



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

April 24, 2012

Dear Superintendent:

Throughout April, our nation has been celebrating the Month of the Military Child. In recognizing these remarkable children, we are focused on their many achievements and strengths. We are also reminded of the unique challenges they face as military-connected children.

Virtually all school districts educate a child whose parent or guardian is serving in our Armed Forces, whether stationed here or abroad and whether on active duty or in the National Guard or Reserves. Of the more than 1.2 million school-aged children of service men and women, more than 80 percent attend public schools.

One of the key issues facing military families is the frequent transitioning from one installation to the next, from one state to the next. Each of these moves impacts the military-connected child—from kindergarten through high school and even college. This is because oftentimes there are inconsistent school transfer policies that can inhibit a student's academic standing and social integration. Military-connected children with disabilities often face additional challenges.

The data demonstrate that transition challenges are not a one-time occurrence. On average, military-connected children attend six to nine different school systems from kindergarten through 12th grade. We want all military-connected school children to have an equal and fair opportunity for academic success. This requires that those individuals who make up our nation's educational system—our teachers, principals, school nurses, coaches, and counselors—understand the unique situations the children of our service members experience.

I am writing this letter to share information and ask for your assistance in meeting the needs of military-connected school children. I hope you will help raise awareness with respect to, and provide assistance for, military-connected children and their families in your schools and community. To be sure, not every military family looks the same, and the support needs will differ. One useful resource in this regard is the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which has been adopted by many states. (See www.mic3.net for Compact language.) This Compact, developed by the Council of State Governments, education experts, and the Department of Defense, addresses common problems that affect military-connected children as a result of frequent moves and deployments. For military-connected children with disabilities, a useful resource is the National Parent Training and Information Center—Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP) (www.stompproject.org).

Specifically, I would encourage you to:

- Review the Compact and consider ways of making your policies and procedures consistent with the guidelines and rules set forth under the Compact;
- Involve teachers, counselors, instructors, coaches, school nurses, administrators, and students at all levels in your district's efforts to better address the needs of military-connected school children;
- Honor and respect the previous academic standing and accomplishments of military-connected children new to your district;
- Be flexible and open to ways to help students transfer earned courses/credits to their new school;
- Enable implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs) as soon as possible and ensure that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) is provided for military-connected children with disabilities;
- Evaluate participation guidelines across your district for extracurricular, after-school, and sports activities to ensure they are welcoming to, and inclusive of, newly arriving students;
- Consider revising other programs or policies that inhibit military-connected children's transition; and
- Share your success stories with respect to implementation of the Compact and service member children. This will allow your work to be showcased to other school districts on the Compact's website (www.mic3.net). Please e-mail your stories to Charles Boyer (charles.boyer@ed.gov) with a short paragraph describing the impact of the Compact in your community.

Thank you for your leadership in helping us fulfill our commitments to our service members and their children. When the women and the men in uniform answer the call of duty, their children are also impacted. Although military-connected children can be adaptable and resilient because of their parent's or guardian's experience, they still need and deserve our help. Please work to ensure their future success as they progress to adulthood. Like their parents and guardians, they will, with your assistance, do our nation proud.

Sincerely,

/s/

Arne Duncan