Military K–12 Partners
Evaluation Technical Assistance Center (ETAC)

a dodea Educational Partnership Program

DODEA EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP GRANTS SUPPORT

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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INTRODUCTION
Every day, youths navigate through a variety of social situations, each with their own set of behavioral expectations and challenges. From the breakfast table, to the school bus, to the classroom, to the playground and beyond, students learn to handle their own emotions and react to the emotions of others. When youth experience any kind of emotional upset or trauma, as military-connected students do with frequent transitions or parent deployment, it makes their social and emotional life more complicated, and can create difficulties with handling social pressures and emotional decision-making. Often this leads to downturns in school performance, as the inherent military-connected social emotional challenges overtake their ability to succeed academically.

The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) initiated the Educational Partnership Grant Program (Educational Partnership) in 2008 to support research-based programs that improve pre-K–12 military-connected student achievement and ease the academic and social-emotional difficulties that military-connected students face due to their parents’ service. The Educational Partnership seeks to help those impacted local education agencies (LEAs) with funding and technical assistance to implement research-based projects that address these challenges through grants that support LEAs and schools near or on military bases. DoDEA has funded 386 Educational Partnership grants since 2009, serving 2,631 schools in 36 states and reaching approximately 581,000 military-connected students. Multiple LEAs in a state can receive grants, and individual LEAs can receive multiple grants over time. As of the 2016 cohort, over 70 grant programs have used Educational Partnership funds to improve military-connected youths’ social-emotional learning (SEL).

WHAT IS SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING?
SEL refers to the way youth learn and effectively apply: the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for a healthy mental outlook; appropriate responses to their own and others’ feelings; and positive, respectful relationships (CASEL, 2013; Michelman, 2016). The new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that replaced No Child Left Behind sets out accountability expectations for school performance. It is important to note that among the multiple measures ESSA requires, the Act insists on a nonacademic indicator (e.g., student and educator engagement, school climate and safety, postsecondary readiness) as a meaningful measure for school performance. ESSA may act as a catalyst to actively include SEL in schools across the country (Blad, 2016).

WHAT DOES RESEARCH TELL US?
The research demonstrates that well-designed and well-implemented SEL programs can have significant benefits for youth. Strong SEL programming improves the academic achievement and social behavior of youth, while reducing their emotional distress and disruptive behaviors (CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2015; Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness, 2016; Durlak et al., 2011; Masten, 2013).

CASEL (2015) has isolated five overall categories of SEL competencies that generally mirror most SEL programs:
• Self-Awareness—recognizing one’s own emotions and thoughts and how they influence behavior
• Self-Management—regulating one’s own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors
• Social Awareness—taking the perspective of and empathizing with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures
• Relationship Skills—establishing and maintaining healthy relationships
• Responsible Decision-making—making constructive and respectful choices

These five categories represent intrapersonal and interpersonal domains. Intrapersonal relates to what goes on inside the individual, as in self-awareness and self-management. Interpersonal relates to what happens between
and among individuals, as in social awareness and relationship skills. Responsible decision-making covers both domains, as decisions can be made within oneself and between others. Through successful programming, youth can learn to effectively apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can help them when they face challenges and obstacles at school and in their lives.

**CHALLENGES FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED YOUTH**

Most military-connected families cope well with continual life transitions and enjoy experiencing new places and cultures. While the Department of Defense, the Veterans Administration, and each service branch offer wide-ranging support services to families, many military-connected families decide not to use them because of concerns with the stigma often associated with mental health issues, especially within a culture that values “self-reliance” (Becker, Swenson, Esposito-Smythers, Caltado, & Spirito, 2014). In addition to the challenges of everyday life, military-connected students and families face challenges associated with multiple or long-term deployments and frequent transitions to new locations every 2–3 years. Deployment, particularly to a war zone, can be disruptive and stressful, affecting the health and well-being of the entire family. Researchers have found common problem areas for military-connected families, including feeling overwhelmed, multiple and long deployments, school transitions, and acting out at school. For military-connected families who have children with disabilities, the additional burdens may feel insurmountable. Military-connected students under deployment stress can exhibit anxiety, depression, and an inability to handle their emotional responses in appropriate ways, even after the parent has returned home (Aronson and Perkins, 2012; Lester et. al., 2010).

**PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESEARCH**

Researchers looking at SEL programs have recommendations based on the programs’ evidence of success (Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari & Blum, 2010; CASEL, 2013; CASEL 2015; Masten, 2013). Successful programs often address students’ efforts to cope with stress and offer strategies to positively impact transitions (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEL Strategy</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connect students with teachers—positive caring relationships help students open up</td>
<td>Increase communication between school and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage participation in extracurricular sports and clubs, regardless of when student enters during the school year</td>
<td>Alter school policies to make it easier for incoming students to participate in school life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect military families with other military families to share resources and know they are not alone</td>
<td>Offer professional development to staff on strategies to connect with military students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer peer mentoring—this may help a reticent student concerned that their problem will get back to their family</td>
<td>Foster peer connections to help bridge the feelings of being an outsider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Researchers who reviewed over 200 SEL programs found that programs were more successful when they were teacher-conducted through classrooms, because there was greater fidelity to implementation instead of being implemented through non-classroom settings. It was also important for the schools to be safe and orderly, communicate high academic expectations, promote caring relationships, and expect student-centered teaching approaches (Durlak et al., 2011). Durlak et al. (2011) also found that SEL programs that followed a sequenced set
of connected activities—including active forms of learning, actively focused on developing SEL, and targeted specific SEL skills—has positive impacts in six areas. Success in these SEL areas include: (1) social and emotional skills, (2) attitudes toward self and others, (3) positive social behaviors, (4) conduct problems, (5) emotional distress, and (6) academic performance; and they can transform a disconnected military-connected child into a connected military-connected child. Finally, researchers recommend that SEL programs must be tailored to help military-connected youth and their families within the local context, so they can learn how to cope with their emotions and develop and retain positive peer relationships.

Schools should use program evaluation to monitor fidelity to implementation, assess outcomes, and incorporate appropriate professional development throughout the program. Researchers (Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness, 2016; CASEL, 2013; CASEL, 2015; Durlak et al., 2011; Masten, 2013) found that including certain topics in professional development made for strong programs. These topics included:

- Understanding the intersection of the military culture and SEL
- Learning about K-12 child development
- Recognizing when students are experiencing difficulties
- Learning how to implement effective supports and family protective factors
- Using professional learning communities as the professional development vehicle that includes coaching and specific SEL materials
BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Behavior management programs are designed to promote positive behavior within schools. Strategies may include methods of building positive relationships between students and staff, creating a welcoming classroom environment, and handling discipline. Positive school climate and engagement are important parts of military-connected student success. Additionally, with increased mobility from parental deployment, schools must be a place of stability and connectedness for students to thrive. The following vignettes showcase DoDEA grantees that implemented the Behavior Management strategy to address students’ SEL needs.

HARDIN COUNTY SCHOOLS, KY

In 2012, DoDEA awarded Hardin County Schools (HCS) in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, a grant to work with four district schools serving Fort Knox. This vignette highlights the programs designed to increase the level of targeted behavior programs and supports for struggling middle and high school students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hardin County Schools, KY</th>
<th>Support and Transition Focus (2012)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Installation and Branch</td>
<td>Fort Knox</td>
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<tr>
<td>District Student Population</td>
<td>14,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Schools in Project</td>
<td>2 middle schools; 2 high schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military-connected Youth Served</td>
<td>704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Academic Goal</td>
<td>Increase the level of targeted behavior programs and supports for struggling middle and high school students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Measure</td>
<td>Discipline and suspension rates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why the Behavior Management Strategy?

HCS evaluated student attendance, discipline, and failed courses and noticed students were not responding to academic interventions. They determined that this was not due to lack of quality interventions, but was due to the failure to target the specific issues behind why students were struggling in school. The root causes of the struggles were not academic, but social emotional. Upon reviewing the research associated with working with at-risk students, it became apparent that a Behavior Management program would provide the best opportunity to help develop and build each student’s coping skills.

