current with their learning. Through the website *Tutor.com*, eligible U.S. military families and DoD civilians have unlimited access at no cost to a variety of support from a certified, professional online tutor, including help with homework, studying, and test preparation. The program is funded by DoD. Blended learning approaches that tap online resources to offer students individualized education opportunities are also used by some charter schools to meet the unique needs of students. The Clayton Christensen Institute provides a range of resources to support this instructional approach.

SERVING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

- Operating a charter school comes with a responsibility to meet the needs of students with disabilities and other special populations. *Special Education Start-Up and Implementation Tools for Charter School Leaders and Special Education Managers,* a guide developed by the National Charter School Resource Center, provides orientation and resources such as sample job descriptions, performance evaluation forms, and checklists. The National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools offers additional resources and expertise. The National Charter School Resource Center devotes a section of its website to tools, guides, and research to assist with understanding and meeting the needs of English language learners.

AIR FORCE CHARTER START-UP GUIDELINES

- U.S. Air Force installations have the most charter schools, and the Air Force has start-up process guidelines, which are described in a 2010 Air Force memorandum (see Appendix II of *Charter Schools: Guidance Needed for Military Base Schools Start-Up and Operation,* U.S. Government Accountability Office report, 2013, page 41). The guidance limits the level of involvement of military personnel, describes the various elements of installation operations that require consultation, and sets parameters for use of facilities for schools.

PLANNING FOR PERSONNEL

- Troops to Teachers, managed by the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES), helps eligible military personnel begin new careers as public school teachers where their skills, knowledge, and experience are most needed.

TOOLBOX TIPS

LEVERAGING SLOs TO SERVE AS KEY INSTALLATION-SCHOOL CONTACTS

- School Liaison Officers (SLO) are employed by the military services and assist military parents of school-age children on educational issues and needs. Each military service dictates the primary responsibilities of its SLOs; however, all assist the local military commander in accomplishing his or her service-directed school support responsibilities and serve as primary liaisons among commanders, military communities, and local schools.

  - Army
  - Air Force
  - Coast Guard
  - Navy
  - Marines

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE CHARTER SCHOOL?

- Student performance on standardized tests is the most prominent gauge of a charter school's success. But the definition of success may incorporate many elements, including measures such as graduation rates, college or job placement, and school management. For a better sense of the issues involved, see Getting Beneath the Veil of Effective Schools: Evidence From New York City, from the National Bureau of Economic Research; What Makes a School Effective?, from Education.com; and Innovations in Education: Successful Charter Schools, featured on the U.S. Department of Education's website.

CORE ELEMENT 7:

Locate the Right Facilities

Acquiring a facility is one of the most difficult challenges faced by charter schools. In some cases, charter schools have the resources necessary to construct their own facilities. More often, however, charter schools must find existing buildings (usually leased) and adapt them to meet school needs and to comply with codes for safety, health, and access, while also staying within budget.

Military installations have provided a range of options for charter school facilities: leases and renovations, takeovers of former district school buildings, colocation with district schools, and new construction. Locating a charter school on a military installation often provides easy access for military families being served and to surplus facilities or land.

With flexibility and perseverance, charter schools have made homes on installations. Highlighted below are some examples of how charter schools serving military families have constructed, leased, or identified facilities for their use:

- In 2002, Belle Chasse Academy , located on Naval Air State/Joint Reserve Base New Orleans in Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana, opened in a newly constructed, 92,000-square-foot facility, which was supported by a $13 million loan guarantee through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Community Facilities Program. The program also offers low-interest direct loans, which some charter schools have received. In 2012, the school completed a $6 million, 26,600-square-foot expansion that includes an auditorium. The project was financed through a $21 million, 30-year, tax-exempt bond issue that included refinancing of the original school facility. The bonds were sold through the Louisiana Public Facilities Authority.[25, 26]
- Imagine Andrews Public Charter School, a planned K–8 school, opened in temporary space on Joint Base Andrews in Prince George's County, Maryland, in 2011. AMC East Communities, a partnership of the Department of the Air Force and Clark Realty Capital, built a 35,000-square-foot facility for the school in 2012. AMC East Communities aided the transaction with a loan guaranty backed by funds generated from its 1,600-unit privatized military housing portfolio and boosted by a corporate

