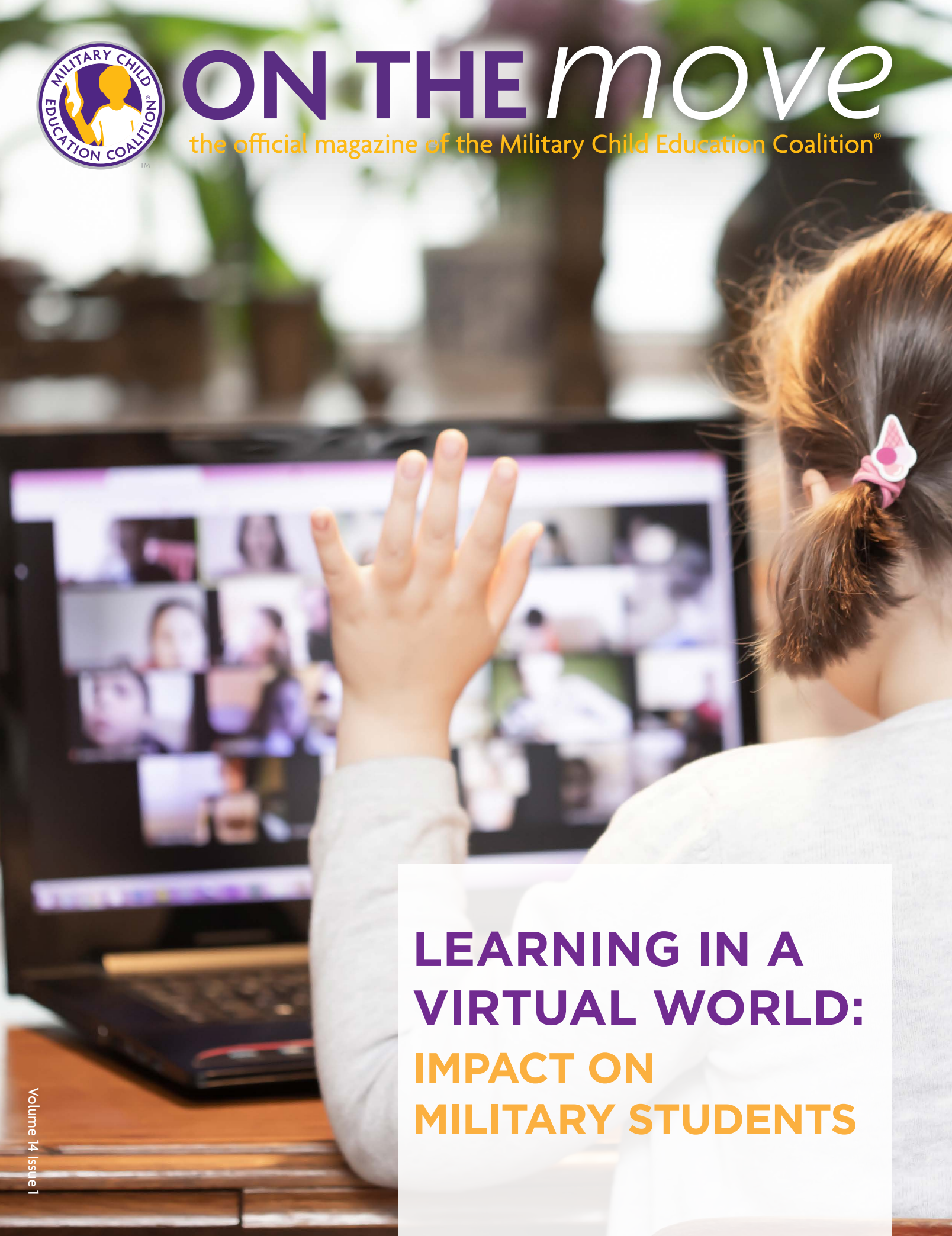




ON THE *move*

the official magazine of the Military Child Education Coalition®



**LEARNING IN A
VIRTUAL WORLD:
IMPACT ON
MILITARY STUDENTS**

01. OUR VISION

Every military-connected child is college, workforce, and life-ready.

02. OUR MISSION

MCEC supports all military-connected children by educating, advocating, and collaborating to resolve education challenges associated with the military lifestyle.

03. OUR VALUES

MCEC remains committed to meeting our Mission and Vision through collaboration, integrity relevance and service.



ACHIEVEMENTS



Military Child Education Coalition®, MCEC®, and associated programs, institutes, trademarks and design elements are owned and licensed by the Military Child Education Coalition. TM/© 2020 Military Child Education Coalition. All Rights Reserved. Reproduction of this magazine, in whole or in part, is authorized with appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Military Child Education Coalition®

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ★

Officers

Admiral (Ret) Cecil Haney, Chairman
Barbara Day, Vice Chairman/Treasurer
Brigadier General (Ret) Earl Simms,
Vice Chairman/Secretary
Anne Haston, Vice Chairman
Kathy Killea, Vice Chairman
Patricia Lester, MD, Vice Chairman

Members

Laura Aquilino
René Carbone Bardorf
Patrick J. Bingham, PhD
Renee Bostick
Cortez K. Dial, EdD
The Honorable Chet Edwards
Lucy Reilly Fitch
Robert P. Grimesey, Jr., EdD
Major General (Ret) Robert Ivany, PhD
Barbara Flora Livingston
Mary Claire Murphy
Edward Van Buren
Eric Waldo, JD
Nancy Wilson

Members Emeriti

Cathryn Franks
Brigadier General (Ret) Robert Gaylord
General (Ret) Benjamin Griffin
William Harrison, EdD
Lieutenant General (Ret) Don Jones
Mary Keller, EdD
James Mitchell, EdD
Kathleen O'Beirne
Robert Ray
Mary Jo Reimer
Sandy Schwartz
General (Ret) Thomas A. Schwartz
Patricia Shinseki
Lieutenant General (Ret) H.G. "Pete" Taylor
Zoe Trautman
Joyce Ward

SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD

Executive Committee

Colonel (Ret) Stephen J. Cozza, MD, Co-Chairman
Patricia Lester, MD, Co-Chairman
Colonel Eric M. Flake, MD, FAAP
Richard M. Lerner, PhD
Ronald S. Palomares-Fernandez, PhD
Paula K. Rauch, MD

Members

Sarah L. Friedman, PhD
Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD
Leanne K. Knobloch, PhD
Colonel (Ret) Keith M. Lemmon, MD, FAAP
Jacqueline V. Lerner, PhD
Gregory A. Leskin, PhD
Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, PhD
Ann S. Masten, PhD, LP
Michael D. Matthews, PhD
Daniel F. Perkins, PhD

NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Ms. Charlene Austin
The Honorable Valerie Baldwin
Ms. Patricia "Tosh" Barron
The Honorable Carolyn H. Becraft
General (Ret) and Mrs. B.B. Bell (Katie)
Major General (Ret) Charles Bolden, Jr.
Mr. Scott Bousum
Dr. Chuck Brooks
The Honorable John Carter and Mrs. Carter (Erika)
General (Ret) and Mrs. George Casey (Sheila)
General (Ret) and Mrs. Peter Chiarelli (Beth)
Lieutenant General (Ret) and Mrs. Kurt Cichowski (Laura)
Dr. Daniel Domenech
Ms. Lea Ann Edwards
Lieutenant General (Ret) and Mrs. Phil Ford (Kris)
General (Ret) Tommy R. Franks
Vice Admiral (Ret) and Mrs. William French (Monika)
Ms. Regina Pedigo Galvin
The Honorable Pete Geren
Mr. Roy Gibson
The Honorable Robert L. Gordon III
Major General (Ret) Gus L. Hargett, Jr.
Dr. Alissa E. Harrison
Mr. David G. Henry, Esq
Rear Admiral (Ret) and Mrs. Leendert Hering (Sharon)
Colonel (Ret) and Mrs. Anthony R. Hernandez (Jennifer)
General (Ret) James T. Hill and Dr. Toni Hill
Lieutenant General (Ret) and Mrs. William Ingram (Lil)
Ms. Marianne Ivany
Ms. Holly Jones
Mr. Gary Knell
General (Ret) and Mrs. Leon J. LaPorte (Judy)
General (Ret) and Mrs. Craig McKinley (Cheryl)
Mr. Drayton McLane, Jr.
Lieutenant General (Ret) and Mrs. Thomas Metz (Pam)
Major General (Ret) and Mrs. Paul Mock (Karen)
Dr. Robert Muller
General (Ret) and Mrs. Richard Myers (Mary Jo)
The Honorable James Peake and Mrs. Peake (Janice)
General (Ret) Dennis J. Reimer
Mr. Reginald Robinson
Mr. Gilbert Sanborn
Dr. Stefanie Sanford
General (Ret) and Mrs. Norton Schwartz (Suzie)
Mr. James H. Shelton III
Ms. Barbara A. Thompson
Lieutenant General (Ret) George J. Trautman III
Dr. P. Uri Treisman
Mr. and Mrs. Robert Utley (Ann)
The Honorable Rosemary Freitas Williams



MCEC STAFF

Rebecca I. Porter, PhD
President and Chief Executive Officer
COL (Ret) John L. Ballantyne
Senior Vice President/Chief Operating Officer
Cindy Simerly
Vice President, Fund Development
Annette Farmer, JD
Vice President, Programs and Curriculum
Dalena Kanouse
Senior Director, National Capital Region
Laura Cayton
Executive Assistant and Speaker's Bureau
Lee Ann Deal, CFRE
Director, Foundation Relations
Shellie M. Campos, PHR, SHRM-CP
Director, Human Resources
Robert Frazier
Director, Marketing and Communications
Juan Garcia, CPA
Comptroller
Debra Longley
Program Manager, Student Initiatives
Helen Mowers
Instructional Systems Design Manager
Ivan Geter
Member Services Coordinator
Judy Glennon
Program Manager, Parent Initiatives
Kaci McCarley
Program Manager, Professional Development
Tara Gleason, M.Ed.
Program Manager, Military Student Transition Consultants (MSTC)
Stephanie Young
Chief Technology Officer
Denise Montana
Chief of Logistics and Retail

ON THE MOVE

Kimberly Blas, Graphic Designer
Laura Cayton, Co-Editor
Shellie Campos, Co-Editor

12



NAVIGATING CHANGE

The MCEC Response to COVID-19

32



CLOVER PARK LEADS THE WAY

For Special Needs Children

- 06 Message from Chairman of the Board
- 08 Letter from the President and CEO
- 10 Character Corner
with Dr. Michael D. Matthews
- 12 Navigating Change
The MCEC Response to COVID-19
- 13 The COVID-19 Military Support
Initiative - A Collaborative Effort
- 15 USAA's Military Family Relief Initiative
Sponsors New MCEC lending library
- 16 SchoolQuest: a Gift from
The USAA Foundation
- 18 ¡Bienvenidos to Parent to Parent
en Espanol!
- 20 Military Student Consultant
- 22 Working together to Benefit
Military-Connected Students
- 24 Purple Star School Initiative
- 26 Military Kids NOW Survey
- 28 Parental Advocacy in Special Education
During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- 31 My Greatest Challenge
- 32 Clover Park Leads the Way
For Special Needs Children

contents

Demystifying Autism for Military Families: Debunking Some Common Myths Regarding Autism 34

Stories of A Caregiver 38

Chuy the Blessor

Hercules

My Son Bailey

Another Memorial Day: It's Time for Military Suicides to be Recognized

A Wounded Warrior's Invisible Child

Each Donor Counts: Philanthropy Driving Support to Military Kids 46

Talking to Your Kids about World News 48

Looking to the Future 50

Capital C for Coalition & Cohen 52

MCEC's First Virtual Education Summit Inspires Collaboration 53

To Make A Difference, Leave a Footprint 54

The views and opinions expressed in articles appearing in On the Move are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Military Child Education Coalition.

38



CAREGIVER STORIES

Stories that find a target in our hearts -- and awaken us to our own purpose

46



EACH DONOR COUNTS:

Philanthropy Driving Support to Military Kids

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

Welcome to this edition of *On The Move*. Allow me to take this opportunity to let you know what an honor and privilege it is to serve as the new Chairman of the Board for the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). Although I have not been in this position long, coming on board this past July, I am a huge supporter of MCEC and its mission. As the father of three children who grew up during the course of my Navy career, I know full well the need for, and the value of, the MCEC organization. I know the difference that MCEC is making in the lives of our military-connected children and could not be prouder of the positive impact this organization has made and continues to make.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my predecessor, General Will Fraser (USAF, Ret) for his leadership and commitment to MCEC these past four years of highly successful mission accomplishment. I also thank our committed Board of Directors who have contributed boundless strategic capital through their leadership, time, financial resources, networks and skills, all of which measurably contribute to MCEC mission success.

I have been thoroughly impressed by the agility and responsiveness of MCEC, given the challenges of the the COVID-19 environment. From curating and posting a plethora of timely and relevant online resources to converting trainings and workshops to virtual delivery, MCEC did not miss a beat in supporting our students, their parents, and education professionals.

One of the unfortunate fallouts of this pandemic was the cancellation of our flagship advocacy and outreach event, the 2020 National Training Seminar (NTS) this past July, given concern for the health and safety of all those who normally attend. I do look forward to meeting you at our next NTS, July 19-21, 2021. I encourage you to save the date and make plans to participate.

