

2016
Executive Summary of the
Interim Activity and Work of the

**Virginia Council on the Interstate
Compact on Educational Opportunity
for Military Children**

Presented to
the Governor
and the General Assembly

January 2017

**Members of the
Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact
on Educational Opportunity for Military Children**

as of December 19, 2016

The Honorable M. Kirkland Cox, Virginia House of Delegates (Council Chairman)

Dr. Jill Gaitens, Community Affairs Leader, Military Child Education Coalition

Dr. John B. Gordon, III, Director of Administrative Services, Fredericksburg City Public Schools

Secretary John Harvey, Jr., Admiral (USN Retired), Virginia Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs

Dorothy McAuliffe, First Lady of Virginia (Governor's designee)

The Honorable Mamie Locke, Senate of Virginia

Dr. Aaron C. Spence, Superintendent, Virginia Beach City Public Schools

Dr. Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction

Brad Williams, School Counseling Director, Tabb High School

Statutory Requirements for the Executive Summary

The *Code of Virginia*, § 22.1-361 states:

In accordance with the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, there is hereby created the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, hereinafter referred to in this section as the "Virginia Council."... The chairman of the Virginia Council shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an annual executive summary of the interim activity and work of the Virginia Council no later than the first day of each regular session of the General Assembly. The executive summary shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (Virginia Council) was created in 2009 to consider any and all matters related to the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The Compact seeks to remove barriers to educational success imposed on children of military families because of frequent moves and deployment of their parents. The Compact addresses such issues as timely enrollment and placement, on-time graduation, and sharing of information between states to ensure a smooth educational transition for dependents of military families as they move from and to other states.

Virginia is home to some of the nation's largest and most important military installations, so it is not surprising that the Commonwealth's schools educate more military children than most states. As of September 2016, the Defense Manpower Data Center estimated that there are 73,017 school age military-associated children of active duty members in Virginia.

The average military student faces transition challenges more than twice during high school, and most military children will attend six to nine different school systems from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The Compact seeks to make transitions easier for the children of military families so that they are afforded the same opportunities for educational success as other children and are not penalized or delayed in achieving their educational goals.

A continued focus for the Virginia Council in 2016 was identifying the needs of key stakeholders group working to ease the needs of military-connected children in our schools. The Council received feedback during all meeting held. This feedback enabled the Council and the newly appointed VDOE Military Student and Family Specialist to better prepare initiatives that will ultimately support professionals and agencies dedicated to easing the transitional challenges of military connected children across the Commonwealth.

This executive summary provides an overview of the work of the Council in 2016.

Virginia Council Meetings

The Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children held three public meetings in 2016. The meetings were attended by school liaison officers, school representatives, military officials, educational organizations, Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff, and other members of the public. When possible, the meetings are also streamed live on the Department's Web page and recorded for archival purposes. The meetings' agendas have covered a number of issues related to the education of children of military families in the Commonwealth. Additional details about each meeting are included below.

- *January 6, 2016 Virginia Council Meeting
Richmond, Virginia*

Military-connected school counselors in Virginia Beach City Public Schools described their role, as well as the impact and challenges faced by military-connected students. The challenges and possible solutions include:

1. The acceptance of assessments from sending states for verified credits – many students face challenges when they have not completed assessments in the sending state that can be accepted for verified credit in Virginia, so they are required to take SOL tests for classes taken one, two, three, sometimes four years ago. The counselors suggested increasing the awareness of substitute exams, compiling information on acceptable assessments from other states, and issuing waivers for students required to complete an SOL test from a class taken prior to the previous school year.
2. Government requirement – Virginia is one of the only states to require a year-long government course. The counselors suggested students utilize Virtual Virginia upon their transition.
3. Mid-year transfers – many students are required to transfer before the end of the Virginia school year to a school where the school year has already or is very close to concluding, making the issuance of credit a major challenge. The counselors suggested school divisions provide students the opportunity to complete work before their transition, rather than during or after their move. They also encouraged school divisions to waive longer periods of time.
4. Variation of math standards from state to state – the counselors encouraged mathematics teachers to understand there are differences between state standards for mathematics, and propose the creation of an online program (modules) to fill in knowledge gaps.
5. In-state college tuition – many students begin the college application process while they are considered “in-state” because their parent is stationed in Virginia, but by the time they attend school, they are no longer considered “in-state” due to new orders for their parents. The counselors suggested requiring colleges to honor the orders of service members at the time of the application, in addition to the orders at the time of enrollment.