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[25] U.S. Department of Defense. (2012). Report on charter schools on military installations. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.militaryk12partners.dodea.edu/docs/Report-on-Charter-Schools-on-Military-Installations.pdf

[26] National Charter School Resource Center. (2011). New Orleans military base charter school starts expansion (Education Week). Retrieved from http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/news/new-orleans-military-base-charter-school-starts-expansion

guaranty from Clark Realty Capital. The Charter Schools Development Corporation designed, developed, financed, and constructed the new school with a $6 million bank loan.[27]

- The LEARN 6 North Chicago charter school opened in 2012 at Naval Station Great Lakes, Illinois, in a surplus Navy training building that is being leased from the Navy. Renovations were required to accommodate the K–8 school. Work conducted with the Illinois Department of Transportation was required to revamp routes around the school's entrance.[28]
- Jacksonville Lighthouse Flight Line Upper Academy, a Grades 5–8 charter school on Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas, opened in 2011 in a renovated former conference center. The $1 million renovation project for the leased facility was supported with donations of $600,000 from the Hunt-Pinnacle Group that handles installation housing, $250,000 from the Walton Foundation, and $200,000 from the Wilson Family Foundation.[29]
- Sigsbee Charter School, a K–8 charter located on Naval Air Station Key West in Florida, is housed in a former Monroe County School District elementary school.

The charter school took responsibility for needed renovations, while the school district provided assistance to help defray costs, and additional assistance was supplied by volunteers including military personnel and parents of students who would attend the school.[30]

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27 National Charter School Resource Center. (2012). *Charter school facility construction starts at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland.* Retrieved from http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/news/charter-school-facility-construction-starts-joint-base-andrews-maryland

28 U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2013). *Charter schools: Guidance needed for military base schools on startup and operational issues* (GAO 13-67). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/651951.pdf

29 Agoha, R. (2011, August 16). New school paves runway for educational excellence. *Little Rock Air Force Base News.* Retrieved from http://www.littlerock.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123268201

30 U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2013). *Charter schools: Guidance needed for military base schools on startup and operational issues* (GAO 13-67). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/651951.pdf

- The Sonoran Science Academy at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, leased from the Air Force for $1 a former district school building for its Grades 6–12 charter school, with the school responsible for upkeep and renovations.[31]
- Manzanita Public Charter School, a K–6 school, opened in 2008 on Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. The school arranged to lease a surplus Lompoc Unified School District facility, paying three percent of the revenue the school receives from the state.[32]
- Wheatland Charter Academy, a K–5 school that opened in 2001 on Beale Air Force Base in northern California, is colocated with a Wheatland School District elementary school.[33]

Meeting Installation Security Requirements

Military installations are not necessarily open to the public. Security concerns can present challenges for providing civilians with access to public charter school facilities. Charter schools have addressed this issue in a variety of ways. For example, they have implemented systems whereby passes are issued to students' guardians and relatives who need access to the installation after they have cleared the background-check process.

A path to appeal is provided for those who are denied access. Escorts have been provided in some cases to allow installation access for school-related activities. Schools may also decide to move school events to venues located off installations to facilitate broader access to the events. In certain cases, a memorandum of understanding with installation officials is used to guide security procedures for access. In other cases, alternatives have been found. For example, at Naval Station Great Lakes, the location of the installation building designated for use by the charter school enabled planners to pull back the installation security fence so the school would be accessible to the public.[34]

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[31] U.S. Department of Defense. (2012). *Report on charter schools on military installations.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.militaryk12partners.dodea.edu/docs/Report-on-Charter-Schools-on-Military-Installations.pdf

[32] Manzanita Charter School Finds Home on Air Force Base, National Charter School Resource Center article, retrieved July 31, 2014 from http://www.charterschoolcenter.org/news/manzanita-charter-school-finds-home-air-force-base.