Educators at HCS understood that these interventions might not “fix” the problem, but did provide students with an awareness of what was happening and attempted to equip students with tools and strategies to overcome barriers to learning. Students often masked social emotional hardship through “acting out” or by simply “fading away,” which increases their risks of losing focus or dropping out. Through this program, HCS identified student needs, delivered interventions and supports, monitored responses to those interventions, and assisted students in transitions.

HCS evaluated several programs and resources to find which ones best fit their goals. Programs included Alternative Behavior Educator (ABE), Apex Learning, Carnegie Learning, and The Coping and Support Training (CAST). These programs offered direct interventions supplemented with online support that helped military students recover classes and work through emotional issues related to extended deployments. The district
started out with the CAST material, but counseling staff found it to be too scripted and intense, and instead used this resource as a baseline. HCS pulled from other resources and created a program that incorporated a variety of programs offering counseling, peer-to-peer mentoring, supplemental math support, and online credit recovery. After training selected staff and assigning a program coordinator, they piloted the new resources in select settings. They then reviewed data obtained from the pilot program to uncover issues that might surface during further implementation.

Selected staff included:
- One counselor
- One psychologist
- Two community care therapists
- Student transition specialist
- Two to three mentor counselors

HCS continued to train staff and re-evaluate the program’s effectiveness. They worked with site coordinators on a regular basis to discuss issues with the program, review monthly reports, conduct surveys with staff, and identify professional development opportunities based on survey findings. Training is ongoing, primarily in response to an implementation challenge noted below.

**Strategy Impact**
HCS reported significant strategy impact with military-connected students. More students were able to stay in school and receive the supports they needed to improve not only their social and emotional status, but their academic status as well. Students interacted more appropriately with their peers and were able to participate more in class. The change in interpersonal dynamics led to reports of increased self-confidence and self-worth in students. HCS also found that suspension rates dropped significantly, and graduation rates increased for identified at-risk students.

**Implementation Challenges and Solutions**
HCS reported program fidelity as their greatest challenge. Staff trained on the use of the various programs frequently transitioned to another position. This created a void in program understandings. HCS eventually had to develop a model of continuous training to ensure that staff assigned to various programs were adequately trained in the operation of the programs.

While the overall measurement of program success was on graduation rates and discipline referrals, HCS found other measures were needed to truly understand the impact of a specific program on student behavior and academic success. For example, successes with counselors were best measured by looking at the way students interacted with peers and staff, not just by examining data. Sometimes, the successes were incremental, so it was important for staff to focus on the student’s positive movement towards more acceptable behaviors, not just the overall goal.
Lessons Learned
The biggest lesson learned while implementing this strategy was that many factors contribute to a student’s success (or failure). It is important to take the time to account for as many of these factors as possible to best assess the effects of a program on targeted students. Conducting a thorough needs assessment prior to implementing any program will help you to effectively communicate why this type of program is needed and what outcomes you hope to deliver. The more information you give out about a program (prior to implementation) the more buy-in you can expect. During implementation, you must also take the time to look at all variables, not just the variables you are expecting. Often, important data are overlooked that could prove critical to program success.

Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative Behavior Educator (ABE)</th>
<th><a href="http://www.abesystems.com/">http://www.abesystems.com/</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apex Learning</td>
<td><a href="https://www.apexlearning.com/">https://www.apexlearning.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnegie Learning</td>
<td><a href="https://www.carnegielearning.com/">https://www.carnegielearning.com/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping and Support Training Program (CAST)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/programs/cast/">http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/programs/cast/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflective Questions
1. Hardin County Schools experienced significant staff turnover; does your district have a plan in place to ensure continual staff training during program implementation?
2. Have you conducted a needs assessment in your school district? What are ways you can help ensure teacher and staff “buy-in”?
3. How do you plan to evaluate factors impacting your students’ success (or failure)?

SOUTH JEFFERSON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT, NY
South Jefferson Central School District (SJCSD) in northern New York is approximately 25 miles from US Army Base Fort Drum. In 2011, DoDEA awarded SJCSD a grant for “Improving Academic Performance through Increased Student Engagement.” In 2014, SJCSD was also awarded additional funds as part of the 2014 Invitational Extension grant. DoDEA selected to extend this project based on demonstrated success in meeting project outcomes. The project promotes student well-being and engagements using the Responsive Classroom (RC) program from kindergarten through fifth grade in two district elementary schools: Mannsville School and Wilson School.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Jefferson Central School District, NY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving Academic Performance Through Increased Student Engagement (2014)</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military Installation and Branch</th>
<th>Fort Drum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Student Population</td>
<td>1,993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Schools in Project</td>
<td>2 elementary schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military-connected Youth Served</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Academic Goal</td>
<td>Improve student engagement in grades 3 through 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Measure</td>
<td>School Engagement Measure (MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why the Behavior Management Strategy?
SJCSD chose this strategy to jointly address academics and learning and social emotional well-being and school connectedness. The district anticipated that improvements in school climate would also improve attendance rates, reduce referrals to the Child Study Team/Pupil Services Team for academic and social-emotional difficulties, and increase academic outcomes, especially in reading and English language arts. During a time of major deployments, military youth report feeling less connected and need a way to form meaningful connections in the community. The RC strategy allows the students to view school as being part of a community center and to feel like they belong.

Responsive Classrooms
RC is a research-based approach to kindergarten through eighth grade teaching that focuses on the link between academic success and SEL (Responsive Classrooms, 2017). The classrooms begin each day with a morning meeting, followed by a sharing component. The morning meeting allows time for students to communicate anything on their minds and allows time for the teachers to highlight the activities for the day. Each morning meeting lasts approximately 20 minutes. The sharing component grants students the ability to voice concerns at the beginning of the day and allow academics to become the focus for the remainder of the day. While students are encouraged and given the opportunity to share information and feelings, it is not required for any student. RCs also use group activities to engage all students to participate, rather than become “wallflowers.”

SJCSD used Responsive Classroom Specialists to provide training for teachers and staff. This ensured uniform practices were implemented and sustained across the schools. Each school’s guidance counselor also served as a military liaison to encourage student participation and enrichment activities. The guidance counselors were also responsible for sharing the RC philosophies with parents to create support at home.

Strategy Impact
RC had an unexpected positive impact on academics. All students, especially military students, felt connected to the school community. The schools used the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status to gauge student engagement and saw an increase in student perception of their connectedness to the school community. Teachers strongly supported RC, as evident through positive reports on surveys and focus groups.

Additionally, SJCSD used RC as part of their response to the New York State’s Dignity for All Students Act (The Dignity Act). This Act required state public elementary and secondary schools to provide a safe and supportive environment for its students. RC also assisted school administrators in changing discipline from a punitive-based approach to a teaching and re-teaching approach for staff. This non-punitive approach allows teachers to set limits and students to maintain their dignity as they learn from their mistakes. Conversations also shifted from individual teaching styles to appropriate language and responses based on RC techniques.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions
As the 2014 extension grant for “Improving Academic Performance through Increased Student Engagement” ends, SJCSD will continue its efforts on sustainability. The grant wholly funded personnel trainings for RC. In the upcoming year, the schools will ensure their budget proposal includes RC training for newly hired staff. They will also identify RC leaders and adopt a train-the-trainer approach to ensure RC practices continue to be a part of the school culture. The RC leaders will be charged with finding other areas of school life to incorporate RC techniques for both students and staff. To further integrate RC as a culture in the schools and maintain it as a
priority in the district, RC techniques will be part of teacher observations on their Annual Professional Performance Review.

**Lessons Learned**

To fully implement RC, the staff needed to incorporate RC language through the entire school system. Therefore, principals and other school leaders were trained alongside their teachers. Refreshers were often used to ensure the techniques remained an active focus and part of the school culture. SJCSD’s proximity to certified RC teachers facilitated easy participation in onsite support and training.