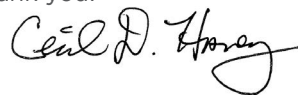
In lieu of this year's cancelled NTS, however, we held a virtual Education Summit, November 17-18, 2020, with the theme of *"Mission Steady, Future Ready: Meeting the Educational Needs of Military Children in a Changing Environment"*. With your participation and feedback coming out of the Education Summit, MCEC will be well

positioned to respond in the years ahead with continued delivery of high-quality programs and services to meet the needs of military-connected students, parents, and professionals.

A featured article in this Fall issue is about the Purple Star School Designation Program. MCEC has committed itself to become the national advocate that encourages states and school districts to establish Purple Star School programs. A Purple Star School designation lets military parents - whether they are on Active Duty, the National Guard or Reserves, know that a school is dedicated to helping their child gain the educational skills necessary to be college, workforce and life-ready. It signals that a school also supports the social and emotional well-being of military children adjusting to new schools and the absence of a parent during deployment.

I will close by thanking all those who support MCEC and its mission to support all military-connected children by educating, advocating, and collaborating to resolve education challenges associated with the military lifestyle. Without your continued generous support, accomplishing our mission would not be possible. Through the confidence and donations of individuals, corporations, and foundations, we are able to continue to pursue the mission of MCEC **...for the sake of the child.**

Thank you!



Cecil Haney
Admiral, United States Navy (Retired)
Chairman, Military Child Education Coalition

MISSION STEADY, FUTURE READY!



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CEO

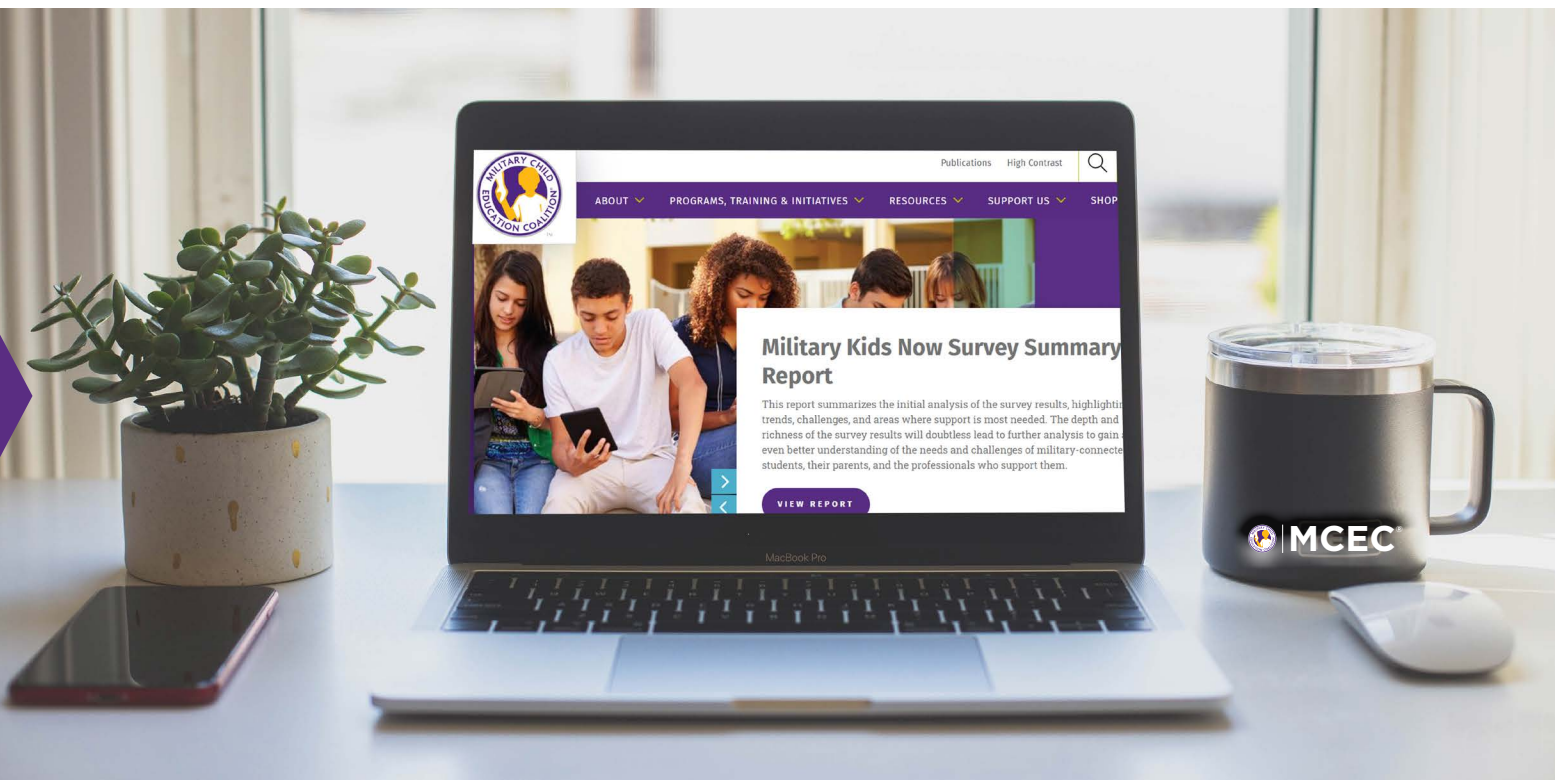
Since the first week of September 2019, I have been on the job as the “new” President and CEO of MCEC. I had watched Dr. Mary Keller in the role for decades – and she made it look almost effortless to guide the MCEC ship, foster new partnerships, and address the education needs of thousands of military-connected children. I was excited and a little intimidated to take the reins.

Still, I had a plan for the path MCEC could take to continue on its upward trajectory. I wanted to increase our virtual offerings, make our content more accessible, and broaden our recognition. My conversations with then Chair of the MCEC Board of Directors, General (Ret) Will Fraser, and the executive leadership of the organization confirmed my intuition that delivering more of our content online would be critical. I was fortunate in those early months to get great guidance from Gen (Ret) Fraser and the MCEC senior leadership. They were unanimously supportive of increasing our digital platform, but also cautioned me that it would be a difficult change for the organization to embrace.



We proceeded with undertakings that had been planned or were a part of the MCEC routine: began advocacy work on behalf of military children with Special Education needs, prepared the *Military Kids NOW Survey* for distribution in February of 2020, pulled together the Spring edition of *On the Move*, set the final agenda and speaker line-up for the National Training Seminar (NTS) to occur in July – as it had for 20 years. Everything was moving along smoothly despite my steep learning curve, thanks to an incredibly competent and professional staff. We even began work with a consultant who specialized in strategic planning for nonprofit organizations. Then COVID-19 happened.

On March 13, 2020, I called Gen (Ret) Fraser and told him I thought we should close the MCEC headquarters building in Harker Heights, Texas. Even though central Texas had not yet been hit hard by the virus, my background in public health told me it was only a matter of time. Jack Ballantyne, the MCEC Senior Vice President and COO convened the staff and told them that it would be our last day in the office for the foreseeable future. The staff started preparing to work from home, and our Director of HR, Shellie Campos, prepared telework agreements for everyone. We even found ways to keep the shipping personnel meaningfully engaged



and able to safely do their jobs. I felt so proud of the professionalism and spirit of the MCEC staff. But there was more to come.

In the coming days and weeks, our Program Managers led their staffs in pivoting training and workshops to online delivery. They reached out to our partners and our stakeholders to ensure we were meeting the needs of military students. The staff was able to stand up and catalog our COVID-19 response efforts on our website under the apt name of *Navigating Change*. We partnered with the Association of Defense Communities, Blue Star Families, and the White Oak Collaborative to work within the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative. We reengaged partners at Columbia University's Center for Professional Research and Leadership (CPRL) to develop a toolkit that parents could use when it came time to return to school, in whatever forum that might be. And we launched a deliberate campaign as the national advocate for Purple Star School designation. While all of this was ongoing, we continued to collect data with our survey, analyzed the data, decided to cancel the NTS for the first time ever, worked with members of our Board on a strategic plan for 2025, and began planning for a virtual Education Summit in the fall. The efforts and accomplishments of the MCEC staff

were nothing short of monumental. It seems fitting, then, that the theme for our Education Summit in November was *Mission Steady, Future Ready: Meeting the Educational Needs of Military Children in a Changing Environment*.

It has been a year, and I can no longer claim to be the “new” President and CEO of MCEC. I am fortunate to be working alongside the new Chair of our Board, Admiral (Ret) Cecil Haney. We have a strategic plan for 2025 that is nearly complete. The results of the year's COVID-19-related initiatives, the *Military Kids NOW Survey*, as well as some of our work on behalf of military children with Special Education needs are featured in this issue of *On the Move*. I invite you to take some time and read about what this year of change has meant for military children and how we have responded. We remain ***Mission Steady and Future Ready...for the sake of the child.***

Becky J. Porter

Dr. Becky Porter
President and Chief Executive Officer,
Military Child Education Coalition





Character Corner is an ongoing series of *On the Move*®.

Dr. Michael D. Matthews, Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, U.S. Military Academy, and MCEC Science Advisory Board member, is the editor of the Character Corner. In each issue, Dr. Matthews or a guest contributor, explores character from different perspectives, with a focus on children in grades K to 12.



The Military Child Education Coalition exists to advocate for the needs of military children. Parents and educators – and everyone else involved in shaping and developing these children – share an interest in seeing them develop into competent adults who go on to lead successful lives, lives full of meaning and purpose, and lives that are values-driven. We want them to have good math and writing skills, and excel in sports and other activities. In short, we want them to achieve great things.

But there is something more fundamental that we want to instill in children. Mr. Fred Rogers captured this eloquently in his 2002 commencement address at Dartmouth College. Framed on the wall of his office, he said, was a quote from Saint-Exupery’s *Little Prince*. It reads, “L’essentiel est invisible pour les yeux.” This simple sentence captures what, for Rogers, is most important in children and all of us – what is essential is invisible to the eye.

DEVELOP IN CHILDREN THOSE THINGS THAT CANNOT BE SEEN

What, about us, is visible to the eye?

Your clothing, the car you drive, the house you live in, your occupation, your degrees, and other achievements. Too often we form initial judgments about people based on these visible artifacts of life. These superficial trappings can be thought of as “resume” virtues – your accomplishments and material positions.

And what is invisible to the eye?

Your values and strength of character. The moral virtues of wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. These can’t be assessed by a casual glance. You can’t judge a book by its cover. These can be thought of as your “eulogy” virtues.

So, while we do want our children to develop resume virtues, we are equally – and perhaps even more so – interested in seeing them develop their eulogy virtues. When it comes to these eulogy virtues, we are born *tabula rasa*, a blank slate. We are not born honest, brave, or kind. These and other strengths of character are learned over time, and they are acquired through social learning and modeling from people who are important to us.

The desire to instill these eulogy virtues in our children may explain the enduring popularity of the 1939 movie, *The Wizard of Oz*. Suffolk University Law professor Lisle Baker uses the movie’s Scarecrow, Tinman, and Cowardly Lion to represent character strengths of the head, heart, and gut. Aware of their character deficits, and desiring to

become smart, loving, and brave, the Scarecrow, Tinman, and Cowardly Lion venture forth with Dorothy (and her little dog, too!) on a long and dangerous quest to acquire these character attributes from the all-powerful Oz.

They overcome adversity and come out the better for it in the end. It is telling that the story does not center on any of the characters achieving resume virtues like fame and fortune. But with a brain, a heart, and courage, the characters achieved something more important — bedrock eulogy virtues upon which to base their lives.

As we celebrate military kids, let's keep Mr. Rogers's message in mind. "L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux." Do everything you can to develop in children those things that cannot be seen. You can be the smartest kid in your class, or the strongest kid in your class; but if you fail in character, you will fail in life. Let's be certain to nurture, educate, and develop military kids so that they will come to be known for their eulogy virtues. Nothing is more important.



 *Dr. Michael D. Matthews, Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, U.S. Military Academy and MCEC Science Advisory Board member*

¹Fred Rogers' 2002 Dartmouth College Commencement Address, from Dartmouth Office of Communications, March 27, 2018, <https://news.dartmouth.edu/news/2018/03/revisiting-fred-rogers-2002-commencement-address>

²R. Lisle Baker, "Educating Lawyers for Compassion and Courage as Well as Brains: The Wizard of Oz Was Right," sites.suffolk.edu/educatinglawyers/resources/



My name is Caleb Visser, and I am a Senior at Princeton University, graduating and commissioning into the active duty Army in June 2020. I recently received a graduate school fellowship called the Schwarzman Scholarship, so I will spend next year in Beijing, China, pursuing a master's degree.

I grew up an Army brat during my father's 30-year career as an Active Duty Army officer, and until my junior year of high school, I never attended the same school for more than a year. But this lifestyle was what my family knew well; my grandfathers enlisted in the Army, and my older brother is also an Army officer.

What eased the transition was support offered by MCEC. I participated in JS2S and S2S in Texas and Missouri, and when I moved to a new high school in Virginia without any programming to support transfer students, I founded the S2S program there. When I participated in the Frances Hesselbein Student Leadership Program in 2013, I was able to commit time and energy to developing my ideas of leadership and teamwork, which in many ways have continued to shape my concept of what it means to be a leader.