[33] U.S. Department of Defense. (2012). *Report on charter schools on military installations.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.militaryk12partners.dodea.edu/docs/Report-on-Charter-Schools-on-Military-Installations.pdf

[34] U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2013). *Charter schools: Guidance needed for military base schools on startup and operational issues* (GAO 13-67). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/651951.pdf

TOOLBOX TIPS

COLOCATION EXPLAINED

- *Can Charter Schools Successfully Share District School Facilities?*, a National Charter School Resource Center newsletter, provides a detailed discussion of colocation of charter and district schools.

ALL ABOUT FACILITIES

- The Facilities section of the National Charter School Resource Center website provides comprehensive information on how to plan, acquire, and pay for a school building, and includes tools to estimate space needs, financing options, and sources of support.

FEDERAL CHARTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM FACILITIES SUPPORT

- The U.S. Department of Education's Charter Schools Program supports charter schools in obtaining facilities through the Credit Enhancement for Charter Schools Facilities Program and the State Charter School Facilities Incentive Grants program. Contact information for organizations that have received grants is available under the listing of awards.

CORE ELEMENT 8:

Develop a Sound Financial Plan

Achieving top student performance is the goal of charter schools, but sound financial planning and operations are essential for success and sustainability. Budgeting for a start-up, balancing revenue from per-pupil funding based on enrollment with costs for programming and hiring, addressing borrowing needs, and contracting for services all generate complex work streams that may be difficult to manage.

Effective financial policies and procedures should be in place to support the school's mission, including positive answers to the following questions:

- Is the school prepared to address funding shortfalls if enrollment does not meet projections?
- Are school leaders ensuring that they do not count on grant applications or uncertain private fundraising to meet day-to-day expenses?
- Are school financial plans and budgets recorded in formats that are clear to the school governing board and state regulators?
- Is the school complying with any state requirements for an annual independent audit?

Some charter schools handle the budgeting and financial management workload with their own staff, while others hire charter school business management companies that provide "back-office" support. Charter school founders and operators should consult with knowledgeable charter school leaders in their state or national charter school organizations to learn about business management companies with reliable track records.

Meanwhile, charter school leaders should be aware of increasing financial management scrutiny by regulators, lenders, and authorizers. In 2013, NACSA published *Core Performance Framework and Guidance: Academic, Financial, and Organizational Frameworks for Charter School Accountability* to help charter schools focus on key areas of operation. The NACSA framework provides context for oversight of school finances, including operating margins, enrollment patterns that are critical to per-pupil funding, and points at which warning flags might be triggered. The framework also covers the importance of determining how individual indicators fit into the school's overall standing. NACSA emphasizes that academic performance be held as the primary success criterion and that excellent financial performance alone does not mean a charter school should be allowed to keep operating.

Special Federal Funding Opportunities

Charter schools serving military families can boost their funding by tapping special federal funding sources focused on federally connected students. Charter school developers should be aware that the percentage of military-connected enrollment also may affect access to certain sources of funding.

Key support programs include:

- Federal Impact Aid, primarily provided through the U.S. Department of Education, amounted to about $1.2 billion in 2013. Program officials base payments on the enrollment numbers of federally connected students, such as dependents of military personnel. The program helps compensate communities for the loss of revenue or increases in enrollments as a result of a federal presence, such as a tax-exempt military installation. The program includes support for facilities construction and maintenance. Only charter schools that are their own school district or local educational agency (LEA), as designated under law, can directly receive Impact Aid. A charter school that is part of a school district can receive a share of Impact Aid provided to the district.
- DoD's supplemental Impact Aid program focuses on military-connected school districts that have an enrollment rate for military-connected students of at least 19.5 percent. An additional program reimburses LEAs for money previously spent on military dependent children with severe disabilities. Some restrictions apply. For example, the program is available to LEAs that have been approved for federal Impact Aid under Section 8003. In addition, eligibility is extended to LEAs that have at least two military dependent children with severe disabilities and that meet certain special education cost criteria, only children of active-duty military personnel (including children of active-duty National Guard and Reserve parents), and children whose parents are officials of, and accredited by, foreign governments and are foreign military officers.
- The U.S. Department of Education Charter Schools Program supports discretionary grants for charter school planning and start-up directly through its Non-State Educational Agency (SEA) program and indirectly with SEA state grants that fund subgrants. The Non-SEA grant competition program provides extra points for applications for projects designed to meet the needs of military families. Applicants should be aware that the Charter Schools Program's Nonregulatory Guidance, which covers the program, does not specifically allow a preferential enrollment system for military families, and an application including such a system would negatively impact grant eligibility.
- DoDEA offers an Educational Partnership Grant Program that has awarded nearly $400 million in grants since 2008 for projects ranging from promoting student achievement to encouraging parental involvement.