The Council also discussed virtual learning options for military-connected students, including Virtual Virginia, multi-division online providers, and local school division online programs. Virtual learning can be a resource when students transition mid-year or transition to a school division with fewer offerings than their current track.

- *May 23, 2016 Virginia Council Meeting
Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek – Fort Story, Norfolk, Virginia*

The May meeting marked the retirement of Captain Hughlett and his last meeting. The Council also presented a resolution to the late Senator John C. Miller for his contributions to the council.

Captain Hughlett provided an update from the Virginia Military Advisory Council (VMAC). Captain Hughlett noted that the April VMAC meeting provided school liaison officers with a valuable opportunity to gain access to their commanding officers and increase communication.

Mrs. Melissa Luchau, military family education liaison, noted the challenges faced by service members and their spouses who are seeking employment as teachers. Virginia recently signed the *State Pledge to Support Military Spouse Teachers*, an initiative championed by Dr. Jill Biden. Mrs. Patty Pitts, assistant superintendent for teacher education and licensure, provided the Council a briefing on teacher licensure opportunities for service members and spouses.

Mrs. Pitts also provided information on HB 261 (Yancey) of the 2016 General Assembly which provides that the Board of Education “shall provide for the issuance of a provisional license, valid for a period not to exceed three years, to any former member of the Armed Forces of the United States or the Virginia National Guard who has received an honorable discharge and has the appropriate level of experience or training but does not meet the requirements for a renewable license” (notwithstanding any provision of the law to the contrary).

The Council also discussed the Norfolk Convening made possible through a partnership with the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). This convening brought together leaders from the City of Norfolk, Norfolk Public Schools and the military community in the Norfolk area.

Three primary objectives were met during the event. These included;

- addressing the needs of military-connected students in the City of Norfolk, at all grade levels, in support of their **college, career and life readiness**. Considerations included academic life, social-emotional well-being and transitions
- identifying and capitalizing on existing **assets, partnerships and resources, and**
- encouraging future **partnerships** between the City of Norfolk, the Norfolk military installations and Norfolk Public Schools.

- *December 19, 2016 Virginia Council Meeting
Richmond, Virginia*

The December meeting included the welcoming of newly appointed members to the Council. These new members included Virginia State Senator Mamie Locke and Virginia Secretary for Veterans and Defense Affairs Admiral John Harvey, (USN retired). It also marked Melissa Luchau’s departure from her position as the Virginia Military Family Education Liaison and the welcoming of Daniel Dunham as the new Virginia Student and Family Liaison.

Mr. Dunham provided the Council with three presentations which included a debrief of the Military Interstate Children's Commission Annual Meeting, Report on the Virginia Military School Liaison Officer Summit and a discussion on the goals he believes need to be considered by the Council.

These included:

Priority Issues for Military Students and Families:

- Residency While in Temporary Housing
- Verified Credit Support
- Accessibility to Specialty Programs
- Mid-Year and End of Year Support

Needs of School Divisions

- Annual Military Awareness and Interstate Compact Training
- Guidance Around Verified Credits /Testing
- Guidance for Mid-Year and End of Year Support
- Impact Aide: Source Checks

Needs of School Liaisons

- Annual Training on State, School and Community Policy and Supports
- Routine Reports on Issues Concerning Military-Connected Students that reach VDOE
- Updated Policy Statement(s) from VDOE on Interstate Compact and other Policies Impacting Military- Connected Students
- VDOE Support with Impact Aide and Marketing Program Support Efforts

The meeting also included a presentation provided by Joan Barrett, director of grants for MCEC, concerning the upcoming Virginia Convening. Ms. Barrett shared that this convening will involve a gathering of thought leaders from education, community, and military leadership who work collaboratively to develop strategic and action plans that ensure the community's support of its military-connected children and families. The facilitated process will guide participants in the development of a refined set of action steps to address challenges faced in the areas of academics, advocacy and access to opportunity.

All presentations and meeting materials are available online at www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_family/military/va_council/.

Military Family Education Liaison

Pursuant to § 22.1-361, the Department of Education employs a military family education liaison to provide staff support to the Virginia Council and to assist military families and the state in facilitating the implementation of the Compact.

The military family education liaison provides for the coordination among state agencies of government, local education agencies, and military installations concerning the state's participation in, and compliance with, the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. A key function of the position is to assist military families and local education agencies in implementation of the Compact to ensure a smooth academic transition for military children in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The liaison works with families and school divisions to resolve problems related to educational records and enrollment, course placement, graduation requirements, and other important issues. The liaison also serves as a policy consultant on issues related to military transfer students, including drafting guidance documents for distribution to school divisions, maintaining communication with school liaison officers, providing training on the Interstate Compact, and maintaining the military resources' web pages.