As I reflect on the village it's taken to get me to where I am, I wanted to thank y'all at MCEC. You've played a critical role in constructing my conceptions of community and invested in me when it could have been easy for me to fall through the cracks.

Thank you!

NAVIGATING CHANGE - THE MCEC RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis had an immediate impact on both the staff and the operations at MCEC. The headquarters office was closed effective March 16, and the nearly 30-member staff housed there began working remotely. With significant disruption in face-to-face service delivery and the cancellation and/or postponement of many events, the team moved swiftly to develop virtual platforms and resources for students, parents, and educators. In less than a week, students were communicating with sponsors while parents and school personnel were being served through podcasts and interactive workshops.

On March 23, relying heavily on its Science Advisory Board to compile and curate content, MCEC launched Navigating Change, found at militarychild.org/covid19, a new virtual learning series developed in response to COVID-19. It was designed for novice and experienced educators as well as parents who suddenly found themselves in the unfamiliar waters of home instruction amidst the pandemic. Each online session includes discussion of the targeted issue, practical strategies for success, age and developmentally-appropriate resources, and guided practice through helpful exercises and tools. The site offers information on upcoming events as well as archived webinars and podcasts on such topics as: ***Supporting Your Whole Child Through the COVID-19 Pandemic***, ***Understanding Your School Options During the COVID-19 Pandemic***, and ***Back to School Basics During COVID-19***. Members of the MCEC Science Advisory Board who generously donated their expertise included: Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg (*Building Resilience in These Uncertain Times*) and Dr. Stephen Cozza (*PTSD and its Effects on Military Children*).

In spite of countless challenges, the virus actually propelled the organization down a path which MCEC President and CEO, Dr. Becky Porter intended when she took the MCEC helm in September of 2019. Her vision for the organization includes the development of accessible programming that meets the evolving needs of our military families. In what may seem to some as a “silver lining approach,” the MCEC staff is invigorated and determined to identify new ways to engage with families, educators, and partners.





As MCEC strives to meet the emerging needs for virtual learning opportunities and universal access to our resources, we are accelerating our timeline in the conversion of training opportunities in all of our programming for parents, educators and other professionals, and the students themselves. As MCEC is rapidly utilizing a variety of online platforms to enhance our virtual presence, we are working toward providing comprehensive, convenient and easy online access to all the resources we have developed to support military and veteran-connected children and their families.

THE COVID-19 MILITARY SUPPORT INITIATIVE - A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

The COVID-19 Military Support Initiative (CMSI) is a group of military and veteran service organizations who banded together in the midst of the country closing down due to COVID-19 (covid19militarysupport.org/). The Association of Defense Communities (ADC) and Blue Star Families (BSF) led the effort by joining together with members of the White Oak Collaborative, a gathering of more than 40 leading advocates working on behalf of military members, veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors to encourage independent thinking and collaboration among major nonprofit military service organizations, related government offices and other key philanthropic contributors to this cause. The group joined forces to provide a national forum to identify and propose solutions for issues that military families are facing due to COVID-19.

Launching the Pain Points Poll, a rolling survey of service families, veterans and community leaders, enabled CMSI to better understand the challenges defense communities were facing, and continue to face, during the COVID-19 outbreak. CMSI gathered data and anecdotal information from military families over the



course of 16 weeks and used its analysis to inform policy and legislative recommendations to ease the impact that COVID-19 is having on military families. CMSI planned and hosted a series of webinars and town halls to provide expert information to military families and to give them a forum from which to voice their concerns.

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) supported the CMSI efforts by leading the following virtual town halls:

MCEC President and CEO Dr. Becky Porter moderated *Managing the Impact of School Closures for Military Families*. Dr. Porter was joined by a panel of leading subject matter experts representing The College Board, the Texas Education Agency, and the UCLA National Center for Child Traumatic Stress. The panel provided insights and resources related to schools changing their methods of instruction due to COVID-19.

Strategies for Resuming K-12 Education, conducted on June 11, was also moderated by Dr. Porter. She was joined by a panel of leading experts from the Department of Defense Education Activity, Partners in PROMISE, Edmentum, Tutor.com, GreatSchools, and the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3), who provided critical information and numerous resources.

MCEC also contributed to the CMSI effort by convening subject matter experts to consider solutions to several education-related areas of concern for K-12 military-connected students. Breaking into smaller working groups, the experts addressed issues of learning gaps, socio-emotional well-being, transitions, access to learning, and Special Education/IEPs. The paper that delineates the problems and proposed solutions can be found at militarychild.org/upload/files/k12_key_takeaways_final_MCEC_BSF.pdf.



USAA'S MILITARY FAMILY RELIEF INITIATIVE SPONSORS NEW MCEC LENDING LIBRARY

At any given time, approximately twenty percent of military families are in transition. Caught between military assignments, numerous families reside in temporary lodging for indefinite periods of time, causing uncertainty and additional financial and emotional stress. Families who are expecting to receive orders may still have their household goods, but schedules are disrupted as they meet each child's academic requirements while anticipating news of their next assignment.

For military families who are transitioning from Active Duty to Veteran status, additional questions and instability loom over an already complicated process. COVID-19 and the additional stressors it has placed on transitioning and veteran families has certainly exacerbated the challenges and compounded the stress.

Thanks to the generous support of USAA's Military Family Relief Initiative, MCEC has created a new Lending Library of resources to help ease the burden and provide educational support during transitions associated with a permanent change of station (PCS) or family separation. The Library will be housed at individual installations and available to families residing at their facility locations. Resources available to military families free of charge will include the following to address the needs of military-connected children at different learning stages:

- Growing, Learning and Understanding kits designed for elementary-aged children,
- The Big Fat Books in a variety of subject areas designed for middle school students, and
- Chart Your Course for college readiness.

In addition, the Library will include literature about other MCEC programs, such as the *Parent to Parent* and *Military Student Transition Consultant* programs, which represent additional resources to military families in transition.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted millions of people across our country and around the world. Many have felt the impacts to our country's health, economy and social stability, and our military families have faced additional challenges because of extended deployments, National Guard stateside deployments and increased military spouse unemployment.

In late August, USAA contributed \$30 million to 24 nonprofit organizations to assist military families during these challenging economic times. This Military Family Relief Initiative is part of USAA's long-standing mission to support military and veteran families, and specifically to address the impact that the COVID-19 health crisis has had on the military community. The funding will help military aid societies and organizations provide zero-interest loans and emergency grants to eligible service members and their families to help with financial emergencies, virtual schooling costs and college educational expenses. When the interest-free loans are repaid, the funds can help new recipients well into the future, making this contribution a lasting benefit.

Additionally, organizations such as MCEC received funds to support their programs in response to the pandemic. MCEC specifically was awarded a \$700,000 grant to support 50 new webinars for parents and the *Student 2 Student* program, and 80 workshops and webinars delivered in Spanish. USAA and The USAA Foundation, Inc. have proudly supported MCEC since the organization's inception more than 20 years ago. Supporting nonprofit organizations such as MCEC helps meet the needs of today's military families and veterans and gives these organizations momentum to keep serving as a lifeline for the military community into the future, including responding to unforeseen events like the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information about The Military Family Relief Initiative, visit www.usaa.com/coronavirus.



Successful transitions for military-connected students have always been a top priority for MCEC which is why, in 2017, MCEC approached The USAA Foundation to underwrite the creation of an innovative parent resource of tips, tools, and tactics to help military parents better prepare for their child(ren) to be on track for degree completion, workforce preparation or military service. MCEC knows that planning ahead and making the best choices for the highly mobile military-connected student before, during, and after a PCS move increases the chances of academic success and social well-being.

After presenting the prototype at the 2018 National Training Seminar to rave reviews, MCEC engaged The USAA Foundation to take the next step and fund the creation of SchoolQuest, a first-of-its-kind, groundbreaking, web-based, completely interactive parent resource tool built upon the prototype. SchoolQuest enables parents from all branches of the military to prepare themselves and their children to manage the educational challenges associated with frequent moves and other unique stressors of a military lifestyle. This revolutionary parent resource tool not only provides critical information but also allows users to develop an individualized student academic map aligned with the persona for each child.

Available now at schoolquest.militarychild.org in its testing phase, SchoolQuest provides military families with the critical information needed to ensure a smooth academic transition between schools and enables parents to develop a highly individualized academic profile for each child. SchoolQuest has many unique and invaluable features, such as:



StudentQuest Academic Tracker to monitor and plan a student's academic career progress from 6th to 12th grade.



Customized **Student Profile** that automatically compiles important details and deadlines for quick view by parents and students.



Checklists that enable users to develop and manage time-bound, student-specific personalized information compiled into accessible lists.



Reminders & Notifications that enable users to set reminders for important deadlines and get notified about them automatically in time to act.

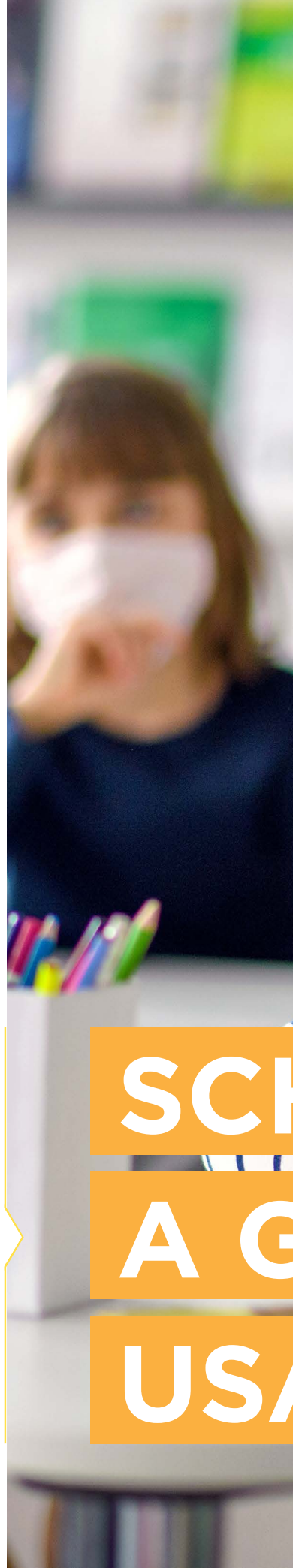


School search capabilities accomplished through the GreatSchools search function that researches and aggregates schools in the next community where a military family expects to live.



Convenience with everything stored in one space, online, so users can access the information - even if they're in the middle of a move.

Although the final product will be formally launched in the Spring of 2021, **you can check it out now** and be among the first to benefit from this amazing tool! We also need your feedback to ensure the finished product is as comprehensive, effective, and easy to use as possible.





**SCHOOLQUEST:
GIFT FROM THE
AAA FOUNDATION**

¡BIENVENIDOS TO *PARENT TO PARENT* EN ESPAÑOL!

¡La familia MCEC quiere darle la más cordial bienvenida a nuestro tan esperado equipo *Parent to Parent* en español! ¡Bienvenidas!

Gracias al financiamiento de nuestros socios HEB, en agosto de este 2020 dos de nuestras Master Parent Educators - MCEC, Yasmina Aragon y Mariella Reber, fueron seleccionadas para liderar nuestro equipo virtual para padres en español. Actualmente, se encuentran ubicadas en Kentucky y California respectivamente. Cuentan con casi diez años de experiencia siendo parte de MCEC y de nuestras familias militares, y han servido en diferentes equipos de PtoP alrededor del país. El objetivo de este equipo virtual es el poder ofrecer nuestros talleres completamente en español, incluyendo las presentaciones de diapositivas y todos los recursos que se proporcionan al finalizar cada taller. Así mismo, este equipo brinda interpretación en español dentro de los talleres virtuales que se llevan a cabo en vivo en Facebook y en nuestro sitio web en colaboración con otros equipos.

El equipo *Parent to Parent* El Paso, fue el primero en colaborar con el equipo PtoP en español obteniendo excelentes resultados. Gracias a la contribución de Military Family Relief Initiative del banco USAA el equipo PtoP en español contará con el financiamiento durante todo el próximo año para brindar talleres virtuales para padres y eventos como *Tell Me A Story* en español.

MCEC se complace en responder a las necesidades de las familias militares de habla hispana que sirven a este país.

Thanks to funding from our HEB partners, two of our MCEC Master Parent Educators, Yasmina Aragon and Mariella Reber, were selected to lead our virtual *Parent to Parent* team, PtoP en Espanol. These veteran educators, currently located in Kentucky and California, have almost ten years of experience with MCEC and have served on PtoP teams across the country. This virtual team offers full Spanish language workshops, fully translated slide presentations, and Spanish translation of MCEC workshop resources that can be downloaded following the presentations. They also provide Spanish interpretation for live virtual workshops on Facebook and the MCEC website in collaboration with other *Parent to Parent* teams. The Parent to Parent team in El Paso was the first team to collaborate with PtoP en Espanol and had excellent results. Through contributions from USAA's Military Family Relief Initiative, the PtoP en Espanol team will be funded through the next year to provide full service virtual parent workshops and Tell Me A Story events in Spanish.





Are you a military-connected family member who is looking for specific resources geared toward those living a military lifestyle?