- DoD's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program enables schools to use U.S. Department of Agriculture foods entitlement funds to buy fresh produce. School purchases in 2013 were estimated to total more than $100 million.

TOOLBOX TIP

IMPACT AID ORIENTATION

U.S. Department of Education advisers can help first-time charter school applicants to complete the application process. Orientation to the application requirements is provided in this Impact Aid program presentation. Charter schools that serve significant populations of military-connected students can apply for the support regardless of where the schools are located.

CORE ELEMENT 9:

Select a Strong Founding Head

One of the most important decisions school organizers will make concerns the selection of the founding head of school. A charter school leader must have a special combination of skills, energy, and determination. The evolving landscape of school leadership has been described in a variety of reports since the U.S. Department of Education's 2004 publication titled Innovative Pathways to School Leadership, which covered efforts to respond to new demands. Subsequent reports zeroed in on charter school leadership, including the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' Charter School Executives: Toward a New Generation of Leadership, and the Center on Reinventing Public Education's Closing the Skill Gap: New Options for Charter School Leadership Development.

A charter school leader is responsible for creating a culture of high expectations; for hiring, developing, and managing excellent staff members; and for consistently communicating the mission of the school and leading the organization to its fulfillment. The job amounts to managing a multimillion-dollar start-up operation that has a vast array of moving parts. For a charter school serving military families, the school leader also must have the ability to work in a military setting, which comes with its own unique elements.

The leader must be able to embody the mission of the school; energize the school community to meet high expectations; attract and retain top faculty and staff; and oversee the range of educational, business, and organizational efforts required to maximize performance—all amid an ever-changing population of students and families. In addition, the challenge of balancing the needs of multiple constituents—installation military leaders, board members, staff, parents, students, state authorizers, community leaders, and others—requires outstanding interpersonal skills and sound judgment.

Various charter school leadership training programs have emerged to meet the demand for leadership. Programs include those operated by larger charter management organizations such as the Knowledge is Power Program, charter support organizations, and programs such as the Building Excellent Schools fellowship.

Developers of charter schools for military children should reach out through their networks and through school leadership training programs to raise awareness of their proposed schools. This will increase their chances of connecting with high-potential candidates. Any outreach should also include the ranks of the military, in which retired personnel have successfully translated their service skills to play key leadership roles in charter schools. Charter support organization job boards can be used to advertise open positions, including the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools' Charter School Job Board.

EXAMPLE from the **FIELD**

Sigsbee Charter School's developers conducted a national search for a principal to open the school in 2010 and guide its advance; but they found who they were looking for right in their own community. A systematic process was designed to ensure that all the key issues, such as knowledge of charter schools, instruction, and commitment, were fulfilled and that the best candidate was hired to address the unique circumstances of the school and the community.

The school's founding board formed a six-member search committee led by the president of the governing board, Leslie Crabbs. The committee was supported by school stakeholders, including one person from each of the following groups: a community member, a parent, a military representative, the Navy School Liaison Officer serving the installation, and a teacher.

The leaders tapped into search models from the Florida Consortium of Public Charter Schools, as well as resources from traditional principal searches. The committee then customized the resources to construct its own matrix for assessing candidates and prepared an interview script based on the unique requirements of the charter school. The job was advertised locally and nationally using the Teachers to Teachers website. More than 150 applications were received. The SLO provided an initial list of 40 candidates based on the résumés received. Committee members divided the résumés among themselves and called candidates to determine their seriousness about the job and to eliminate candidates who might be more focused on the allure of Key West than on the mission of the school.