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Dissemination of Information

Through a variety of mediums, the Department, on behalf of the Virginia Council, has disseminated timely and relevant information related to the education of military children to school divisions, school liaison officers, military organizations and other important stakeholders.

Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps school liaison officers play an invaluable role in sharing information about the Interstate Compact with military families and Virginia educators. School liaison officers (SLOs) connect military families with educational opportunities and critical information about state and local school laws, policies and standards. SLOs work in partnership with local school divisions and the leaders of military commands and installations to enhance the public-school experiences of military children. They equip school division staff with resources and information about the challenges faced by military children while working in partnership with schools and community organizations to raise awareness about the needs of these students. School liaison officers promote parental involvement and assist parents, teachers and administrators and commanders in troubleshooting and finding solutions to education-related problems.

The military family education liaison is in regular communication with the SLOs via e-mail, phone, and the Virginia Council meetings. These communications serve as opportunities to discuss issues with implementation of the Interstate Compact and share updated resources.

The Department, on behalf of the Virginia Council, has developed and maintained Web pages dedicated to the Military Compact (http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_family/military/index.shtml) with resources for military families and educators. The site features guidance documents to help school divisions interpret key provisions of the Compact and training materials, including printable brochures and guides. The resource pages contain links to pertinent Virginia laws related to the education of

military children, as well as contact information for school liaisons. The Web site highlights best practices of school divisions to assist military-connected children, and provides links to numerous military-affiliated organizations for additional resources. The Department has also maintained a Web page dedicated to the Virginia Council that includes the Council's meeting schedule, agendas and minutes from previous meetings, and presentations given at Council meetings.

With resources provided by the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3), the Department, on behalf of the Virginia Council, has distributed guidance documents to school liaison officers and school divisions that can be used in trainings for school division staff and in meetings with military families. The resources include:

- a 16-page document, *Guidance for Military Families with Students in Special Education*, which provides information and answers to questions that military families with school-aged children might have about special education programs in Virginia public schools. Topics include enrollment, special education services, parental consent in Virginia, Section 504, dispute resolution and procedural safeguards.
- a *Desk Reference* for the *Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children: Compact Rules* which is shared with school liaison officers as they work with educators in implementing the provisions of the Interstate Compact; and
- a brightly-colored pamphlet, *Guide for Parents, School Officials and Public Administrators*, which provides information to families, military leaders and educators about the Interstate Compact



The Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3) also provided states with posters to promote the Interstate Compact. The posters were distributed to schools with large military populations to welcome military-connected students and make families aware of the Interstate Compact.

The military family education liaison, on behalf of the Virginia Council, has provided training on the Compact and the Virginia Council to thousands of educators, military families, and other interested stakeholders since its creation in 2009. SLOs throughout Virginia frequently provide training on the Interstate Compact to educators in their region as well.

Military Student Identifier

In 2014 the Virginia Council unanimously adopted a statement in support of a military student identifier:

The Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children supports the implementation of a military student identifier in Virginia as a means for local school divisions to collect information on military-connected children enrolled in the school division, beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. Further, the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children encourages the use of such data by local, state, and federal entities to enhance the funding and quality of services provided to serve the unique needs of military-connected children residing in the Commonwealth.

The 2015 Virginia General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed, legislation (HB 2373 Ramadan and SB 1354 Reeves) to require the “identification of newly enrolled uniformed services-connected students by local school divisions.” School divisions were provided flexibility in how they identify the students and collect the data. The data is collected three times per year, via VDOE’s Student Record Collection. VDOE communicated with school divisions about implementing the military student identifier through Superintendent’s Memos and webinars hosted by the VDOE Office of Educational Information Management. Students are “coded” as either not military connected, active duty connected, or reserve connected.

In total, 121 school divisions reported data regarding military-connected student(s) in the division. 13 school divisions did not report any military-connected students during the fall 2016 data collection period, however this should not necessarily be construed as not serving any military-connected students.

The Virginia Council and the Virginia Department of Education will continue encouraging school divisions to identify and reach out to the military-connected students in their schools. The identifier serves as an important tool in connecting military-connected children with the counselors, services, and resources for academic, social, and emotional support. The identifier also provides data for becoming eligible for critical funds for schools to further meet the needs of uniformed services-connected students residing in the Commonwealth.