- Receive information on military-connected student academic, developmental, or social-emotional well-being during times of transition.
- Learn more about social-emotional support during times of COVID transitions.
- Ease your concerns about upcoming transitions during a PCS relocation or deployment cycle.
- Get questions answered about academic credit transfers and transcript evaluations, along with other possibilities tailored to your college, career, and life readiness goals.
- Find out more about the special education process during times of transition that includes EFMP, IEP, and 504.

Contact an MCEC Military Student Consultant today!

 militarychild.org/connect

 (254) 953-1923 ext 1146

 MSC@militarychild.org





Military Student Consultant

As a premier resource who addresses challenges associated with the military lifestyle, an MCEC Military Student Consultant is a trusted professional resource during times of transition and throughout the deployment cycle, providing individualized support services for parents, educators, and administrators. As a licensed school counselor, active duty military spouse and parent, Sue Lopez, the first international Military Student Consultant, takes pride in serving military students and families. Sue understands the daily challenges associated with being part of a military family during times of transition and deployment.

As a mother of two extraordinary military children, she has witnessed the struggles of adjusting to the 'new normal' for the last 21 years, through 13 PCS moves, one unaccompanied tour in South Korea, and four one-year combat deployment cycles supporting OIF and OEF. "Transition is part of our military family lifestyle, not concept or theory." Sue has served as a *Military Student Transition Consultant* (MSTC) in a local school district for the last four years, supporting seven high schools, providing district-wide teacher professional development, and offering bridging-the-gap services with the local installation command and school district all while providing one-on-one transition counseling services to military-connected students and their families.

As the first international MSC, Sue hopes to demonstrate professionalism and education equity with local education agencies and military installations across the globe ensuring positive support connections between all stakeholders.

Since the new Military Student Consultant initiative began in the 2020-21 school year, and even in light of COVID-19, connecting with the international MSC has proven to be beneficial for parents, teachers, community members and support personnel. Through partnerships and collaboration with installation school liaison officers, installation EFMP coordinators, state-level Department of Education

Student Services, Military Interstate Children's Compact Commissioners (MIC3), and other MCEC Programs, the MSC has provided wrap-around individualized transition and relocation support services to assist military-connected students, families and those who support them with real-world transitional barriers associated with the military lifestyle.

As a valued MCEC program, the Military Student Consultant also serves as a force multiplier within other MCEC organizational programs to include: *Professional Development*, *Parent to Parent*, *Tell Me a Story* (TMAS), *Student 2 Student*, *SchoolQUEST*, and *For the Sake of the Child* podcasts.

"The most rewarding part of being a Military Student Consultant is being able to help military-connected students and families with real-world situations and to provide assistance in overcoming transitional barriers associated with our military lifestyle."

No matter where you are in the world or what issue you are encountering, one of our MCEC international Military Student Consultants is here to help with academic, social-emotional or transitional issues. You can contact us through the web, by phone or email, and we will personally respond within 24 hours.

 www.militarychild.org/contact

 (254) 953-1923 ext 1146

 MSC@militarychild.org



MCEC AND CPRL: WORKING TOGETHER TO BENEFIT MILITARY-CONNECTED STUDENTS

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) has partnered with the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University since 2017. At that time, with the support of a grant from the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, MCEC and CPRL introduced *Mitigating the Impact of School Mobility: An Effective Practices Model and Guide for Educators*. This work included methods and procedures that U.S. public schools could implement to mitigate the potential harmful impact of frequent school transitions as experienced by military-connected and other highly mobile students.

This partnership yielded such valuable resources for military-connected parents, as well as those education professionals who serve military-connected students, that it was no surprise MCEC and researchers at CPRL decided to team up again in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Amanda Cahn, Deputy Director, Strategy and Operations at CPRL, “Military families are well-practiced in the art of flexibility and have demonstrated resilience time and time again. Undergoing a PCS during a global pandemic, though, deserves a set of resources created just for military families. We were honored to partner with MCEC to create this toolkit for military families.”

Over the summer of 2020, MCEC and CPRL developed a collection of resources, information, and helpful tips titled, **School Transitions during COVID-19: A Toolkit for Military-Connected Families**. (militarychild.org/cprlparents)

This compilation of tips, tools, apps, and websites provides the information military parents need to support their children’s social-emotional health and wellness in a time when seeing friends, socializing in the school environment, and just being kids can no longer be taken for granted.

Ms. Cahn expressed it best, “Working directly with military families and the educators who serve them allowed us to create of-the-moment, family-facing resources to support the unique needs of military families transitioning during a global pandemic.” Whether parents want to build their knowledge about the current environment or acquire some very specific tools to help their children cope, this toolkit can be a tremendous resource.

Now, thanks to the generosity of USAA’s Military Family Relief Initiative, MCEC and CPRL are continuing to work together on behalf of military-connected children. Our current project is two-fold:



- Understanding pandemic-related issues facing school systems and how these may impact the unique circumstances and challenges faced by military-connected students transitioning schools during the pandemic, revising existing tools and creating new tools to help military families, and designing and guest delivering MCEC-hosted webinars to provide information and support to families and educators.
- Determining the efficacy of the Purple Star School (PSS) program (in the eight states that have developed one) and its impact on military families and students to include exploring how each program was initiated and is administered, which requirements have the most significant impact, and recommendations on how to scale the PSS program nationally to all the remaining states.

Each of these studies will continue the MCEC and CPRL efforts to not only provide valuable insight but also produce actionable items enabling parents and educators to better serve military-connected children.

OUR MISSION

The mission of the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia Law School is to revitalize public education while reinventing professional education. CPRL conducts rigorous coursework, skills training, and research and consulting projects to ready talented graduate students for challenging twenty-first century careers enhancing the education sector’s capacity to improve the outcomes and life chances of all children.



Amanda Cahn, deputy director, strategy and operations, has spent her career working within and supporting school systems. She leads CPRL’s operations and student supports, project development, and external affairs, and she supports the executive director on CPRL’s strategy. Amanda’s prior roles include the founding COO for Public Square Partnership and deputy chief portfolio officer at the NYC Department of Education, helping to lead New York City’s nationally renowned portfolio and school choice strategy. Amanda began her career as a high school English teacher. She earned her BA in English, economics, and managerial studies from Rice University, her M. Ed. in secondary education from University of Phoenix, and an MBA in social enterprise from Columbia University.



MCEC[®] National Advocate for the PURPLE STAR SCHOOL Initiative



September ushered in an exciting new role for MCEC as the national advocate for the Purple Star School initiative. After having been a strong proponent of the initiative since its inception in 2017, MCEC is now reaching out to states and school districts around the country to consider the benefits and value of participating in this great endeavor.

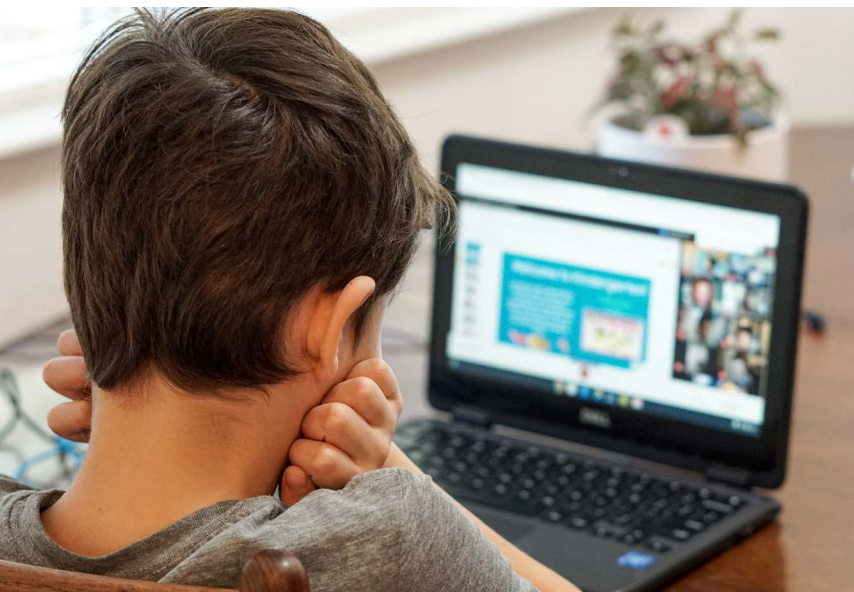
The Purple Star School designation is the brainchild of Pete LuPiba, Ohio's Commissioner for Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3), a national set of laws protecting the rights of Active Duty families as they change duty stations and navigate the enrollment and activities offered in different school systems.

The Purple Star designation is granted to military-friendly schools that show a major commitment to students and families connected to our nation's military. Currently Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, Arkansas, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia (called Military Flagship Schools) and Indiana, have followed suit by starting their own programs, many patterned after the Ohio model.

The timing of MCEC's new role couldn't be more critical. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to

present challenges for every student, it can be especially complicated for our nation's military-connected kids. Military-connected students can move six to nine times during their K-12 years; consequently, they repeatedly must cope with adjusting to the different cultures, curricula, standards, course offerings and graduation requirements of the schools they are moving into. As if that's not enough, now many of these students are starting the year in a full-time distance learning mode or a hybrid model that may mean only a couple of days per week in the school building. Imagine how much harder it is for transitioning military-connected students to adjust – not to mention make friends and feel acclimated – with only a computer screen as their doorway to the school. Many schools have also had to curtail school clubs and sports and other possibilities new students might otherwise have had to build social networks.

This “new normal” makes transitioning even more stressful for parents, too. Deciding which school their children should attend is foremost on their mind as they explore academic reputations, courses (including advanced placement) offered, and extracurricular opportunities. Knowing that a school has achieved a Purple Star School designation, thereby demonstrating their understanding of, and commitment to, military-connected students, provides an incredible advantage to military parents. By achieving the Purple Star designation, schools prove they are committed to helping military-connected children transition into a new school academically and socially, and helping them stay on track to be college, workforce and life-ready. This designation is so helpful to military parents that searching for a Purple Star School is often the first





thing they do upon receiving permanent change of station orders.

Purple Star School programs are established at the state level and administered by the state's education authority or its designee. Schools are then invited to apply through a process distinctive to each state. Most programs, with some slight variation, require the following:

- Designating a staff point of contact to be a resource for military students and families;
- Maintaining a dedicated page on a school's website featuring information and resources for military families;
- Establishing a student-led transition program to help new students settle in and make friends; and
- Providing professional development for the Point of Contact and other staff members.

In order to ensure all parents will one day have this advantage, MCEC has initiated a campaign reaching out to state education leaders with information about Purple Star Schools, encouraging them to initiate their own program. MCEC is also reaching out to school districts in the states that already have an active Purple Star School program to encourage participation.

MCEC is pleased to be a powerful resource for information on starting and maintaining a Purple Star School program, and we stand ready to offer guidance and consultation to all who seek it at any level. Parents can join the effort by asking their school about seeking designation as a Purple Star School if they have not already achieved it, and complimenting them if they have.

Parents and education leaders can learn more about the Purple Star School Initiative at: militarychild.org/purplestarschools.



MCEC[®]
The National Advocate
FOR THE
Purple Star
School Program



MCEC EDUCATION SURVEY: MILITARY KIDS NOW 2020

Since its inception in 1998, MCEC has focused on meeting the needs of military-connected students by providing programs that empower their parents, inform and enlighten their educators and other youth-serving professionals, and facilitate a peer-to-peer support system for the students themselves. Whether students are the children of Active Duty, National Guard, Reserve, or Veteran service members, MCEC strives to ensure that every military-connected child is college, workforce and life-ready.

In order to fulfill our mission, MCEC needed to have a more comprehensive and current understanding of what students, parents, and educators supporting military-connected students identify as unmet needs. Consequently, MCEC conducted the *Military Kids NOW 2020* survey which attracted more than 5,000 participants, including military parents, educators, and military students age 13 and older. Respondents from a total of 22 countries provided their input. The data, collected February 17 – May 7, 2020, was analyzed, with the help of Avlyn Bolton, instructional specialist at Killeen ISD for the initial report. Dr. Andria Schwegler, associate professor of psychology at Texas A&M University – Central Texas, and graduate student Rebecca Hopkins reviewed the data and provided additional insight prior to the release on October 16, 2020.

The findings were critically important, particularly in the context of COVID-19 and the additional stress it has, and continues to, put on military students. Concerns were divided into two primary categories: academic and social/emotional. Although there were differences among the ranking of concerns as noted by parents, educators, and students, there were also some common themes. Some of the findings are reflected here and the full report can be found at: militarychild.org/mcecsurvey.

Perhaps most exciting about the success of this survey and its findings is what MCEC is offering in response.

First, the Education Summit, held virtually on November 17 and 18, 2020, provided a forum for sharing the survey data and analysis with all in attendance. Secondly, survey results informed MCEC's enhancement, updates and/or creation of current and future MCEC programming thereby strengthening our efforts in paving the way for smoother transitions and helping military-connected children be college-, workforce-, and life-ready.