**RESOURCES**

| Responsive Classrooms Principals & Practices (RC) | https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/about/principles-practices/ |

**Reflective Questions**

1. **Does your state or district have a policy or requirement like New York State’s Dignity for All Students Act (The Dignity Act) that might support a cost-benefit analysis of implementing a behavior management program curriculum?**

2. **In what ways will your schools’ daily schedule need to be revised to accommodate a behavior management program curriculum?**

3. **Why did South Jefferson Central School District decide to focus on school climate to help manage student behaviors? Will this work for you too?**

**COUNSELING SERVICES**

School counseling programs support learning for all students, while also working to improve students’ self-regulation, build healthy attitudes and behaviors, and create and maintain positive social relationships. After establishing a caring and trusting relationship, counselors work one-on-one in small groups and large groups to develop positive SEL skills and attitudes and appropriate behavior. Counselors can also offer professional development opportunities to teachers to increase their awareness and knowledge of the social-emotional challenges that are unique to military-connected youth and families involving frequent transitions, loss of parents for periods of time due to deployments, and re-entering parents from warzone deployments. Oftentimes, counseling includes building awareness of personal barriers and challenges that are impeding positive SEL development and then learning and applying methods that help youth get past their barriers. When youth have these types of strong adult relationships in school, their academic work tends to improve, along with their relationships with peers, attendance, classroom behaviors, and feelings of connectedness to the school environment. The following vignettes include DoDEA grantees that implemented the counseling strategy to address students’ SEL needs.

**SAN DIEGO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, CA**

In 2015, DoDEA awarded San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) in California a 5-year grant to implement a program that addresses the high numbers of military-connected families who exit the military due to local downsizing. As of this publication, this project is in its first year of implementation.
Why the Counseling Strategy?
SDUSD noted that many San Diego military personnel exit the service due to downsizing and need an array of resources to support a return to civilian life, including assistance with career transitions; finding housing; future financial stability; and emotional issues related to major life changes, such as the impact of the change on their children’s educational success and emotional well-being. Because SDUSD defines SEL as the effects of military transitions on students, they decided to build and maintain partnerships with local and military organizations to best meet the wide variety of needs.

In the first year of the grant, SDUSD began directing families to resources and offering varying types of counseling as needed. SDUSD partners with (1) zero8hundred, a locally funded resource project; (2) San Diego Military Family Collaborative (SDMFC), a formal network of organizations that works to connect military families to resources; (3) SAY San Diego, an organization that works to meet the comprehensive needs of youth and families; and (4) Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLC) who work with military families to address the unique challenges they face due to frequent transitions and multiple and long-term deployments. Within this partnership structure, SDUSD works most directly with zero8hundred. Zero8hundred offers Peer Navigation to military families who sign up. Peer Navigation involves assigning a graduate school intern from the University of Southern California’s Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work to families to discuss their needs and maintain a connection to them as they access appropriate resources. SDUSD expects to connect 80 percent of families who are discharging from the military to an appropriate transition support resource. Beginning in the second year of the grant, SDUSD is thinking about implementing direct counseling services for students.

Strategy Impact
This is the first year of implementation for “Operation Aim High,” but SDUSD has been working to connect families with services and resources they need, as well as build awareness of the program. The Project Director works in each of the five schools involved in the project every week, so she is continually aware of progress and issues. She conducts in-person meetings with partners to plan family events and professional development for staff, and she also meets monthly with the project’s outside evaluator.

SDUSD has offered e-communications for information about zero8hundred family services and resources at all five schools involved in the project. The district has also sent personalized letters and flyers to almost 300 military families about the services and resources available. Zero8hundred has presented information about the program to district staff at three of the five schools, with the remaining two scheduled on the calendar for early
2017. Zero8hundred also presented program information during a Healthy Habits event, where MFLCs, school administrators, and school counselors from all five schools were in attendance.

In November 2016, about 30 families attended an event offered in partnership with SDMFC and SAY San Diego. This was to build awareness of resources and services that these organizations offer to military-connected families as they transition out of the service.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions
The district ran into implementation challenges during the planning year and the first 6 months of implementation, including leadership turnover at two of the five project schools. This meant that, while three principals were involved in proposal planning and were familiar with the project, two other principals were unaware of the project, its goals, or planned activities. Also, some outside partner agencies were new to working with SDUSD and were unfamiliar with its rules and regulations. To move forward smoothly, the Project Director met formally with the new principals and conducted a project presentation. She followed up with informal meetings and at least weekly phone calls and emails about the project to ensure project components were being implemented with fidelity across all school sites. The Project Director also worked with outside agencies to familiarize them with SDUSD requirements (e.g., staff need to be fingerprinted to work in schools) and ensured that they filled out all paperwork correctly.

SDUSD also has found that families of secondary-level students, in general, are more difficult to identify and maintain a connection to over time. These families are not as accessible, and it has been difficult to track their progress in accessing appropriate resources. Also, SDUSD recognized that it is difficult to collect accurate and objective data directly from students. Instead of direct student data, they decided to collect data through a proxy measure (e.g., families accessing resources). However, SDUSD realized that while families may benefit from accessing resources, individual students may not experience SEL benefits as much as they would from direct counseling services. Therefore, SDUSD is thinking of phasing in direct student services during the second year of project implementation.

Lessons Learned
- Plan for a comprehensive communication plan that involves input and participation from all stakeholders, and considers constant communication and continual attention to relationship-building and maintenance.
- The Project Director should meet weekly with each school administrative team to check on implementation progress and address any issues or potential challenges.
- The Project Director should conduct two formal meetings per year with counseling providers and school site administrators.
- Keep lines of communication and collaboration open to all stakeholders throughout the development and implementation process. Ask for continuous feedback from all involved.
RESOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>URL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military Family Life Counseling (MFLC)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Military Family Collaborative</td>
<td><a href="http://sdmilitaryfamily.org/">http://sdmilitaryfamily.org/</a></td>
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<td>SAY San Diego</td>
<td><a href="https://www.saysandiego.org/">https://www.saysandiego.org/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>SDUSD Military Family Resources</td>
<td><a href="https://www.sandiegounified.org/military-family-resources">https://www.sandiegounified.org/military-family-resources</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>zero8hundred</td>
<td><a href="http://www.zero8hundred.org/">http://www.zero8hundred.org/</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Reflective Questions**

1. *San Diego experienced personnel turnover challenges, which are common in large school districts. How can you prepare for such internal challenges during the planning year?*
2. *What local or national organizations might you enlist as partners with your school to improve the SEL of military-connected youth?*
3. *How does involving outside entities complicate the work in schools? How do these partnerships enrich the work in schools?*

**YUMA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT, AZ**

In 2012, 2013, and 2015 DoDEA awarded Arizona’s Yuma District 1 (Yuma) grants to implement programs that address military-connected students’ adjustment to school during transitions and deployments. Alongside active and retired military families, the Yuma community also includes Border Patrol and military-connected civilian families who face danger on the job and temporary training assignments that take family members away for a length of time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yuma Elementary School District</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operation Brainstorm (2012)</td>
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<td>Operation Brainstorm at Otando (2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operation BrainSTEM Personalized 2015</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military Installation and Branch</th>
<th>MCAS Yuma; APG Yuma</th>
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<td>Military-connected Youth Served</td>
<td>978</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Academic Goal</td>
<td>Improve SEL adjustments to school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Measure</td>
<td>BASC-2</td>
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**Why the Counseling Strategy?**

When Yuma personnel reviewed their data, they found that the ratio of counselors to students was unbalanced in their schools. Some schools had full-time counselors but very different totals for student populations, rendering unbalanced counselor-to-student ratios. Some schools shared a counselor, meaning that they were at a campus 1 or 2 days per week, with counselor-to-student ratios ranging from 1:75 to 1:650. The disparate ratios were emphasized during annual surveys, when parents were asking for more counseling services. Also, when
Yuma personnel reviewed data from their military and border patrol partners, the data highlighted continual and prolonged deployments, along with temporary family separations for trainings.

Yuma’s military-connected students are spread out over nine of their schools, so the need to improve counseling services was felt district-wide. Employing more counselors would improve their military-connected students’ abilities to adjust to transitions and deployments through school services and activities. Therefore, staff used their DoDEA grants to hire full- and part-time counselors and social workers and offer at least two family nights per year that involve military-connected families more deeply in the life of the school. Counselors and social workers built relationships and addressed SEL topics informally during family nights.

Yuma project staff defined their SEL to include academic, alongside social and emotional adjustment, to school settings. Yuma project staff found that if students adjusted well to their schools, they demonstrated academic success, made and kept friends, managed their emotions during stressful times (e.g., deployment, reintegration, impending moves), openly discussed concerns, and developed coping mechanisms. With counseling support, based on research and their lived experiences, Yuma project staff felt their students could engage optimally in school life.