Top Issues

Throughout 2016, several issues related to the transition of military-connected students surfaced as reoccurring topics to address. The Council will continue to discuss these important issues with its partners, and provide leadership in finding solutions to these challenges.

Military Student Identifier

For several years, the Virginia Council acknowledged the challenge of identifying military-connected children in Virginia schools, since enrollment procedures vary from school division to school division. Since identifying these children is important to connecting military-connected children with counselors, services, and resources for academic, social, and emotional support, the

Virginia Council supported the 2015 legislative requirement for school divisions to identify military-connected students. As we analyze the results from the data collection, and school divisions streamline their processes for collecting the data, we will continue the work on how best use this important data.

Professional Development for Educators

While professional development opportunities and training on the Interstate Compact continued throughout the year, there is still a need for more training due to high turnover and the range of educators who work with military-connected children. The Military Family Educational Liaison continues to field calls from military connected parents and educators in the field on issues directly linked to the Interstate Compact. Professional development and outreach efforts must therefore continue to ensure the Compact is being implemented with high fidelity.

Many provisions of the Interstate Compact provide for local authority and flexibility, so additional professional development on the Interstate Compact should be focused on educators who interact directly with military-connected children -- school counselors and teachers -- and the school division staff who implement local operating procedures. Some of the issues that continually present challenges are:

- awarding of verified credit for assessments completed successfully in the sending state - The Department has issued guidance that if military-connected students have taken and passed an exit or end-of-course test for graduation or accountability purposes in their sending states, they should be awarded the corresponding verified credit in Virginia and not be required to take the Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment for that course. Despite this guidance, many students are told they must take multiple SOL tests when they transition to Virginia schools. The Council and Department will continue to get information out to school counselors regarding this issue so that counselors know to ask students about any previous assessments taken, and families come to school armed with the pertinent information.
- waiving of coursework required for graduation when similar work has been completed successfully in the sending state – Too many military transfer students are being told they need to complete unique Virginia coursework, when similar coursework or credit has been completed in the sending state.
- placement in gifted programs – The Interstate Compact provides that “the receiving state school shall initially honor placement of the student in educational programs based on current educational assessments conducted at the school in the sending state or participation/placement in like programs in the sending state.” While the intent of the Interstate Compact is to facilitate the student placement process through which military-connected students are not disadvantaged by variations in attendance requirements, scheduling, sequencing, grading, course content, or assessment, military families often struggle to have their children placed in gifted programs because they are told the

program entrance requirements in Virginia are different than the sending state, and local school divisions have authority with regard to “gifted” education.

- Guidance regarding residency and temporary housing. Some military families find themselves unable to enroll in the school division they ultimately with reside in because they are awaiting closing of a house or vacancy in a rental property. These families therefore have no choice but to reside in temporary housing. This occurrence places additional stress on students who must therefore undergo an additional school transition once the permanent residence is secured. Some division school board residency verification policies make it challenging for parents in these situations.

Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission

The Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission (MIC3) is the national organization that oversees the implementation of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The Department, on behalf of the Virginia Council, is in regular communication with MIC3 to disseminate policy information related to the Military Compact. The military family education liaison also works with Commission staff in some cases where a military family’s transfer in or out of Virginia schools needs assistance.

The military family education liaison attended the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunities for Military Children as Virginia’s commissioner’s designee. The Annual Meeting provided valuable opportunities for the military family education liaison to dialogue with commissioners in other states about how the Interstate Compact is implemented, and share best practices for navigating challenging issues. Topics for discussion included MIC3’s strategic plan goals and action plan, Rule changes discussions on the issue of temporary housing and redefining of the term “active duty”, State Council set-up and maintenance, and state council selection of military representatives to the state Councils.

Conclusion

Throughout 2016, the Virginia Council has taken on many important issues related to the education of children of military families. The Council provided numerous training opportunities and resources to educators and military families on the provisions of the Compact. Despite progress, more work is needed to ensure that educators and military families alike are aware of the Interstate Compact, and the flexibilities it offers. Ongoing professional development for those working with military-connected students is needed to ensure military-connected students’ transition to and from Virginia is as seamless as possible.

In nearly every community in Virginia, there are children with parents or guardians on active duty with the armed forces. While their parents honorably serve our nation and our Commonwealth, we should recognize military children’s contributions and celebrate their spirit. The Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children is proud to recognize the service of our military servicemen and women, their families and their children.

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