Academic Challenges Ranked by Participants

Addressing variations in state academic standards	2388
Being unprepared for curriculum differences	2349
Moving mid-school year	2178
Understanding state/national testing differences/requirements	1691
Accessing gifted education programs	1632
Dealing with school-year calendar discrepancies (i.e., conflicting start and end dates)	1533
Maintaining eligibility for extracurricular activities (i.e., sports, band, choir, orchestra, debate, etc.)	1304
Accessing advanced academic programs (honors, Advanced Placement, etc.)	1299
Finding equivalent courses (e.g., foreign languages, advanced courses, AP, IB, etc.)	1291
Handling schedule discrepancies between sending and receiving schools (i.e., traditional vs. block schedules)	1234
Transferring special education documentation (e.g., IEP, 504 Plan, Behavior Plan, HS Transition Plan)	1178
Transferring credits	1124
Accessing appropriate special education placement and supports	1055
Interpreting transcripts/course alignment	932
Preparing for the college application and enrollment process	785
Meeting graduation requirements	667
Calculating grade point averages	662
Preparing for career choices	516
Accessing career and technical education programs	510
Handling language barriers/differences	459

Social/Emotional Challenges Ranked by Participants

Making friends	3037
Feeling of acceptance/"fitting in" (school and local culture)	3000
Building self-confidence	2565
Dealing with parent deployment/reunion	2550
Managing stress	2349
Addressing behavioral mental/health concerns (anxiety, depression, substance abuse, self-harm, etc.)	1928
Addressing bullying concerns (cyber and/or in-person)	1514
Dealing with peer pressure	1115
Coping with challenges when a parent leaves the military	952
Coping with the loss of a family member or friend	948
Coping with divorce or separation	702
Handling changes in home life and/or academics due to a service member's injury/health	688
Dealing with poverty/homelessness	221

COLLABORATIVE PARENTAL ADVOCACY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION DURING A PANDEMIC: *STRATEGIES FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES*

Military families are no strangers to big, frequent changes in the form of deployments and permanent changes of station. But even seasoned military families may be finding themselves overwhelmed by the uncertainties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For parents of military children with disabilities who are facing the reality of quarantine, concerns about illness, and remote learning due to school closures, these times are incredibly stressful. If your child receives special education services, the challenge of advocating for him or her at an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting may seem daunting.

With so much of life upended by the pandemic, it's important to remember that the fundamental rights provided to children and parents by the Individuals

with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law that governs special education requirements, have remained constant.

Here are some ideas to keep in mind as you prepare for your child's next IEP meeting, whether it's held in person or online.

DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT, DOCUMENT

The IEP process should always be data-driven. A child's IEP team—of which you are a member—must meet at least yearly to discuss, among other things, the child's present levels of performance. These “present levels” are based on data in the form of test scores, Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) evaluation results, grades, behavioral charts, medical records, and other relevant information. Actual work samples can and should be part of the





discussion as well. The team should consider your child's academic and functional performance.

Once the IEP team has an understanding of how your child is doing currently, the team should decide on appropriately ambitious goals for him or her based on his or her needs. This will then help the team decide on the appropriate special education and related services.

No matter whether your child is attending school in person, remotely, or a combination of the two, one of the best things that you can do as a parent advocate is to come to the IEP table with data—information that you have gathered that shows the team how your child has been doing throughout the pandemic period.

As you consider how to collect that, here are some questions you can ask yourself:

- Does your child need support with specific academic skills, such as math, reading, or test-taking? Has your child regressed or not been able to make appropriate progress during periods of school shutdowns and/or remote learning? How can you document those skill challenges to share them with the rest of team?
- Has your child been exhibiting any behaviors that make it hard for him or her to learn, whether in school or in a remote learning environment? Have those behaviors become more of a challenge during the period of school

shutdowns and/or remote learning? How can you document these behavioral challenges to share them with the rest of the team?

WHAT KINDS OF DOCUMENTS?

Having documented information and data about your child's academic and functional needs is key to effective collaboration between you and the rest of his or her IEP team. Because of all the disruption caused by the pandemic, this is especially true now.

CONCERNED ABOUT ACADEMIC SKILLS?

If your child has regressed, or lost skills in a particular area (or if he or she has been unable to make appropriate progress), gather current samples of your child's work.

Consider the following:

- Is all of your child's work being done online? Capture a few screenshots of the assignments your child has completed. If you have similar samples of work in the same skill areas from the spring—before the school closure period—gather those as well for comparison purposes.
- Is your child struggling with reading? If you're concerned about regression, you might use your phone to take a video of him or her reading aloud. Consider asking your child's case



manager if the school can conduct a reading evaluation remotely. This may provide some useful information about your child's current academic performance.

- If you're assisting your child with homework assignments, make a note (or send an email to your child's teacher) explaining that your child completed the assignment with help from a parent (in the area of spelling, or math calculations, or accessing online programs, for example). Parents often want to help support a child with a disability in any way they can, but it's still important that the school know what skills your child has or hasn't mastered—and therefore what level of services he or she needs. This will be useful information as your child's next IEP is being developed.

CONCERNED ABOUT BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES?

If, like many parents of children with disabilities, you've observed increasing behavioral challenges that make it tough for your child to learn remotely—or in person, with new rules regarding masks and social distancing—write down as much objective information as you can about your observations.

- Is your child showing avoidance behaviors? Becoming very frustrated? Finding it particularly difficult to concentrate? Demonstrating self-injurious behaviors? If possible, make notes about how often, and for how long, these challenges last. Have you noticed that they always happen during or right after working on math, for example? Make note of that. Be sure to note the date for all information you gather.
- If your child is attending in-person school and you notice that you're receiving messages from the school about behavioral issues during certain transition times, for example, document when and how often they're occurring.
- The key to developing appropriate IEP goals and services for your child is to have thorough and accurate data about how your child is doing now, in addition to how he or she might have been doing before the pandemic. As parents, we all want the appropriate services in

place for our children. Coming to the table with clear documentation of your child's needs puts you in a much better position to advocate for those services.

THE IDEA CALLS FOR PROACTIVE BEHAVIORAL SUPPORTS

The IDEA requires that each child's IEP team consider and, as appropriate, develop "positive behavioral interventions and supports" to help ensure that a child with a disability can learn in his or her educational environment. This is of particular importance for a child "whose behavior impedes the child's learning or that of others."

Check out the relevant federal regulations at sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.324.

34 C.F.R. § 300.324.

Developing proactive, positive behavioral supports for children with disabilities may be crucial during the upheaval brought on by COVID-19—especially for military children who may also be experiencing the stress of deployments and PCS moves. It can be a good idea to explain to your child's IEP team, in writing, when your family is anticipating an upcoming deployment. Share with the rest of the team what emotional effects deployments have had or may have on your child. Ask for positive behavioral supports to be put in place in your child's IEP—with your participation—to help your child before problematic behaviors start.

Throughout your special education advocacy process, remember that as your child's parent, you're uniquely situated to bring crucial information to the IEP table to help shape the services and proactive supports your child needs so that he or she can make real progress toward his or her individualized goals.



Amy K. Bonn has been a military spouse for 19 years. She and her husband David, who is in the Air Force, are the proud parents of children with developmental disabilities. Amy is a Nebraska attorney with The Law Office of Amy K. Bonn, LLC, where her practice is devoted entirely to providing legal representation to families of children with disabilities in special education matters.

The information in this article should not be construed as legal advice or the basis of the formation of a lawyer-client relationship. If you are in need of legal advice, you may wish to engage an attorney in your state who has specific knowledge about special education law.

My Greatest Challenge as a Military Child

Military kids have always faced challenges, either it's falling behind in school or having a hard time making friends. Well, I have faced both of those problems which connects to my biggest challenge - adjustment.

Every single challenge I have faced has been connected to the overlying theme of adjustment.

Military kids have disadvantages all the time for school-related issues. For example, in 6th grade I used to be one of the top flute players and it wasn't easy. I did everything I could possibly think of to be prepared for my next school by staying after class and doing extra assignments. While that did help me for some aspects, it didn't help me for everything. When I got to my new school, I learned their standards were completely different. In 6th grade, you had to memorize three scales, know your chromatic scale, and know how to do vibrato. I was in disbelief that everything I had done to prepare was nothing close to what I had to know. So when the first test came around I got a 80 because I wasn't at their standards which I had never been taught or been aware of. This didn't stop me. Being a military kid teaches you many things, and one of them is to never give up. So, I began to do everything I could to be at their standards and above which ended in me finally getting 100's.

Although adjusting in school has always been difficult, what I find even more difficult is adjusting to the new social standards. I can tell you this right now the social standards set by high schoolers or even middle schoolers are high and the social standards are completely different between each state or county. For instance, saying phrases like "Y'all" can be considered weird in the west coast while totally acceptable in the east coast. So how do you adjust so quickly to make friends?

Well, you can't. You have to go into the new school day and just find out what's acceptable. But, you have to remember to never change who you are and always smile no matter how stressed and confusing day one already seems. While adjusting to social standards might be one of the hardest challenges I have faced, it has also given me an advantage. Living in Japan you get people who have lived all around the states or even the world. With all the adjustments I have made to meet social standards around the country, I have found I could connect with someone who has lived in Washington as well as someone who has lived in Virginia.

To conclude, being a military kid is not easy no matter what. You have to always be on your toes and walk into each new school day expecting to be a little lost. Although, these aspects you pick up from the challenge of adjustment have also seemed to become our greatest ally.

Written by Samantha, 15 years old



CLOVER PARK LEADS THE WAY FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



Moving to a new school can cause anxiety for children and families, especially when a child has special needs to be considered.

“We understand how challenging transitioning to a new school can be,” said Principal Diana Dix. “We provide a full continuum of services right at our school to support students.”

Educators at Evergreen Elementary School in the Clover Park School District on Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) have access to some of the best resources available for teaching students with special needs.

JBLM, located in Lakewood, Wash., is a **designated compassionate care site**, which means families who have children with disabilities are often placed on base over other assignments.

Funding provided by the military and a strong partnership with Madigan Army Medical Center next door makes Evergreen a great place for special education students to flourish. Families have access to robust self-contained programs and early learning services, students play on adapted playground equipment and the school is able to actively coordinate health services with Madigan. JBLM houses the only Department of Defense autism center in the country.

Evergreen has access to developmental pediatric fellows to work collaboratively with staff to support students through the Developmental Pediatric Fellowship Program at Madigan. Clover Park is the only school district in the country with a Memorandum of Understanding for developmental pediatric support through Madigan.

Madigan and Evergreen staff meet monthly to discuss student needs and how they can partner to support student development. It allows them to share information more freely and work proactively. The Madigan pediatric fellows also provide training to Evergreen staff on autism.

The school has a therapy suite that provides physical and occupational therapy, as well as speech language pathologists, school psychologists and a teacher for the visually impaired who coordinate care. Clinical social workers and Madigan school-based mental health

staff also serve students with significant mental health issues that are impacting their learning.

“This coordinated care helps families because sometimes they are not sure what information to share with medical staff and school staff,” Dix said. It also better enables families to advocate for their children and helps school staff work alongside families to support their child’s individual needs.

“We built Evergreen to accommodate a special education population with intensive needs,” said Special Education Director Michaela Clancy. “Our strong partnership with Madigan allows us to provide top notch school, behavioral, and health services.”

The school is designed to accommodate all learners. Elevators are equipped to transport students with disabilities along with other students so as not to isolate them. Evergreen also features multiple adaptive playgrounds for students, which consider the child’s size and ability, to improve their experience.

Inclusion is an important component of the school’s culture, and school staff work with families to integrate students with disabilities into general education classes with their peers based on the child’s individual needs.

Evergreen provides the programs, services and space for students to thrive. It has been recognized for student achievement and was named a **School of Distinction** for multiple years.





Demystifying Autism for Military Families:

Debunking Some Common Myths Regarding Autism

Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by deficits in social communication and interaction as well as restrictive, repetitive behaviors, interests, and activities. Updates to the clinical definition of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were published in the newest edition of the Diagnostic Statistic Manual-5. The prevalence of autism has dramatically increased to impacting 1 in 59 children, according to the Center for Disease Control in 2018. Increased awareness of ASD has improved in the general population due to large-scale efforts in social media and advocacy by ASD organizations. However, the goal of evaluating children with a suspicion of autism by the age of three and starting intensive therapies by the age of four, especially in underserved populations, has been more elusive. Myths surrounding the diagnosis only add to these delays. The following is intended to dispel 10 common myths of autism.

Myth # 1

Autism is a disease.

TRUTH: Autism is not a disease. It can therefore not be “caught.” It is classified as a biologically-based neurodevelopmental disorder impairing an individual’s ability to communicate and interact with others. The earliest signs of autism, including eye contact with other human faces, can be present before the age of one year old; but symptoms of autism are more easily seen in young toddlers, including impaired communication, play, requesting, and imitation skills. The exact cause of autism is still not understood, but is thought to be an interplay of multiple factors including: genetic, neurobiological, environmental, and perinatal factors.

Myth # 2

Autism is caused by unloving, abusive, or neglectful parents.

TRUTH: The concept of “refrigerator mothers” has been dispelled for many years now. Conjecture that “emotionally cold” parents were more at risk for having a child with autism was disproved by the end of the 1960’s by many well-designed medical studies. Any medical professional privileged to work with the parents of children with autism can attest that they constitute some of the most loving and devoted parents.

Myth # 3

Vaccines cause autism.