**Strategy Impact**

During 2012, Yuma project staff hired two full-time counselors (Military Advocates) who got right to work engaging in individual and small group student counseling. They also conducted extensive parent outreach using letters, phone calls, formal and informal meetings, and family nights. In addition, they offered professional development during faculty meetings to build awareness about the unique challenges of military-connected families. Challenges include how often families are separated for temporary trainings or deployments, what kinds of student behaviors teachers might see during these times, and ways that teachers could address these changes in their students. One of the ways they could address the changes is to refer the student to a counselor, so they could begin to include them in counseling activities. The Military Advocates kept a spreadsheet-style log of every military-connected student on every campus. In these logs, Military Advocates noted the date and which type of engagement activity they conducted with each student.

Military advocates were able to put two family nights per year in place at participating schools. Yuma project staff collect sign-in information at each event to track participation, and the 2016 annual Parent Survey indicated that nearly 60 percent of parents were satisfied with parent nights. In 2013, 175 military-connected parents responded to the survey, but after Yuma project staff added specific questions for active-duty military to the survey, 309 military-connected families responded in 2016.

One type of popular family night event is reading a book together (all families receive a copy of the book). At one school, the families read *Night Catch* by Brenda Ehrmantraut. This story is about a deployed father who uses the North Star to play catch with his son. After the reading, students engaged in themed activities like decorating star cookies, looking through telescopes, and writing aspirations on paper stars for a bulletin board. Often, Base Commanders or the school superintendent are the guest readers on such family nights. The 2012

![Figure 1: A high school ROTC member leads fitness exercises during Hero Hustle night, which emphasized fitness while celebrating military families.](image-url)
grant was used to put systems and activities in place, so that by the 2013 and 2015 grants, the programs could grow from a solid foundation.

Informal conversations with parents plus counselor notes on sessions lets Yuma staff know that the counseling services were highly effective. Students seem comfortable discussing issues with peers in small groups of military-connected youth. The 2015 parent survey indicated a growing awareness of and satisfaction with the counseling services. The project used the Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC-2) as its formal assessment to track progress. Students with clinically significant issues did improve, but this proved to be a very small subset of the overall military-connected population the project served.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions

Yuma staff recognized the importance of identifying military-connected students as soon as possible, but Yuma’s online student information system (SIS) did not have an immediate and accurate identification system for military-connected youth. Project staff began a campaign to help office clerical staff work with parents during registration to completely fill in all of the forms and accurately input information into the SIS. Another challenging issue was having no marker in the SIS for military-connected students. Yuma project staff worked extensively with technical support to develop and establish those markers, so they could track progress and use the marker to sort and filter to find students. This way, Yuma’s list of military-connected students was more accurate and they would have a way to identify and monitor them. They also had the MFLCs visit every classroom on each campus and talk directly to the students and asked teachers to use their knowledge of students to adjust the school rosters to accurately reflect military-connected youth. Finally, Yuma staff created a family page website, with a link for parents to submit questions. The Military Advocates monitor this link.

The BASC-2 instrument, originally selected because grant requirements necessitated a normed assessment, is designed to elicit information regarding behavioral/emotional issues beyond the normal scope of student behaviors in elementary and middle school. It did not turn out to be the most suitable impact measurement of the counseling strategy, because most of Yuma’s student population did not fall within the behavior range of the BASC-2 measures. Yuma’s students experienced stressors such as frequent moves, deployment or reintegratio of military parent, social interaction issues at school, and making friends. Yuma counselors addressed these types of issues through individual or small group counseling with other military-connected peers and found that anecdotal evidence of positive teacher report, students’ enthusiasm for the groups, and positive parent survey responses were better indicators of success and impact, because this data represented a larger group of students.

After the project was in place and the counseling strategy up and running for a couple of years, project staff got feedback from families about counseling services. For some, the idea of counseling, or needing counseling, carried a negative connotation. Due to this feedback from families, project staff changed the title of the counselors to “Military Advocates” to avoid the stigma that some people associate with counseling. Yuma uses “Migrant Advocate” for staff who work with migrant populations in Yuma, and project staff felt this was in line with what their project was asking of these positions. By changing the focus to Military Advocate, this helped with another challenge they had in finding fully credentialed counselors.
Due to Yuma’s remote location and depressed economy, project staff were having difficulty hiring and retaining counselors with fully credentialed counseling backgrounds. As it turned out, alongside the project implementation, the Marine Corps Air Station Military School Liaison lobbied to bring more MFLCs to Yuma. Once in place, MFLCs began conducting individual and group counseling for students. Having MFLCs helped Yuma by providing counselors knowledgeable about the unique needs of military-connected youth and freed project staff by 2015 to hire personnel with social worker backgrounds as the Military Advocates to engage in project activities. This also eased the ability to reach students quickly because if a student is referred for counseling, a parent signature is required. However, to attend a “lunch bunch” or have a group of military-connected students join a coloring group does not require parental permission, because the activities are aligned with regular school activities.

Lessons Learned

Yuma project staff shared several lessons learned from their three different projects:

1. Measuring SEL is complex and often problematic. The grants were proposed to dovetail alongside other Yuma initiatives, so it is difficult to know which variables contribute directly to improved student SEL. Also, these other efforts (e.g., effective and involved Military School Liaisons) contribute to the schools’ overall positive SEL culture. It is key to mesh SEL activities with ongoing initiatives to increase the impact of all strategies.

2. Constant communication with all stakeholders (e.g., installation personnel, district and site personnel, MFLCs, project coordinators, families) is essential for surfacing and addressing problems quickly. For those providing direct services, it is key for them to meet at least once a week to discuss progress and challenges. For other leadership, they attend monthly or quarterly meetings to learn about updates and help troubleshoot issues. Phone call and emails are usually weekly, if not daily, and help answer questions immediately and respond to student referrals quickly.

3. Openly discussing roles among the MFLCs and Military Advocates helps get direct services to students quickly and with the least amount of confusion. By being transparent about roles, staff don’t overstep their
boundaries or duplicate efforts. Staff sort out who should respond to a referral or when students might need more than one staff member working with them, based on the student need and their defined role.

4. Be open to using qualified social workers with military-family backgrounds or knowledge instead of fully certified counselors. This may help with hiring—as well as get around district regulations when individual and small group counseling is involved—if your project activities are not really counseling.

5. Family nights have many unseen or unpredicted benefits. Military parents discovered other military families experiencing the same issues during the family nights and were able to make new friends at these events. One mother, new to Yuma, told staff at a family night that she made her first friend that evening.

6. Offer creative outlets to students to build a visible, military-connected, supportive school culture. A military-connected student group that met at recess to color morphed into writing thank-you notes for school events and gathering goodie bags to send to a deployed squadron. Military Advocates in schools with a large population of deployed family members created lessons about the countries where their parents were going, so students would have a better understanding of the country’s historical and cultural background. Set up community service opportunities, such as older students tutoring younger students or delivering breakfast to remote schools without kitchens. Some schools get special presentations (e.g., NASA and Honeywell) on physics demonstrations or slam dunk basketballs with inspirational messages.

RESOURCES

Yuma Military Family Website  http://www.yuma.org/Military_Families

Reflective Questions

1. Does your district have other SEL initiatives that you might be able to use to support your project?
2. What types of communications systems do you have in place that you can harness to provide continual and effective internal communication with district and school staff? What outside communication platforms are available to you to communicate regularly with the community and stakeholders?
3. Yuma needed to redesign a key role (counselor to social worker) to attract people to the position, due to their rural location combined with the burdensome counselor certification requirements. Can you foresee any such complications in your community?

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Research overwhelmingly indicates that when parents and the community are authentically involved in education, student achievement improves. Authentic parent and community involvement often works as a partnership, offering collaborative opportunities with the schools to reinforce learning across multiple settings that may include classrooms, homes, and community or faith-based centers. When the partnership engages parents and community members in ways that offer systematic approaches to support learning, participants find purpose in their interactions that encourage them to persist. DoDEA recognizes the need to partner with parents and community members in the schooling of military-connected youth and encourages the use of engagement strategies that will build and maintain partnerships and collaborative possibilities among families and the community. The following vignettes highlight three DoDEA grantees that have engaged parents and communities in various ways to improve students’ SEL or academic learning.
CLARKSVILLE-MONTGOMERY COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM, TN

In 2013, DoDEA awarded Clarksville-Montgomery County School System (CMCSS) in Tennessee a partnership grant to work with Christian County Public Schools in Kentucky, both serving the Fort Campbell installation. This vignette is only about the activities that took place in CMCSS. While the goal for CMCSS was to improve reading scores, we included their project in this SEL document because CMCSS was highly successful in implementing parent engagement techniques that would also serve if the goal had been geared to improve SEL.