"You have to find someone who is in it for the right reasons," Crabbs said. Initial screening yielded 24 prospects, who were interviewed via individual conference calls with the committee, and responses were scored according to a matrix. The matrix covered 11 broad categories, including strategic planning experience; leadership in the areas of administration, instruction, human resources, and parent and community engagement; charter school start-up experience; understanding of the military community; and knowledge of marine science. Each category was assigned a weight depending on its importance to the success of the school. Each committee member scored the candidates, and the results were compared. Eight candidates rose to the top. References were checked and letters were sent to the candidates asking for written responses to three questions specifically related to Sigsbee Charter School, including how the candidate would prepare to take the reins and how he or she planned to nurture and accommodate the special needs of the school's military children and families.

The eight candidates were invited for more in-depth interviews, some of which were carried out in person and some via conference call due to distance. The committee used a list of 20 questions, primarily open-ended, asking candidates to specifically discuss their experience with school and education program development, including what they had done to raise student achievement, their approaches to seeking grants, their understanding of Key West, and what they thought of the plan for the Sigsbee charter school. The committee recommended its top four candidates to the full board, providing supporting documentation from the selection process, which ran from late February to early April 2010.

Crabbs, who stayed in Key West for a year to finish the Sigsbee start-up after her Coast Guard husband was transferred to California, said that throughout the principal selection process there was an ever-present question that the committee was seeking to answer about each candidate, namely: "How committed are you, and what are you willing to do for the mission of the school?"

The board voted to hire Elisa Jannes, who had moved to Key West in 2006 with her Coast Guard officer husband's transfer to the location. A certified school administrator and elementary school teacher with advanced degrees in education, Jannes initially was part of Sigsbee's founding board and was instrumental in developing the school's vision and mission. She also was then a teacher at a Key West charter school and came with experience in gifted instruction.

Jannes withdrew from the board in December 2009 when she decided to apply to be Sigsbee principal. Crabbs said that because of her relationship with Jannes and Jannes' connection to the school, a thorough search was essential to ensure that the fate of the school she had been working to build was placed in the right hands. Crabbs said she wanted to ensure that the board found the best candidate and did not simply turn to someone who was known. "I wanted to make sure that we had exhausted all possibilities and that the right person was selected so that the school would succeed."[35]

TOOLBOX TIP

SCHOOL LEADER SELECTION GUIDANCE

- It can be a demanding task to determine whether a school leader candidate has the mindset and competencies to overcome obstacles and meet difficult challenges. The *School Turnaround Leaders: Selection Toolkit* developed by the education and policy consultancy Public Impact provides critical guidance for evaluating candidates. Although the toolkit is designated for the turnaround environment, the interviewing techniques, methods for rating and comparing candidates, sample checklists and procedures, and focus on capacity to overcome adversity can easily be translated and adapted to help choose the best candidate to lead a charter school.

CONSIDER USING A SCHOOL LEADER SEARCH FIRM

- Search firms that specialize in education can help schools identify candidates for leadership positions.

[35] Interview with Leslie Crabbs, former president of Sigsbee Charter School founding governing board, May 12, 2014.

Conclusion

Charter schools have evolved to serve a wide variety of communities, populations, and needs since the first law allowing the public charter school model was passed in Minnesota in 1991. Now, charter schools established on military installations are emerging to offer high-quality public school options to military families, fulfilling a demand that has existed for many years.

While establishing a new school is never an easy task, establishing a charter school on military installations, in particular, brings with it a unique set of challenges. Addressing these challenges has necessitated creativity and commitment on the part of charter school developers and the support of a range of stakeholders. Military and civilian authorities have shown flexibility and fortitude in adjusting to accommodate this new school model.

The charter schools profiled in this toolkit have successfully navigated the terrain, clarifying the competencies and tools that are needed to design and implement charter schools on military installations and the policies and supports that are essential to success. Their experiences serve to illuminate the path for charter school developers and other stakeholders who are considering the establishment of charter schools on military installations. This toolkit provides critical keys to understanding the process, methods, and attitudes required to be effective.