TRUTH: This is likely the most dangerous myth regarding autism. Dispelling this myth is paramount to the maintenance of a healthy population especially given the recent alarming increases in vaccine-preventable diseases seen worldwide. There is no current medical evidence that demonstrates a causal link between any vaccine and autism despite thousands of evidence-based medicine studies. Vaccines remain one of the most important medical contributions in history for the good of population health.

Myth # 4

There is a test that can diagnose autism.

TRUTH: In recent years, several laboratories have marketed “autism testing” panels. While great advances have been made in our ability to identify underlying genetic causes of autism, the notion that a blood test can somehow identify an individual who has autism is misleading. Just as there is no single cause for autism, there is no single test to diagnose autism. It remains a clinical diagnosis and any tests help to support the diagnosis only. Lab testing, to include genetic testing and the currently heavily marketed “autism testing” panels, may help to identify individuals at risk, but remain non-diagnostic. Likewise, psychological testing helps to clarify strengths, weaknesses, and behaviors helpful for making the diagnosis, but it does not confirm a diagnosis in isolation.

Myth #5

Individuals with autism are either savant or intellectually disabled.

TRUTH: No two individuals with a diagnosis of autism are the same. Autism is inherently a spectrum disorder meaning that there is significant variability in how the symptoms of autism combine to form the unique diagnosis. Specific autistic traits or behaviors can be seen in many children, but all the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 must be met for diagnosis. The limitations of autism are different for everyone.

Myth #6

Individuals with autism do not want to make friends.

TRUTH: At its core, autism is an impairment in the ability to socially interact with other people and to form relationships. Additionally, there can be hindrances in verbal communication that further impair social skills. Individuals with autism may demonstrate their desire to connect with others differently, but this should not imply that individuals with autism lack feelings or emotions.

Myth #7

Individuals with autism dislike physical contact.

TRUTH: This myth regarding individuals with autism often leads to a delay in diagnosis. While individuals with autism often delay environmental sensitivities, the majority enjoy some level of physical contact and seek out human connection and affection. Individuals with autism are capable of displaying a unique sense of humor and showing pleasure in tickling, teasing, and joking with others.

Myth #8

Autism can be outgrown.

TRUTH: Autism is a chronic, lifelong disorder. While early, intensive appropriate therapies can help an individual diagnosed with autism progress to a point where theoretically symptoms are difficult to perceive, it does not equate to a blanket statement that individuals “outgrow” their autism. It simply highlights the need to increase access to the therapies, specialized medical care, and supporting educational and social (i.e. respite care, emotional support groups, advocacy groups) for families raising an individual with autism.

Myth #9

Medications and special diets can cure autism.

TRUTH: There is no cure for autism. Medications may benefit some of the behavioral symptoms of autism as well as symptoms of common diagnoses coexisting with autism (i.e. anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), insomnia), but they are non-curative. Likewise, no definitive studies have supported any diet or supplement impacting the core symptoms of autism. Diet and/or supplements may, however, help address individuals with concurrent digestive issues, food allergies, or sensory aversions to foods.

Myth #10

Autism is being over diagnosed due to increased media publicity.

TRUTH: While misdiagnosis is a problem, autism remains underdiagnosed and the diagnosis is often delayed. While the increase in prevalence may be partially perpetuated due to revisions in the DSM-5 consolidating several diagnoses, these revisions did not change the core behavioral symptoms. Moreover, while increased media attention has aided in bringing the disorder to public attention, significant numbers of individuals remain undiagnosed especially girls, minorities, and those socially disadvantaged. The true reasons for the increased prevalence of this disorder remain unclear.

As we continue to demystify the diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder and focus on the individual and not the diagnosis, we will continue to understand the unique qualities and strengths that individuals with autism lead to a richer, more diversified global community.

Written by: Col. Eric M. Flake, Lt. Col. Rebecca A. Christi, & Dr. Daniel Roy

The authors are military physicians from Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM) CARES who are experts in caring for children with autism. They are also parents of military children with and without special needs.



Lt. Col. Rebecca A. Christi & family



Col Eric M. Flake & family

Stories of A Caregiver

By Thomas Porter, Ph.D.



The moment a man or woman dons a military uniform, their family members – spouses, children- put on one, too. It is the “uniform” of a caregiver and it is not always visible to others. The uniform represents a calling – to protect and serve. This is what Dr. Thomas Porter, Sabine Ward, Dr. Raquel Cataldo, Colleen Saffron, and Sarah Dancer realized, as their writing group wrote about and discussed the change that they and their loved ones underwent after a sudden catastrophic loss. As psychologist Gordon Allport said in Viktor Frankl’s book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, it was up to them “to weave these slender threads of a broken life into a firm pattern of meaning and responsibility.”

One way for the caregivers to “weave” was through writing, storytelling, and art. This is why the group, “Writing Back to You,” formed as part of the Center for Military Families at the University of Texas at San Antonio—to share their experiences and to bring healing to others. UTSA faculty member Dr. Carmen Fies asked Dr. Porter to be the writing director and use his extensive storytelling background to support the group. He soon discovered that he needed the group’s support as well. “I had recently lost my sister and was quite overwhelmed with grief. As a child of military parents, I had also become my parents’ caregiver before they died. The group helped me realize what I had actually studied in my dissertation: losses could be shared for a higher purpose of serving others.”

As the group wrote and shared - even online during the pandemic, a certain theme emerged. They would throw off their “Cloak of Invisibility” to make themselves and their loved ones “seen.”

Dr. Porter writes of his mentor, Chuy, who helped him years ago, then reappeared forty years later to create healing in his family. Porter, once a self-described “pothead teen,” found redemption in the care of his parents, years after turning his family upside down.

Dr. Cataldo writes of her family’s hero, the service dog Hercules whom no one wanted, and how Hercules helped the family heal after the painful news about her husband’s disability.

Shalia Swaggart writes of her son Bailey’s death and the respect, and enlightenment, that grief can bring.

Colleen Saffron makes visible a coffee pot, a family artifact, around which the family gathers with a warm-but-somewhat “forbidden” cup of joe.

Sabine Ward writes about the devastation her husband’s suicide caused and how to honor his memory by making his experience, and sacrifice, visible.

And **Sarah Dancer**, daughter of a long-suffering father, Scott, talks about her father’s recent death and her unique experience as a grieving college-age caregiver whose pain no one sees.

Caregiver stories keep going, perhaps never returning, until they find a target in our hearts -- and awaken us to our own purpose and to make that purpose visible.



CHUY THE BLESSER

By Thomas Porter, Ph.D.

On the first day of the 2016 spring semester, I told my college students a story I had repeated for a number of years. I had tried to turn my mother on to marijuana, lied to my dad about quitting, received a beating, dropped out of school, ran away from home in San Antonio, and ended up in jail in New Mexico. I was 15. Declaring to my cellmate that I did not want to wind up like him, a middle-aged church-robbing vagrant, I vowed to get my education. After my parents got me out of jail, a year later, I left again. This time I hitched a ride to Los Angeles with a caravan of gospel hippies. When that got old, I ended up in a controlling group that made it very hard to leave. With no help from the group and knowing no adults on the outside, I came up with a plan: I would get into college. That way, when I returned home, I wouldn't be a dropout.

There was one problem, though. I had no high school diploma or GED. By this time, I was in Houston and found a GED program for migrant workers at the University of Houston. Still, I faced another setback: I had no farm experience. I had mowed lawns, grown a giant tomato in my backyard, and sorted marijuana seeds. That was it. And when the director, Chuy, asked me what farm experience I had, I told him how I grew a gigantic tomato in the backyard of my parents' house.

"Does that count as farm experience?"

"No," he said.

"Well, I mowed lawns in my neighborhood. Does that count?"

"No, son, it does not."

"Ok, this next one got me into lots of trouble, but I'll tell you anyway. I sorted seeds from bags of marijuana. Does that count as farm experience?"

"Afraid not, son," he said.

Still, he wasn't through with me. Thank God. He told me to go away for a week or so until I remembered what farm experience I'd done. It was then that I remembered that, while crossing Texas, I stopped at a friend's grandpa's farm. While my

friend visited his sick grandpa inside, I chased the grandpa's old dog, who seemed anxious to play, across a field of maize, until I suddenly came to a 10-foot-tall weed. We stopped and I pulled out the weed.

Sort of like the "Sword in the Stone," it was a life-changing event. Back at the migrant program, when I told Chuy the story about chasing the dog and pulling out the weed, he practically leapt from his chair and declared, "Son, you're in the migrant program!" I could not believe this oddball experience of chasing a dog and pulling out a tall weed in Ida-Lou, Texas, struck a chord with the director of the migrant GED program. Nevertheless, after earning my GED, Chuy showed me how to get into the University of Houston.

Although I lost touch with Chuy and the migrant program when I moved from Houston to San Antonio, I completed my bachelor's degree. In San Antonio, I turned the GED into an Associate of Arts in journalism, a bachelor's degree in English, and Master of Arts in education, in reading and literacy. Then, nearly forty years later, when I was about to earn a doctoral degree, a man who had been jogging in my neighborhood approached me in my front yard.

We began talking.

"What happened to the older man, the owner of the house," he wanted to know.

"That was my father," I said. "He died while I was in my last course to receive my master's degree." My mother had Alzheimer's and my father had dementia. I had taken care of them. The man's remark turned our conversation to education. He wanted to know what high school I had graduated from in San Antonio. I told him I was a dropout who earned a GED in a migrant worker program 40 years earlier at the University of Houston.

"The director's name was Chuy," I said. "And if I saw him again, I would give him a big 'Thank You' because, although I was a high school dropout, I am about to earn my Ph.D." He

inquired into the time and place I had earned my GED in Houston, put two-and-two together, and replied:

“You know, I was the director of that program at the time. I let you in. My name is Chuy!”

Our jaws dropped.

This was the man I had told my college students about weeks earlier when the semester began and the person I had been telling my college students about for the past several years.

I asked Chuy if he would please come speak to my college students. I had disclosed this part of my life to my students because I wanted them to see the profound effect one person could have on another. I wanted them to know that they too could help change someone’s destiny. I also wanted to make Chuy visible to them.

A few weeks later, I introduced Chuy to my classes. A number of the students in this Hispanic-serving institution were from Texas’ Rio Grande Valley, just like the students in the migrant GED program, all those years ago. They had heard me speak on the first day of class, about the fondness I had for the migrant workers from the Rio Grande Valley I met in the migrant program, people whose public-school education was interrupted to feed our country. I talked about how I was well treated in the program. They also listened to Chuy speak about how he had once been discounted by a high school counselor when he expressed a desire to teach.

“You are not the caliber of a teacher,” she told him. She had spoken to all the migrant students this way. Chuy was crushed but not for long. He went home from that experience and told his friends in his neighborhood. They told him not to listen to the school counselor, that indeed he had what it took to be a teacher. Chuy’s friends invited him to register for college with them.

They even graduated together. He became a certified teacher of sons and daughters of migrant workers, earned two master’s degrees, then became the director of the GED program Houston.

Meeting the man who was once a migrant worker, who earned his master’s degrees to become the director of the High School Equivalency (H.E.P.) program at a university to help others, and who

opened a door for their teacher, was a powerful experience for the students, as evidenced by their thank you letters to Chuy. They saw how profoundly affected their teacher was by his blessing, Chuy. It was a powerful, poignant instructional moment of self-disclosure.

Students not only wrote thank you letters to Chuy, they also began to refer to Blessers in their lives, interchangeably as both Blessers and Chuy.

Like Chuy, they were reminded of the people in their lives who recognized and encouraged their unique human capacities. By meeting Chuy, they saw first-hand the long-term impact of one fellow human being on another.

In the past four years after meeting Chuy again, I learned more about him. I discovered that after working in the fields and canneries to put himself through college, he was drafted from his teaching job to serve in Vietnam. There, in ’69, he became a Air Flight medic where he witnessed the sights, sounds, smells and carnage of combat. Not only had he suffered many slights as a migrant worker and Mexican American prior to Vietnam, he also suffered ridicule by many when he returned from Vietnam. (I too, protested by “going up in smoke,” like Cheech and Chong, but I didn’t believe vets deserved ridicule).

Still, I want the world to know how a migrant worker and Vietnam Vet turned around a pothead dropout. I want the world to see our capacity to bless other people, to play a role, no matter how large or small or how seemingly insignificant it might be.

Jesus “Chuy” Lopez has helped many combat vets come to terms with the horrors of their memories. We invited Chuy to be our key-note speaker on November 9, 2019 to address the Military Families Caregivers group “Writing Back to You.”



HERCULES

By Raquel Cataldo, Ph.D.