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<td>District Student Population</td>
<td>24,000</td>
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<td>Military-connected Youth Served</td>
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<td>Project Academic Goal</td>
<td>Improve reading proficiency</td>
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<td>Goal Measure</td>
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**Why the Parent Engagement Strategy?**

When CMCSS reviewed its data, they noted that military families made up one-third of their population, but generally were not as meaningfully engaged in their child’s school as CMCSS wanted. Although CMCSS had extensive structures for keeping parents informed on student progress, ways to contact schools, and opportunities to participate in school activities, they noted that less than half of the military-connected parents were actively engaged. Therefore, CMCSS set out to insure that 80 percent of parents attended at least one teacher conference. To that end, they created (1) a technology piece (portal, parent videos) and (2) authentic volunteer positions: Parent Ambassadors, Volunteer Coordinators, and Information Coordinators.

**Using Technology: Parent Portal**

Based on feedback from parent focus groups, the first activity for CMCSS was to revamp its website to make information more accessible and meaningful to families and community stakeholders. When CMCSS surveyed parents, they found that 97 percent of their respondents had Internet access at home, so they knew this would not be a barrier in their community. The technology department revamped the website, rendering it more user friendly, with easy-to-find interest items for students and parents, such as links to upcoming events, top stories, curriculum, assessments, and Powerschool (CMCSS’ web-based student learning management system that provides parents and students with real-time access to assignments, grades, attendance, and connections to teachers).

Once the website was redesigned, CMCSS developed a parent portal on their website as a way to engage parents, with each school having its own link. CMCSS began to design and offer a series of parent training videos that were 3–5 minutes in length through Engage TV. They offered topics that parents ask about frequently:

- Attendance policies
- Nutrition in cafeteria meals
- Digital blended learning: What is it and what it looks like for kids
- Supporting homeless students
- Clear learning targets and navigating the curriculum
- How to create Powerschool accounts to monitor student progress
- How to seek assistance to support home learning
• ACT preparation
• Protecting children from online predators

_Powerschool_ and _Engage TV_ videos are accessed online via computer, tablet, or phone so even a deployed parent can stay connected to their child’s progress, school events, and relevant topics. All videos offer a system for follow-up questions so parents can get answers to their questions or concerns. For those who sign up, the system also offers alerts about new videos, with a brief background about the topic. By the end of the 2013–2014 school year, 15,551 parents were accessing their portal accounts.

**Meaningful Volunteering**

After collecting data from separate focus groups of administrators, classified personnel, coaches, teachers, and parents, CMCSS decided there needed to be points of contact within each school to provide support and to reach out to parents who might not be comfortable with dealing directly with school personnel. Three different positions were identified; _Parent Ambassadors, Volunteer Coordinators, and Information Coordinators_. The _Parent Ambassador_ role was designed to help parents become more involved and better informed. _Parent Ambassadors_ participate in training workshops designed to prepare them to navigate the school system. These workshops address issues and topics in which parents have less understanding of, or may receive inaccurate or incomplete information about, that emerge from focus groups or are lived experiences of _Parent Ambassadors_. _Parent Ambassadors_ can share the workshop information learned with other parents and families, using various communication tools, including facilitating their own community workshops.

The _Volunteer Coordinator_ role is to identify those meaningful opportunities for parents and community stakeholders to authentically participate in the school environment. The _Volunteer Coordinators_ conduct a needs assessment in each of their buildings to learn about any perceived needs of the staff (e.g., librarian needs extra help during the book fair, hopscotch squares need repainting, more adult supervision needed during lunch periods). Based on the needs assessment, CMCSS offers volunteer opportunities that involve working with students as well as activities that do not, in part because of the nature of the needs and in part because some parents want to support the school but are not comfortable working directly with students. The needs assessment helps determine all possible ways that volunteers can help.

The _Information Coordinator_ role is to streamline the parent and school communication process, so information is clear and concise with less chance of misunderstanding. Through posting volunteer opportunities to the parent portal and communicating school news via the school website and online calendar, _Information Coordinators_ keep information current and relevant.

**Strategy Impact**

It is important to monitor how parent engagement activities are working so they can be revised in the moment to better meet the overall goal of involving more parents in their child’s learning. CMCSS did meet their outcome of reaching 80 percent of parents attending at least one teacher conference. In addition, _Engage TV_ had over 16,800 people accessing the videos. Also, parent access to _Powerschool_ increased from 10,500 active accounts to
over 24,445 active accounts by 2015. The various Ambassadors and Coordinators submit monthly logs of their activities, which are reviewed by district-level personnel to ensure the positions are being adequately and appropriately responsive and the activities address the sites’ needs. Focus groups are also conducted each year to gather staff perceptions about the extent to which the work is progressing and meeting needs. CMCSS had over 10,000 volunteer sign-ins, 3,500 being military-connected, and all of which exceeded 2,700 volunteer hours. Importantly, student proficient reading scores on the state test made forward progress throughout the grant.

CMCSS also decided to brand its parent engagement approach. They worked with a design firm to create a trademark for the project that encapsulates the partnership and integral communication aspect of the work. The trademark is used on signage and work products to provide immediate recognition to school personnel, parents, and community stakeholders.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions
There are always ongoing, labor-intensive challenges with technology to ensure information is current and accurate and that all links work. CMCSS has a group of technology experts who have the skills to build or fix any technology design. They work in a fully supported technology studio and have won national awards for FOCUS videos. They work as a team, are valued, and are given reign to be creative in their work. The Chief Technology Officer knows how to recruit and retain highly effective staff. This context may be very difficult to replicate.

CMCSS is purposeful in choosing military-connected people for the Ambassador and Coordinator roles. However, this creates a turnover challenge due to family transfers and deployments. In other cases, the people are hired out of the volunteer positions by the district or schools into paying positions. In addition, some people in the positions speak a second language, so principals pay them with stipends as a way to ensure their retention, while others continue as unpaid volunteers in other schools. This creates a level of disparity among similar positions across the schools.

Lessons Learned
CMCSS has learned many lessons over the years in building and maintaining their successful Parent Engagement approach:

- Align the vision, mission, and outcomes, and communicate with all individuals to understand the purpose, plan, activities, and their roles in the effort.
- Solidify partnerships by seeking input and seeing family and community members as partners so everyone contributes to and knows the vision, speaks the same language about the vision, and all work toward the same goals.
- Communicate and build capacity within the schools to identify needs and make data-based decisions.
- Brand the parent engagement approach to focus the work for the schools, families, and community stakeholders.
- Be flexible and follow your data. Parents were not motivated by Parent University (the precursor to Engage TV), as evidenced by lackluster site traffic, so CMCSS transitioned to Engage TV and now there are over 16,000 followers.
- Define meaningful parental engagement for each school by including parents in determining what that means.
RESOURCES

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Reflective Questions

1. Why do you think Clarksville-Montgomery County School Systems was able to successfully implement a technology-heavy program?
2. How does your school reach out to and support military-connected parents and families?
3. How can your district use volunteers to increase parent and community engagement?

RICHLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT TWO, SC

Richland School District Two (RSD2) in Columbia, South Carolina, serves more than 27,000 students across 19 elementary schools, seven middle schools, five high schools, five magnet centers, one district-wide child development center, and two alternative schools. RSD2 is located less than 15 miles from US Army Base Fort Jackson, the largest induction installation in the United States. In 2012, DoDEA awarded RSD2 a grant for “The 2012 Victory Initiative” to improve student achievement and provide support for military students and their families.

| Richland Two School District, SC              |
| The 2012 Victory Initiative (2012)            |

| Military Installation and Branch              | Fort Jackson (Army) |
| District Student Population                   | 27,842              |
| Types of Schools in Project                   | 5 elementary, 2 middle, 1 high schools |
| Military-connected Youth Served               | 1,495               |
| Project Academic Goal                         | Increase support to youth |
| Goal Measure                                  | California Healthy Kids Survey |

Why the Parent/Community Engagement Strategy?