Charter schools for military families represent a tiny niche in the charter school landscape, but they serve a population that plays a crucial role in the life of our country and that makes special sacrifices on its behalf. With the right support and leadership, charter schools on military installations can help ensure that these sacrifices do not preclude access to quality education.

Appendix A.
Additional Resources

National Charter School Resource Center provides extensive information to support start-up and operation of charter schools, including establishing governance and recruiting board members, facilities planning and financing, and addressing special student populations.

ED's Charter Schools Program provides information and resources to assist development of high-quality charter schools.

Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission—developed by the Council of State Governments' National Center for Interstate Compacts; DoD; various national associations; federal and state officials; and departments of education, school administrators, and military families—seeks to ease school transitions for military children, so they have the same opportunities for educational success as other children.

Military Families and Veterans is a U.S. Department of Education website that provides resources, references, and information about programs to support military families and veterans.

Assistance to Local Education Agencies for Defense Dependents' Education (Update), a 2014 DoD Education Activity report, describes specific efforts to improve educational opportunities for school-age dependents of people serving in the military and identifies specific needs, and notes a priority to give preference in certain U.S. Department of Education grant competitions to applicants focused on military families. Projections about growth and loss of military connected students by state and LEA also are provided.

A U.S. House Appropriations Committee report, accompanying a U.S. House Appropriations Committee bill on military construction, veteran's affairs, and related agencies that was passed in the House in June 2011, urges "the Services to develop and publicize procedures for establishing charter schools at installations that are not supported adequately by the local public school system."

Charter Schools: Solutions for DoD Families is a presentation summarizing the start-up and operation of Belle Chasse Academy charter school on Naval Air Station/Joint Reserve Base New Orleans in Louisiana.

Davis-Monthan Air Force Base Charter School Start-Up Summary is a presentation covering the start-up of the Sonoran Science Academy charter school on Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona.

The Road to Charter School Quality is a presentation from the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), provides analyses of charter school performance and comparisons to traditional district schools, including breakouts by state and student demographics, as well as patterns in school performance and expansion, and trends for charter management organizations.

Effects of Soldiers' Deployment on Children's Academic Performance and Behavioral Health is a Rand report covering experience in North Carolina and Washington and includes analysis of test scores for elementary, middle and high school students and circumstances at schools for military-connected students.

Military Children and Families, a report from The Future of Children—a collaboration of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and The Brookings Institution—covers a wide range of issues, including demographics, economic conditions, support programs, resilience and the impact of wartime service and building care communities.

Appendix B.
Key Topic Resources

Core Element 1: Know What a Charter School Is

It is important to understand the structures that define charter schools and how federal and state laws affect the different elements.

- ☐ Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001 (No Child Left Behind) Part B—Public Charter Schools—provides federal definitions
- ☐ Charter Schools Program—ED website devoted to charter school development
- ☐ Understanding Charter Schools—National Charter School Resource Center research

Core Element 2: Focus on Meeting Military-Connected Children's Needs

Military-connected families are not just like any other and their unique needs must be understood to be successfully addressed.

- ☐ Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children—a system to ease school transitions for military-connected children
- ☐ Military Child Education Coalition—provides resources and training
- ☐ Operation: Military Kids—supports children and youth impacted by deployment
- ☐ Building Capacity—resource guides on military-connected students.
- ☐ Students at the Center—synthesizes key components of deeper learning
- ☐ Effects of Soldiers' Deployment on Children's Academic Performance and Behavioral Health—a RAND Corporation report
- ☐ Military Children and Families—the *Future of Children report*

Core Element 3: Establish a Strong Governance Structure

The autonomy granted to charter schools means school governing boards must take the essential role in school-level accountability for performance.

- ☐ Finding, Recruiting, and Retaining Outstanding Board Members—a webinar and slide deck
- ☐ Recruiting Charter School Board Members and Governance Challenges—two newsletters
- ☐ Charter Schools: Creating Effective Governing Boards—a comprehensive guide
- ☐ Governance Best Practices—a summary

- ☐ Belle Chasse Academy-Naval Air Station/Joint Reserve Base, New Orleans Cooperative Endeavor Agreement—a tool to clarify priorities, policies, and use of resources
- ☐ Conflicts of Interest: Matters to Avoid and Manage for Charter Schools—a newsletter primer

Core Element 4: Create an Enrollment Plan That Includes Outreach and Monitoring

Developing an enrollment plan that allows a charter a school to specifically serve military families requires the ability to navigate complex legal issues.