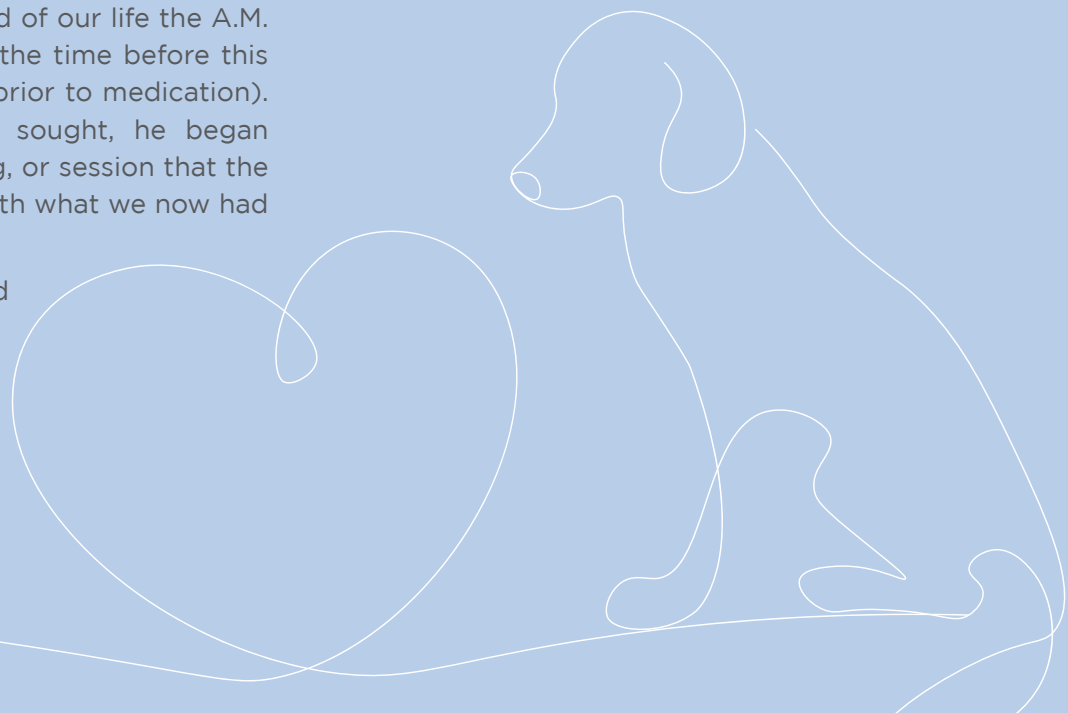
When you hear the word Hercules, your mind immediately conjures thoughts of great strength and power. Yet, for my family that name means gentleness, love, care, and safety. Hercules was our dog, a black lab mix we “rescued” from the Humane Society of San Antonio. He came to us through a VA program to help veterans suffering from the effects of trauma with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), or some other challenge that makes it difficult for a veteran to handle day-to-day living.

In 2010, almost 20 years after my husband Paul left the military under an early release program as a result of a draw down in forces, we uncovered a dark secret. The many troubling situations that our family had experienced all came to a head when my youngest son and I drove him to the hospital. We managed to thwart his attempt to end the pain. At the time of this frightening experience, I recall having many questions. Most of them circled around a sense of fear: “What will we do now? How will we survive financially? What does this new diagnosis mean? How could we not have known?”

Suddenly, we were thrust into a new life that none of us had the skill-set to manage. I began to read any and all material I could get my hands on, along with seeking the resources of local mental health agencies. At that time, things did not seem hopeful. Perhaps the greatest concern was accepting the fact that we were now facing a new normal. My husband coined this new period of our life the A.M. period (after medication) and the time before this turning point the P.M. period (prior to medication). In addition to the support I sought, he began attending every course, training, or session that the VA offered to help him cope with what we now had a name for, PTSD.

At the time, I wasn't sure I could handle this new way of life that we all had to adjust to, and which seemed to have happened overnight.

As fate would have it, that next year the VA began a program selecting dogs from the Humane Society of San Antonio to train and pair with veterans needing support for PTSD. A doctor shared the information about the program with Paul, and we began the process to adopt a dog. It was an extremely detailed process involving sessions asking many questions of the veteran to determine if he qualified based on all the markers that might make him an ideal candidate. This involved visiting our home to inspect our living conditions and interviews with me as well. It seemed that the vetting process took many weeks. Meanwhile the Humane Society completed their end of the bargain by assessing various dogs they felt would meet the requirements to be selected as a comfort dog. Finally, the day came when we would arrive at the Humane Society to choose the new addition to our family. If I'm honest, it was quite a strange and embarrassing experience to appear there with what was an entourage (Paul, me, the VA psychologist, his assistant, the intern, and a social worker). We sat in the waiting room prepared to meet the veterinarian who arrived with two shelter staff. This entire committee moved to the room where we would begin reviewing the dogs that might be a great match for us. We began by looking at photographs of each of the five dogs and then visiting them in their kennel.



Throughout, Paul wasn't saying much at all. In fact, that's who he had become: a quiet, reserved man, completely transformed from the gregarious person he had been. I encouraged him to choose a dog, and he reluctantly chose to look at the first one which was a black lab mix. They brought Hercules to Paul, and he didn't have much of a reaction. I persuaded him to take Hercules to the small outdoor examination area to see how he might react there. That, too, elicited no response from Paul. As I observed Paul holding Hercules on a leash with a stone-like expression I said, "Why don't you look at another one?" As we made our way back indoors, Paul stopped, abruptly stating, "Wait! He's the one. He looked at me." Because Paul seemed indifferent towards the dog, I asked if he was sure, but Paul was immediately convinced,

“Hercules is the one! He chose me!”

You couldn't have imagined the celebration from the shelter staff when Paul selected Hercules. They all came to rejoice and to say goodbye to the dog they had rescued from the kill shelter, the one with two broken femurs and a deep gash on his side where a scar still remained, at approximately a year into his dear life.

And now, after eight months of living at the shelter and being passed over by many potential adopters, Hercules had been chosen to go home with us. That day would begin the most incredible transformation in a man by a dog that I could have imagined. With Hercules at his side at every moment possible, Paul grew into the closest version of his prior self. His spirits had been lifted by a species which is quite appropriately known as "man's best friend." I recall telling those who asked about this adoption, "If I had known that a dog could change your life the way Hercules has changed ours, I would have adopted a pack of dogs a long time ago!"

As the years passed, the bond between Paul and Hercules grew stronger. No one could come close to Paul for a handshake or a hug without Hercules signaling that they were encroaching on a sacred

space. We had formed a unit that seemed to be created by the gods, and in our eyes should remain intact. However, after eight beautiful years with Hercules at our side, the bond between us and Hercules was sorrowfully broken. We recently lost our beloved dog to a rare stomach illness. I have to say that I am proud of Paul for loving Hercules so immensely that he instantly made the decision that we had to lay him to rest. I didn't expect him to be able to make that painful decision. Yet, that confirmed for me the immeasurable love and gratitude Paul had for the dog that saved and changed our lives.

Whoever named Hercules could not have been more accurate in giving him a name fit for the gods. Mythology said that Hercules' life would be rewarded with the promise he would live forever, and this could not be truer. We miss Hercules more than I can express. We can't even bring ourselves to consider attempting to replace someone so valuable. The one thing that remains true for us is that never has a dog fulfilled a journey more than Hercules.

Thank you, Hercules, we love you forever!



MY SON BAILEY

By Shalia Ketchell Swaggart

*"People die everyday.
It's a sad part of life."*

This was my go-to tagline. I clearly recall the last time that I knee jerkingly said it. It was when my daughter called with terrible news. A friend of hers had a single-car crash. The friend and her newborn baby died. I told my daughter how sorry I was. And out popped my "people die" spiel.

Death first came to my world in childhood. I lost two of the major women in my life. My grandmother at age 10. And my mother when I was 13. It seemed I was becoming an expert of sorts. As the loss of loved ones trailed me into young adulthood, death became an "old hat" feeling for me.

After the death of another major woman in my life, I took a moment to glimpse at grief. I told my husband: "Everybody who loves me is dying." Even then, I moved on without much ado.

Fast forward to my son's decision to join the Army. His journey to meet each requirement for entry was a little rough [for him or for you—for him, right]. The last bump was athlete's foot. To rid his feet of this, took many weeks. His determination became more palpable with every accomplishment. This focus fueled him through basic training. And that milestone pushed him to find great pride in continued learning at his designated Army base.

Then word came about his deployment. The date to deploy was quite a few months away. As it neared, I suppose it cluttered my mind. I remember so clearly. It was a day or so after I had "comforted" my daughter at the news of her friend's fatal car crash. I was waiting at a stop sign. My mind wandered to this thought. Would I be able to walk out the words that I so easily say about people dying, if my son didn't live through deployment?

I did not answer myself. The traffic cleared and I was able to drive on.

After a long and wonderful visit home, my son, Army PFC Bailey Swaggart, deployed to Africa. While investigating a possible threat during his patrol duty, he was killed by snakebite.

My husband and I got the worst news we would ever receive. I picked my soul up from my feet and I put on my "old hat." I shifted to caregiver. I felt I had to care for my husband and three daughters. And get through the Army red tape. I went into Wife, Mom, and Super-Survivor mode.

The aftermath of this tragic loss was profusely different from all others in my life. It switched from "someone who loved me" dying to "someone I love most" dying. No "moving on without much ado," this time.

For the first few years, I found any way I could to make "much ado" about Bailey's life. It was my way to cope.

Now, after five years, the scope of the loss may be smaller and the feeling of grief less frequent, but I will always champion the life and death of my son.

That "old hat" way of thinking, ties me in a new way to all the families of the world that lose loved ones every day. Bailey lived a full life for 25 years. His death destroyed that childish feeling of mine of being an expert on death. All this encouraged me to move on with my eyes on grief.

*Grief is a form of
love. Like love, it
changes as we do.*

I am trying, with much help, to learn to grow with my grief. I am finding it helpful to be my own caregiver. I am so grateful to Tom Porter for connecting me to the "Writing Back to You" caregivers' group. To know that you are not alone in the griefs of this world is a comfort.



ANOTHER MEMORIAL DAY: IT'S TIME FOR MILITARY SUICIDES TO BE RECOGNIZED



By Sabine Ward, *president of mission 22*

Every Memorial Day, thousands of families show up at war memorials to honor their spouses, parents, siblings and children who have died serving our country. However, there is one particular group of military families who will not see their hero's name engraved in a memorial, again this year. These families are getting the message that their soldier's sacrifice is not acknowledged here.

Why?

Because these Active Duty and veteran soldiers died by suicide.

We have memorials for veterans of all wars; their names are engraved in stone for all eternity, but the only people that are remembered and are worthy to have their names engraved in those war memorials, are those who were killed in action (KIA). It highlights the way this country still stigmatizes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and Military Suicide.

By not putting their names on the memorials, we are telling these families that their loved ones were "weak," and that they did not die "honorably." These men and women took an oath and put on the uniform like everyone else. Their sacrifice should be acknowledged in the exact same way. They deserve to be honored and to seek the help they need.

Memorial Day is a time to recognize ALL of those who died serving their country.

This fight is personal to me. I am fighting for the recognition of my husband and for all those who suffered and died by suicide. While representing Mission 22, a Veterans' treatment, memorial, and community social impact group; Veterans told me that my husband was a coward for taking "the Easy Way Out" and that they all have such "demons" to fight. I see it differently. My husband sacrificed himself in service to his country, and it hurts me, as his widow who knows how much he suffered daily, that his fellow soldiers and others

in this country believe that he did not die an honorable death.

He came back, yes...but he didn't come back the same way he left. Nobody could see his wounds. He wasn't missing a limb nor did he have other visible scars. Instead, he suffered a long time in silence and held it together as long as he could. But he ultimately lost his battle.

As of today, there have been more suicides than KIA deaths since the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan began. By not recognizing these casualties, we dismiss the pain and suffering of thousands and minimize the tragedy of war. People who died by suicide acquired their wounds on the battlefield, just like their KIA brothers and sisters. Traumatic events occurred that left them scarred for life, and because they don't have a limb missing, or scars that show their battle wounds, they are ignored.

These men and women joined the service to keep all of us safe. Let's recognize their sacrifice and let their families know their lives matter!

My husband, a combat medic in the US Army, was killed in action; it just took a few years for his body to catch up with his mind. I will make it my mission to bring awareness to this epidemic and change the perception that exists in this country.

Please help me in my mission to bring awareness to this epidemic and change the perception that exists in this country.



A WOUNDED WARRIOR'S INVISIBLE CHILD

by Sarah Dancer

I've spent most of my life firmly believing that I wasn't allowed to be upset with my situation, and I still feel that way, not because I'm glad for my situation, no, nothing like that, but because I am so invisible that I have even fooled myself into thinking I truly was no more than a ghost walking around in people clothes.

Never have I been asked how it feels to not be seen, to be invisible in the caregiver/veteran community and how to become visible. I've always felt misunderstood by my peers from school, as they never truly understood my situation. I could explain it over and over again; I could say, **"I'm sad that my dad's going to die and so I'm sad a lot and these particular words trigger me because of my dad."** Some people would try to be understanding and some people wouldn't. They'd say that they weren't going to censor themselves for me, and that's fine— **I got over it, but I did and do feel alienated.**

My pain isn't something you can see on me, physically, and never has been. Which, in my generation, is kind of hard, at least... in a certain sense. I remember wishing as a 14, 15-year-old that I did have some physical wound on me, like huge letters carved on my arms saying **'my dad is dying please be mindful.'** But there weren't words on my arm, and still, **I was invisible.**

I had nobody in a situation even vaguely similar to my own to talk to, I was nobody, I even felt invisible in my own family dynamic, not because my family didn't care, but because I didn't know that I was allowed to be upset over my situation, so I just pretended it didn't exist.

There is no program for teenagers of wounded warriors. There is nobody who knows to say **"you're allowed to be upset"** in a way that we can understand. Now that I'm 18, my mom offers for me to sit in on grief counseling— but that's not what I want, what I need.