Located near Fort Jackson, RSD2 understood the sensitivity needed when working with transient military families. While the district honored and respected military families, many staff did not truly understand the impact of military life on their students and the community. The district recognized that they needed to do more for their military families, including making staff more sensitive and aware of their unique needs. RSD2 believes that when schools engage parents and the community, they make the necessary connections to provide continuous support for their students and educate parents on topics to enhance learning.

“In partnership with our community, Richland School District Two prepares all students for success by providing meaningful, challenging, and engaging learning experiences.”

– Richland School District Two Mission Statement
Strategy Impact
The 2012 Victory Initiative has received positive feedback from both teachers and administrators. Staff indicated the experience was “eye opening” and provided insight into the daily lives of the parents and how the military lifestyle impacted students. Through questions and inquiries, conversations arose across the district that have incited new and creative ways to support military-connected students, including military support groups and special programs.

Military Support Groups
The addition of the elementary Student2Student (eS2S) program has provided a necessary student support program for elementary students. The district has also partnered with the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) to further develop the research-based eS2S program. Military support groups provide opportunities for students to develop pride in their military family, use a buddy system to create a sense of belonging and recognition in school, and enhance leadership skills. Students introduce each other as military brothers and sisters and learn they can find a support system anywhere.

A Day in the Life of a Drill Sergeant
Fort Jackson is the largest induction installation in the United States. With the majority of military-connected parents working as Drill Sergeants, RSD2 wanted to gain additional knowledge behind the scope of work and long hours for these parents. With this in mind, RDS2 developed the concept of “A Day in the Life of a Drill Sergeant.” RSD2 worked with their School Liaison Officer (SLO) to request access to Fort Jackson for this event. Once the request was granted, the SLO worked with representatives from the school district to finalize the agenda and logistics for base access and maneuverability. RSD2 invited 25 faculty and staff to attend “A Day in the Life of a Drill Sergeant.” Sign-up sheets for the event were published two months in advance. The Project Director helped to arrange for parking at a local warehouse just outside of the post and used a school bus to provide transportation for the day. Participants took pictures and engaged in social media posts to share their experiences on base. This learning opportunity has become a unique and highly anticipated annual event for RSD2 staff.

Adoption by Platoon
The Fort Jackson School Liaison Officer identified platoons interested in adopting an RSD2 school to develop positive relationships with student and staff. Often, the Platoon Leader had a student or students enrolled in a particular school or a spouse working within the school district. The Platoon Leaders worked with the school’s principal and administration to bring soldiers to the school. At the elementary level, soldiers came to the school to participate in a day-long “STAR” Run, which is similar to school field days. Soldiers engaged students at different stations as they participated in events such as hula-hoop competitions, bean bag toss, track runs, and push-up challenges. At the middle school level, soldiers used their presence as role models to engage in mentoring opportunities for students. The principals, guidance counselors, and school administrators worked diligently to develop and maintain strong partnerships with Fort Jackson and hope to further expand the platoon school adoption program.

Implementation Challenges and Solutions
Changes in leadership at Fort Jackson created both challenges and opportunities for the program. At each change in leadership, RSD2 had to explain the programs, obtain approval to have 25 staff members from the school district on base for the drill-sergeant shadowing day, and arrange to have soldiers leave base to attend events at the district schools. However, this situation provided an opportunity for the new leaders to meet school personnel and understand the district’s role in providing student and community support to military families. Additionally, RSD2 experienced logistical challenges. Some district schools are located farther away from Fort Jackson and Platoon leaders and soldiers have a limited amount of time they are permitted off base. While the district accommodated their schedules as best as possible, the distance from some outlying schools made it difficult to build the program and develop strong bonds between the base and RSD2 schools.
RSD2 also experienced challenges with survey response rates from parents during the first year. Although the survey was electronic and easy to use, the response rate was low. In the following year, RSD2 developed an implementation plan within the schools, making the surveys public at events such as Family Night. Parents also had access to the surveys via computer labs and other electronic devices at these events. These strategies increased access to the survey and provided opportunities for parents to receive assistance in completing the survey.

Lessons Learned
RSD2 identified three important aspects of a successful program: collaboration, persistency, and communication. When first discussing the “A Day in the Life of a Drill Sergeant” program, the School Liaison Officer was supportive; however, there were others on the Fort Jackson base that had concerns of civilian presence in sensitive areas on the military base. Once Fort Jackson understood the district’s commitment of staff to get the full experience of a Drill Sergeant, including arriving at 4:30 am, they became more flexible and accommodating in collaborating with RSD2. When the district realized an elementary-level military support program for students did not exist, they were determined to organize a support program. RSD2 discussed possible options with MCEC, and together, they worked to develop the research-based elementary S2S program.

RESOURCES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Military Family Support</th>
<th><a href="https://www.richland2.org/Departments/Enrollment-Registration/Military-Family-Support">https://www.richland2.org/Departments/Enrollment-Registration/Military-Family-Support</a></th>
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Reflective Questions
1. How did Richland get support for their SEL program from the military personnel at Fort Jackson? How can their experience inform your approach?
2. Survey research always experiences challenges with return rates. What can you put in place that will help mitigate a low return rate from your stakeholder, parent, or student surveys?
3. Why did Richland feel so strongly about the “Day in the Life of a Drill Sergeant” event in their program? What aspect of their SEL programming were they attempting to impact?

MANHATTAN-OGDEN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT 383, KS
Manhattan-Ogden Unified School District 383 (MOUSD) in Kansas encompasses two communities, Manhattan and Ogden, and adjoining areas. The district serves 6,319 students across nine elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The majority of MOUSD is located adjacent to US Army Base Fort Riley. Main Street, located in Ogden, serves as the East gate to the military installation. In 2013, DoDEA awarded MOUSD a grant for “STEM-ing into College and Career Readiness” to motivate students to explore and succeed in STEM coursework, while simultaneously improving their college and career readiness.
**Why the Parent Engagement Strategy?**

Based on the ACT report “The Forgotten Middle” (2008), MOUSD learned that the level of academic achievement that students attain by the eighth grade has a large impact on their college and career readiness after graduation. The report revealed that academic readiness for college and career can be improved with development of successful behaviors between the upper elementary school grades and middle school. To maximize success, interventions need to occur before the students reach high school. Parent engagement, school preparation, and student academic preparation are key components to student college and career readiness. Parents need to know how to assist their child with identifying and encouraging proper educational choices.

**Strategy Impact**

MOUSD created a Parent Engagement Coordinator (PEC) position to engage military-connected students, parents, and families and teach skills linked to college and career readiness. The enhanced support included academic support for military-connected students and ongoing parent and teacher trainings designed to increase effective parent engagement in their child’s education. Students and parents developed skills needed to be successful and learned to use available library and technology resources.

**Parent Engagement Coordinator**

The district and the PEC identified the importance of continued exchange between the students, parents, and the school. The PEC helped to improve communication between the parents and schools, with parent meetings, informational e-mails, phone calls, and letters. The PEC also planned, coordinated, and implemented several parent-focused meetings and events, including: Parent College and Career meetings at every school, STEM District Family Night, and Military Family Night.

**Pre-Act Aspire**

To support college and career readiness, the PEC administered and evaluated the Pre-ACT ASPIRE to students in grades five through eight. The Pre-ACT ASPIRE helps prepare students for high school, college, and future careers. It is used as a counseling tool to monitor a student’s progress and help students and parents understand the importance of college and career planning. The Pre-ACT ASPIRE is accepted by all states.

**Career Profiles**

The PEC used the ACT Profile Career Interest Inventory (ACT Profile) to help students explore various college and career options. In addition to the ACT Profile, the PEC used iON Future, which is an online game-based learning system allowing students to explore and match their interests to various STEM-based professions. The
computerized career program called Occupational Outlook Handbook was also used for career lessons. The PEC then used the resulting scores and information to develop a personalized plan for the student and parents. The personalized plan included course selection and skills needed for both general and STEM-focused careers. The PEC focused on a variety of skills needed for success, including improving study skills and developing library and technology skills. Students were encouraged to become well-rounded individuals by improving their leadership qualities and participating in community service activities. Colleges are no longer looking for simply a 4.0 grade point average and high ACT scores. Colleges now want students with diverse talents, goal-orientated motivation, and high expectations of themselves.