- ☐ Louisiana law—exception to free or reduced-price lunch rule for a charter serving military children
- ☐ Florida Law—charter school-in-the-workplace and active-duty preference
- ☐ Illinois Law—priority for replacing military-connected students who leave during the year
- ☐ Maryland Law—allows State Board of Education to grant open enrollment waiver
- ☐ South Carolina Law—sets standard for charter enrollment on military installations
- ☐ National Alliance for Public Charter Schools Model Law website—provides a point-by-point comparison of how each state law measures up
- ☐ Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute—provides links to state education laws

Core Element 5: Understand the Authorizing Landscape

Authorizers are the gatekeepers that grant approval for a charter school to open, monitor performance and make renewal and closure decisions.

- ☐ Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing—NACSA's key considerations
- ☐ The State of Charter School Authorizing 2013—NACSA analyses and survey results
- ☐ Authorizer-School Catalog—a national database linking charter schools with their authorizer

Core Element 6: Write a Successful Charter School Application

To make the case to open a charter school, a thorough, authentic and compelling application is vital.

- ☐ Colorado Department of Education: Charter School Development Best Practice Resources—general guidance
- ☐ California Department of Education: Charter School Best Practices Project—general guidance

- ☐ State Connections—offers state education agency and charter support organization contacts
- ☐ Tutor.com—offers Department of Defense families no-cost tutoring
- ☐ Clayton Christensen Institute—blended learning resources
- ☐ Special Education Start-Up and Implementation Tools for Charter School Leaders and Special Education Managers—a comprehensive guide
- ☐ English language learners—tools, guides and research
- ☐ Air Force Charter Start-Up Guidelines—2013 Government Accountability Office Report; see especially page 41
- ☐ Troops to Teachers—helps military personnel become public school teachers
- ☐ Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard—directories of SLOs who assist military parents of school-aged children
- ☐ Getting Beneath the Veil of Effective Schools: Evidence From New York City, What Makes A School Effective?, and Innovations in Education: Successful Charter Schools—offer insights into what makes an effective charter school

Core Element 7: Locate the Right Facilities

Acquiring an appropriate facility poses a key challenge for charter school developers.

- ☐ Community Facilities Program—U.S. Department of Agriculture rural development
- ☐ Can Charter Schools Successfully Share District School Facilities?—a newsletter
- ☐ Facilities—A-to-Z from the National Charter School Resource Center on how to plan, acquire, and pay for facilities
- ☐ Credit Enhancement for Charter Schools Facilities Program and State Charter School Facilities Incentive Grants—federal Charter Schools Program support

Core Element 8: Develop a Sound Financial Plan

Operating a charter school is high stakes work that calls for rigorous stewardship of public resources that are made available.

- ☐ Core Performance Framework and Guidance: Academic, Financial, and Organizational Frameworks for Charter School Accountability—NACSA guidance
- ☐ Impact Aid, supplemental Impact Aid program—special federal funding opportunities
- ☐ Impact Aid Program Presentation—an orientation
- ☐ Non-State Educational Agency (SEA) and SEA—grants planning and start-up of charter schools
- ☐ Educational Partnership Grant Program—aid for support projects
- ☐ Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program—a DoD program

Core Element 9: Select a Strong Founding Head

The myriad and demanding responsibilities of leading a successful charter for military families call for a skillful and committed educator.

- ☐ Innovative Pathways to School Leadership—report on new approaches
- ☐ Charter School Executives: Toward a New Generation of Leadership—NAPCS report
- ☐ Closing the Skill Gap: New Options for Charter School Leadership Development—Center on Reinventing Public Education report
- ☐ Charter School Job Board—NAPCS website section
- ☐ School Turnaround Leaders: Selection Toolkit—school leader selection guidance