**Implementation Challenges and Solutions**

In the first year, the largest challenge was parent involvement. The schools must continually work to involve parents. For the second year, the Parent Engagement Coordinator increased her presence and went to all the Parent Teacher Conference nights, attended Back to School nights, and had a booth at Manhattan’s “Everyone Counts” program. To help with parent engagement, the PEC worked with teachers, principals, social workers, counselors, and several outside agencies. The PEC worked with the nine elementary schools, two middle schools, and the high school to develop age-appropriate military groups, which focused on social and emotional needs: resiliency, coping, character-building, confidence-building, team-building, deployment, and many other skills. The PEC also worked with the Fort Riley School Liaison Officer for the “Adopt a Soldier” project. In this project, Fort Riley soldiers assist in military groups, classrooms, and fitness days.

The district also experienced challenges with sustainability of the Pre-ACT Aspire. Although the Pre-ACT Aspire College Readiness Test is nationally accepted, the test has increased in price. The DoDEA grant paid for 3 years of data. However, due to the cost of the test, the district will not continue to administer the test following the end of the DoDEA grant.

**Lessons Learned**

Manhattan-Ogden learned several lessons in implementing their program and developing the role of Parent Engagement Coordinator. Effective communication is the most influential aspect of parent engagement. The PEC calls parents directly to check in or follow up after family and school events. Parents respond positively to the phone calls and appreciate the district taking the time to check in with the entire family, not just the student. MOUSD encouraged others interested in successful parent and community engagement programs to make and maintain partnerships with local organizations and military installation personnel. Creating and connecting programs for parents on the military installations and within the schools lead to higher parent and community engagement.
RESOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iON Future</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ionfuture.org">http://www.ionfuture.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A free online game-based learning environment for middle school and early high school young people to explore STEM-based professions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT Profile</td>
<td><a href="https://www.actprofile.org/login">https://www.actprofile.org/login</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free online tool to create interactive best career match graph</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A free online career lesson that helps students find career information on duties, education, training, and pay for hundreds of occupations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reflective Questions

1. What impact did the Parent Engagement Coordinator have on Manhattan-Ogden Unified School District’s strategy implementation?
2. How can your district best incorporate parent engagement to help make students more college and career ready?
3. Who could your district partner with to create a successful parent and community engagement program?

PEER SUPPORT AND MENTORING

Peer support-mentoring programs are increasingly popular at all levels of education. Effective programs are shown to provide benefits to both mentors and mentees, such as an increased sense of connectedness with a school and an increase in confidence and leadership skills. Well-planned, peer-support-mentoring programs may include appropriate screening procedures for mentors and adequate mentor training, and provide ongoing support for mentors and mentees. DoDEA recognizes the importance of peer-support-mentoring programs in the schooling of military-connected youth and encourages this type of programming. The following vignettes showcase the work of two DoDEA grantees that implement peer-support-mentoring programs to improve students’ SEL and academic learning.

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT, AK

In 2014, DoDEA awarded the Anchorage School District (ASD) in Anchorage, Alaska, a grant to work with four district schools, serving Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER). This vignette is about the activities that took place at these schools. The goal for these schools was to increase the positive development of military-connected students and work toward embedding Adventure Leadership into the overall education program. The ASD program is included in this SEL document and is based on their innovative approach to supporting SEL.
### Anceorage, AK
**Project Connect (2014)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Military Installation and Branch</strong></th>
<th>Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Student Population</strong></td>
<td>48,159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools in Project</strong></td>
<td>2 middle schools; 2 high schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military-connected Youth Served</strong></td>
<td>932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Academic Goal</strong></td>
<td>Increase the positive development of military-connected students through participation in <em>Project Connect</em>, as well as embedding Adventure Leadership into participating schools’ overall education programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal Measure</strong></td>
<td>Positive Youth Development Survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Why the Peer Support Strategy?
ASD decided to support SEL to help ease the stress that military-connected students face during periods of transition and heavy deployment. ASD noticed that military students were struggling with the effects of transience, personal and family dynamics, fractured peer social networks, and the disruption of enrolling in new schools during the school year. They decided that the central isolating effect, which encompasses academic, emotional, and social issues, was the lack of connection to the school and community.

ASD’s experience in developing a pilot transition program at one of their high schools demonstrated how peer leadership had an immediate effect in connecting transitioning students to their peers, teachers, school, and a new community. Reports from school counselors, military liaisons, and Military and Family Life staff suggested that alienation, anger, and sadness were subtle and pervasive among military-connected students, but that school adjustment and acclimatization issues exacerbated these traits. Counselors and principals reported how some military students did not feel “seen,” were placed in classes below or beyond their previous level of preparation, and often moved through their entire ASD experience without forming a close new peer group.

### Designing Peer-To-Peer Mentoring Program
In the first year, ASD piloted two programs, the Peer Leadership course and After School Adventure programs. The Peer Leadership course was conducted at Eagle River High School. Students progressed through an experientially based program that emphasized interpersonal relationships and individual growth. The class encouraged the development of self-efficacy, while students acquired a sense of trust and commitment in their classmates. This course also used Challenge by Choice (CbC), which helped students develop cooperation, communication, critical thinking, and trust skills through a variety of activities. In CbC, there is no “level” a student must reach, other than participating and trying his/her best in every activity. The After School Adventure program was piloted at Bartlett High School and Central Middle...
School. Using the Adventure Leadership model, these after-school programs were designed with activities that built community among students and an appreciation for Alaska’s unique setting and opportunities. Activities included rock climbing, mountain biking, Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, canoeing, and long boarding. These programs were designed to fill a void. High schools offered many athletic teams, but few offered physical activity and team-building. Because these clubs were alternatives to the structured season and competitiveness of sports, they fit not only athletic students, but also students who were not sports-minded or who enrolled midway through the academic school year.

In the second year of the program, ASD incorporated the following additional programs:

- Model Facilitator—continued to develop basic skills in inter- and intrapersonal relations, personal leadership styles, and strengths in students.
- Lead Facilitator—emphasized the implementation of the leadership and facilitation skills learned in previous experientially based adventure training courses and the philosophy of CbC.
- Transitions Course—provided peer leadership techniques for students new to the district.
- Adventure 101 P.E.—focused on developing the soft skills necessary to grow socially and emotionally, while participating in Alaska-based outdoor activities.

Having a program primarily run by students and facilitated by teachers worked at ASD. The program used a student inquiry model, where students were asked questions and then led discussions. Teachers talked less, and asked more questions. The students were in charge, rather than the teachers.

**Strategy Impact**

Although the Positive Youth Development (PYD) measure had its limitations, it was administered annually to all military-connected students in the targeted schools who had parental permission. The data showed the highest PYD scores were attained by the participants in the school that had been implementing the peer leadership model for the longest period of time and, specifically, in the classes where the teacher was trained in and worked with the model for the longest time. While the findings on the PYD scores were not statistically significant, they highlighted the potential for programs that are allowed the time to develop both its professionals and nontraditional methods for cultivating student success.

**Implementation Challenges and Solutions**

ASD reported recruitment was successful in some years and challenging in other years. It was problematic at the high school level, where the students had many extra-curricular options to choose from. Students asked for physical education (PE) credit for the after-school program and felt this would attract more students. Unfortunately, this was a difficult request because the teachers who were available and interested in running the program were not necessarily certified as PE teachers. ASD required certified PE teachers to modify the program to allow for PE credit.

Another challenge was turnover in either school administration or program staff. Principals also varied in how receptive they were to the program. Sometimes a teacher who understood the program lacked the time to continue with the program. Principal support and trained, committed teachers were the most important ingredients for success.
Lessons Learned
The most important lesson was the challenge of keeping students after school to participate in the program. It was difficult to find time to accommodate the program within the school day without competing with academics. These strategies are best implemented within the school day, especially at the high school level. Additionally, the techniques used in Project Connect are specialized and require significant professional development. ASD acknowledged that not all educators were open to experiential- and peer-facilitated education. The larger the scale of implementation, the longer it may take to embed these nontraditional approaches into other school or district cultures.

RESOURCES

| Project Connect Website | http://www.asdk12.org/pld/experientiallearning/ |

Reflective Questions
1. Why do you believe peer-to-peer mentoring worked well for Anchorage School District? Could this be successful within your district?
2. How would you help to acclimate your staff to a cultural shift from teacher to peer-run education within your district?
3. Anchorage School District used their geographical location to an advantage in the Adventure Leadership model. How might your district adapt this model to best fit your geographical location?

MADISON CITY SCHOOLS, AL
In 2014, DoDEA awarded Madison City Schools, located in Madison City, Alabama, a grant to work with four district schools, serving the US Army Redstone Arsenal. This vignette highlights the programs implemented at four secondary schools to increase military-connected students’ sense of belonging.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Madison City, AL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SOS - Strategies of Success Mathematics: College and Career Ready (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Installation and Branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Student Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Schools in Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military-connected Youth Served</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Academic Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Measure</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Why the Peer Mentoring Strategy?

Madison City Schools (MCS) recognized the unique needs and challenges that military-connected students face from transitions, relocations, and deployments. Due to BRAC relocations, the military-connected population in MCS increased yearly, thus creating an increased need for a social-emotional support program to improve these students’ social-emotional well-being. After examining student satisfaction indicators on a school climate survey, a prevalent need to provide a peer support system to better serve the social-emotional needs of these students was apparent. Using DoDEA funds, the district established baseline measures for school climate, student acclimation, and students’ social-emotional adjustments at each school. Data to inform grant efforts were collected through a district-generated school climate survey for students in grades 7–12. The results indicated a need to improve school satisfaction for the military-connected students. The baseline data indicated a lack of school involvement and positive peer relationships, and alienation from the school staff and other students.

Designing Peer-to-Peer and Junior Peer-to-Peer Programs

MCS hired a district At-Risk Counselor to oversee the implementation of the SEL goal for the grant. Each school under the grant then formed a school climate team and evaluated the current status of their school climate in order to choose the next course of action. All four groups chose the Challenge Success program as one piece of school climate improvement, because of its focus on reducing student stressors. Challenge Success provides schools and families with the information and strategies they need to create a more balanced and academically fulfilling life for students. Schools involved in the program send full teams to attend intensive conferences, where they work with a coach to design action plans to implement best practices in areas such as curriculum, assessment, homework, school schedule, and a healthy school climate. The next steps are to find S2S and Junior S2S (jS2S) sponsors, choose student members to serve as peer mentors, and have the teams trained. Once the teams are trained, they create a plan to meet with each new student who enters their school, so the new student can begin to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to the student body.

New students were provided with tours of the school and social events in the initial stages of the program to minimize any feelings of isolation that they might experience. New students also were invited to join a S2S or jS2S group from day 1 that meets once per month. This automatically included new students in an extracurricular student group; this provided students not only with a feeling of being connected to a group, the group itself provided the new students with a place to share experiences with others in similar positions.

Strategy Impact

Military-connected students in middle and high schools were given the Colorado Education Institute 2014 Perception Survey. This provided a snapshot of the percentage of students who had a positive perception of the climate in their learning environment. New students were surveyed about how effective the S2S team was in making them feel connected to the overall student body. Sign-in sheets and meeting notes were also collected from the S2S teams.
MCS has seen a steady increase in the percentages of military-connected students with a positive school climate perception.

**Implementation Challenges and Solutions**
When establishing the S2S programs, MCS used military-connected sponsors to aid in a smooth implementation of the program. Challenges came from the increased number of military-connected students and the popularity of the programs. In one school, increased enrollment in the S2S program created a need for an additional sponsor. To ensure that all students received the benefits of the program, each S2S member chose a committee to serve (social, welcoming, service, etc.) and each sponsor worked with two committees and collaborated on certain projects. This provided each team member with the adult support and supervision for his or her role in S2S. However, this was not possible at every school, so there were ongoing discussions about where this would be feasible and where caps on the number of students could be imposed. The district overall is proactive when applying for grants and looking for additional opportunities to fund the implementation of the program in all 11 district schools.

**Lessons Learned**
MCS has learned it is beneficial to have military-connected S2S sponsors. It is difficult to understand the emotions of military-connected students if you too have not experienced similar situations. Military-connected sponsors are also an excellent resource for program implementation. In one school, the S2S program unintentionally excluded a large number of students due to schedule restraints; MCS altered the program schedule to accommodate the additional students.

**RESOURCES**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Success</td>
<td><a href="http://www.challengesuccess.org">www.challengesuccess.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student2Student (S2S)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.militarychild.org/parents-and-students/programs/student-2-student">www.militarychild.org/parents-and-students/programs/student-2-student</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado’s Student Perception Survey</td>
<td><a href="http://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/studentsurvey/">www.coloradoedinitiative.org/studentsurvey/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflective Questions**
1. **Why is it important to evaluate the status of your school climate?**
2. **Madison City Schools highlighted the importance of military-connected sponsors. Do you have access to potential military-connected sponsors within your school district?**
3. **How might your district benefit from implementing a peer mentoring program?**
CONCLUSION

With ESSA requiring states to include a nonacademic indicator when measuring school performance, it is an important time to address social and emotional learning. The Aspen Institute [https://www.aspeninstitute.org/](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/) convened the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development in November 2016, charging them with advancing the notion that success in schools means integrating social, emotional, and academic development (Blad, 2016). We must recognize the need to support the whole child as students move through our schools under our care, especially military-connected youth, who experience unique life stressors through frequent transitions and multiple deployments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL DISTRICT</th>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>STRATEGY SUPPORTS</th>
<th>LESSONS LEARNED/TIPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hardin County Schools, KY (2012)</td>
<td>Behavior Management</td>
<td>Increase the level of targeted behavior programs and supports for struggling middle and high school students</td>
<td>Alternative Behavior Educator (ABE) Coping and Support Training (CAST)</td>
<td>There are many factors that contribute to a student’s success (or failure). It is important to account for as many of those factors as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Jefferson Central School District, NY (2014)</td>
<td>Behavior Management</td>
<td>Improve student engagements in grades 3 through 5</td>
<td>McArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status Responsive Classrooms</td>
<td>Incorporate Responsive Classroom language and training through the entire school system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Unified School District, CA (2015)</td>
<td>Counseling Services</td>
<td>Increase SEL supports for students and families</td>
<td>Zero8hundred San Diego Military Family Collaborative (SDMFC) SAY San Diego Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLC)</td>
<td>Keep lines of communication and collaboration open between all stakeholders throughout the development and implementation process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarksville-Montgomery County School System, TN (2013)</td>
<td>Parent and Community Engagement</td>
<td>Improve reading proficiency (using parent engagement techniques)</td>
<td>TNReady</td>
<td>Treat family and community members as partners in program implementation and seek their input on the program mission and outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richland School District Two, SC (2012)</td>
<td>Parent and Community Engagement</td>
<td>Increase support to youth</td>
<td>California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) Elementary Student2Student</td>
<td>Collaboration, persistency, and communication are key factors for a successful program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manhattan-Ogden Unified School District 383, KS (2015)</td>
<td>Parent and Community Engagement</td>
<td>Increase student’s effective engagement</td>
<td>Parent Survey Parent Engagement Coordinator Pre-ACT Aspire ACT Profile Career Interest Inventory ION Future</td>
<td>Effective communication is the most influential aspect of parent engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL DISTRICT</td>
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<td>GOAL</td>
<td>STRATEGY SUPPORTS</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage School District, AK (2014)</td>
<td>Peer Support and Mentoring</td>
<td>Increase the positive youth development (PYD) of military-connected students</td>
<td>Positive Youth Development survey</td>
<td>These strategies are best implemented within the school day, especially at the high school level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison City Schools, AL (2014)</td>
<td>Peer Support and Mentoring</td>
<td>To increase 7–12 military-connected students’ sense of belonging in a positive school climate</td>
<td>Colorado Education Institute 2014 Perception Survey Student2Student Junior Student2Student</td>
<td>Military-connected sponsors are a good resource for program implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