I need people similarly aged to me in similar situations. I want to pretend to be a regular teenager with people like me, who are robbed of the opportunity to be a regular teenager. It's hard to describe what feeling invisible is like because it's so normal to me. It's like describing what my tongue feels like sitting in my mouth. I know how it feels, and I can sense an explanation in the back of my mind, but I'm not sure how to translate that.

It feels the same way as being desensitized to something horrifying.

I'd say feeling invisible in my situation is the same as listening to a character in a horror movie scream and not feeling anything at all. **Desensitized.**

Being invisible is sort of like sitting in the rocks underneath the playground and even the kid who all the other kids think is weird thinks you're the weird one.

It's sort of like that.



Did You Know?



1.74 M

There are 1.74 million non-profits vying for limited philanthropic dollars.



12%

In 2018, less than 12% of taxpayers itemized, reducing their motivation to give philanthropically.



30%

of all individual giving is to religious institutions.



Political campaigns can have a profound effect on the amount of money given to non-profits.

EACH DONOR COUNTS

Philanthropy Driving Support to Military Kids

With state, federal, and military contracts diminishing and their funding focused on issues not aligned with the MCEC mission, MCEC must rely more and more on philanthropic support. Over the past six years, the percentage of philanthropic support to ensure MCEC fulfills its mission has grown from less than 30% to over 50% and growing. With the anticipated redirection of public - and even private - funding to the more essential needs of food, clothing, shelter and medical support brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, MCEC is preparing for philanthropic support to become even more critical.

MCEC seeks and receives philanthropic contributions from three general sources: corporations, foundations, and individuals. As corporations and foundations shift their areas of focus/interest, are flooded by non-profits seeking financial support, and are now (due to the effects of the pandemic) finding themselves with less discretionary capital and an explosion of more essential needs to fill, the generosity of individuals is now even more crucial to MCEC.



Because the MCEC has, in the past, been so generously funded by service contracts, federal grants and state contracts, it seems individuals may have viewed their contributions as simply augmenting our primary funding sources. However, the truth is the MCEC has seen a dramatic decrease in public funding over the past 10 years without realizing a comparable increase in individual philanthropy.

Although MCEC has increased our efforts to pursue corporate and foundation grant funding, we know that individual philanthropy not only supports our mission financially, but it also makes a strong statement to corporations and foundations who want to be assured the people who know us best are also supporting us financially.

A prime example of how important individual donations are to the MCEC's overall philanthropic effort is our need to be included on the Charity Navigator list of recognized and rated nonprofits.

Charity Navigator is an organization that works to guide intelligent giving, helps people have the information they need to give to a charity with confidence, and helps charities by highlighting truly effective organizations. However, MCEC cannot register with Charity Navigator unless its "public support," i.e. charitable giving, represents 40% of revenue, which, according to the MCEC 2019 audit, sits at 35%.

The MCEC is so very grateful to the hundreds of individuals who contribute each year, and we believe there are hundreds more who believe in our mission of ensuring inclusive, quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, transition, deployments, and family separations. Hopefully, this information draws attention to the MCEC need for individual support.

Not only are we committed to our Active Duty, National Guard, Reserves, and veterans, we're also committed to their families. As a West Point graduate, U.S. Army veteran, and father, I know how important these programs are to our military families, and I am so happy PAE can be a part of it.

John Heller
President and CEO [PAE]





The United States has been fighting the war on terrorism since 2001. The ongoing engagements mean every military-connected child under the age of 19 has only known their active-duty parent serving in a time of war. It's a sobering reality for many military families, which is played out daily on network news stations, newspapers, magazine covers and in social media.

A military child might linger a bit longer in the living room to watch the nightly news when reports of a bomb or images of troops fighting in a war zone are events featured in news coverage. Even if the military parent isn't deployed, the familiar look of a uniform is enough to catch a child's attention. The recent escalation of tensions between Iran and the United States brought extra-long workdays to many military parents and concern for the future.

How do military families talk to their children about the news and world events?

Megan B. is a spouse of a Navy officer working in special operations. She's spent years raising a family through short notice, long deployments and repeated moves. When asked how she talks to her four children about world events, she says she doesn't hide the news from them, but is careful about which news sources she allows her children to watch.

"Good Morning America is on every morning while the kids are eating breakfast and getting ready for school. It's family friendly news that touches on current events but doesn't add the hype my family doesn't need," said Megan B.

She says it's important to curate the news for kids and really monitor where they get their information, especially the younger ones. For older kids, she can't control everything, but she does guide them to factual news versus over-hyped media.

According to Megan B., "It's important to keep them informed at an appropriate level for their age. My youngest son is good with just the morning news, while my oldest reads everything he can get his hands on. We just make ourselves available if they have questions." However, she says when her husband is forward deployed, "it's strictly music in the morning. I control as much screen time as I can to avoid them seeing or reading something that would cause them to worry."

Becky Harris, a Certified National School Psychologist and a former military spouse, has worked at length with military-connected students over the last decade. She recommends sharing information, including news coverage, that is age-appropriate and at a child's interest level.

Harris advises, "Don't push too much information on them. If they ask questions, answer them, but stop once their interest fades. For younger ones, it's hard for them to really grasp war. I had a child once ask me. 'Why don't they just use their words

“It’s important to keep them informed at an appropriate level for their age.”

instead of fighting?’ Their world isn’t big enough yet to understand the realities of war.”

She says a parent’s goal should be to avoid worry or anxiety, especially for deployed families. She recommends focusing on the present.

“Practicing mindfulness activities is a good way to shift a child’s thoughts from worrying to the present. Taking ‘big-belly’ breaths and focusing on what is right in front of them helps shift the mind, especially while they are in the classroom. Simple acts such as asking themselves to remember what is the math homework or what is on the wall surrounding them,” said Harris. She also suggests that children check in with all five senses to keep the mind present and reduce worry.

“We want a child to focus on the things they can control and not the things out of their control. Watching traumatic world events such as bombings or combat can be deeply personal to a military child; those are things that are definitely out of their control,” said Harris.

Harris reminds parents that children will take emotional cues from them, and to “be aware of how much emotional energy a parent is investing in news and their reaction to it. Children will take on the worry and anxiety a parent displays. If it’s tough for the parent to control, it might be best to limit the news for the adults, too.”



VISIT THE MCEC STORE TODAY



store.militarychild.org

We offer a wide variety of gifts and educational resources, book bundles, and sale merchandise at excellent prices.

Unplug with a good book this season & keep your spirit alive with our MCEC logo products!

We appreciate your continued support of military-connected children.

Have questions?

Contact Denise.Montana@MilitaryChild.org

-OR- call 254-953-1923 ext. 1117

Looking to the Future

FRANCES HESSELBEIN STUDENT LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Frances Hesselbein is the former CEO of the Girl Scouts USA from 1976 to 1990, book author, and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient. Today, she serves as president and CEO of her namesake leadership institute.

The mission of the Frances Hesselbein Student Leadership Program is to grow and sustain the *Student 2 Student* Program on the local campus. Established by MCEC in 2006, the Frances Hesselbein Student Leadership Program offers an intensive experience for selected students to enrich their leadership and team-building skills.

In the Fall of 2019, several S2S members from around the United States were selected to attend this highly-coveted program at West Point. The week-long, intensive experience helped build skills through personal small group settings. Students gained confidence and competence and committed to developing their leadership skills in order to build their local S2S program.

Students also had an opportunity to share their program challenges and successes with other peers, and to hear from distinguished guests who provided insights to overcoming challenges and to building personal character. Two of our FHSLP attendees shared their experiences and reflected how the program changed their outlook for their future.



When I arrived at the airport, I had no idea that I was about to meet a group of people so amazing and interesting as those I had the privilege to meet at Frances Hesselbein Student Leadership Program. Not only was it an amazing leadership program, it was a way for me to experience the perfect mixing bowl of personalities and the kindest students from all over the US and beyond. The way this program was organized was not only to learn from people with an abundance of knowledge concerning leadership and interactions between people, but to also learn from each other.

From the first lecture to the last panel, I felt like my scope of knowledge concerning leadership grew exponentially. To be in the presence of Frances, as well as instructors and professors at West Point, was so inspiring. I learned everything from goal-setting and leadership, to character development to understanding and finding strengths and weaknesses. When the enlightening week of fun and leadership was over, I

felt like **I could really change people's lives for the better** once I got back. This was all oriented to our school's S2S program and how we could improve it, and I have already made some improvements. I took the knowledge about leadership and goal-setting and implemented it into training. The training that I created with this knowledge has smoothed over a lot of kinks that needed to be fixed.

I am a military child and have moved eight times in my life, and I have traveled to 19 countries because of the different places we've lived. Being surrounded by students who have similar interactions with the military made me feel much less alone. I became best friends with all 11 of my fellow participants, and we are still keeping in touch.

What was so incredible was that our amazing team of MCEC members were able to find all of us and bring us all together. I am not an extremely sensitive person, but in left, I left the best group of people ever. Thank you to all: Destiny, Debra, Tracy, and Dan!! You guys were the absolute best! I hope this program continues, I believe it has impacted everyone who has been involved and has changed someone's life for the better, whether it was a student who attended FHSLP or a new student helped through their S2S program.

- Jackson



A trip that started with unfamiliar faces and awkward hellos turned into unwanted goodbyes. It was

a time that I will remember forever, filled with great lessons and experiences I will certainly cherish.

Our week started off with a wonderful meeting with Ms. Frances Hesselbein, which was a remarkable experience for all! She welcomed each and every one of us with a big smile and loving hugs! Ms. Hesselbein is such a humble and influential leader. It was the best way to start our week. As our adventure continued, we were given the opportunity to take part in classes on leadership, and learned lessons on team building, problem solving, and more. We were able to learn valuable lessons through workshops designed to teach us positive leadership, moral strength, strong character, and problem solving in uncomfortable situations.

Each day our group was able to see different parts of West Point and spend time with different cadets. The cadets were able to tell us their stories and personal experiences while pursuing their education. I encountered the daily life of a cadet and the standards they are held to. I witnessed how the leaders around them constantly work to show and lead by example. To top everything off, I was surrounded by my peers who were driven by and held to the same standards as me. We all were able to connect and share ideas to help our communities grow. We worked together to enhance our knowledge to fix the problems we face in our own schools and cities. My time at the Frances Hesselbein Student Leadership Program was an extraordinary and unforgettable experience.

- Kaleigh

FOR COALITION & COHEN

The MCEC podcast team puts the capital “C” in Coalition with two recent podcasts created in partnership with The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Veterans Village of San Diego (VVSD). Thanks to the generous financial support of the Navy Spouses Club of San Diego, the first 30-minute podcast addresses the stressors our military-connected children are facing in their varied COVID-impacted learning environments and illustrates how caring adults can understand and support the children in their life, while discussing the burgeoning benefits of tele-health during the pandemic.

MCEC podcast host Susan Sellers talks with Marla Monk, herself a military spouse and a licensed clinical social worker with the Cohen Clinic at VVSD. Marla truly understands the military community and offers practical advice on empowering children and supporting caring adults while navigating school in this unique time. The Steven A. Cohen Clinic at Veterans Village of San Diego is one of sixteen health clinics nationwide under Samford-based nonprofit Cohen Veterans Network (CVN), which provides targeted treatments for a variety of mental health challenges facing post 9-11 veteran and military families.

The second podcast is a powerful personal story with Jenny Lynne Stroup, Outreach Coordinator at Cohen Clinic at VVSD and an active duty Navy spouse. Jenny Lynne shares her family’s journey in finding treatment and support for not only her changed soldier, but their child, as the

complexities of injury and reintegration tell a story many families can recognize. These two podcasts with the Cohen Clinic at VVSD, as well as the entirety of the **“For the Sake of the Child”** podcasts, are archived on the MCEC website militarychild.org. Anyone can visit, for free, the Google Playstore, iTunes, or Podbean, become a subscriber and follower, and get notified when the newest podcasts are released. Coalition is an important part of the MCEC name, and these podcasts reflect that component of the mission. MCEC looks forward to continuing to work with Cohen Clinic at VVSD and the entire Cohen Veterans Network across the country.



MCEC's First Virtual Education Summit Inspires Collaboration



When COVID restrictions caused the cancellation of the MCEC National Training Seminar in July, the organization pledged to find a way to bring parents, students, educators and key subject matter experts together before the end of the year. The result was the first, virtual Education Summit held on November 18-19. The two-day event focused on the results of the Military Kids NOW Survey released in September and fostered collaborative efforts to shape the way forward in a changing environment.

As part of the two-day event, MCEC partnered with appointed government officials, education and student behavioral experts, and military leaders from across the services. Dr. Jill Biden, the wife of President-elect Joe Biden, reinforced the importance of helping military families and referenced findings from the survey during the Education Summit's opening assembly. **"With this critical information, we'll be able to chart a better path for students, parents and schools,"** said Biden.

The Education Summit attracted more than 1,700 attendees, all of whom reinforced their commitment to collaborating on ways to provide increased support to military and veteran-connected children and families. The Military Kids NOW Survey findings can be downloaded on the organization's website (www.militarychild.org).

MCEC also took this opportunity to recognize organizations who went above and beyond in their local communities over the past year.

Five groups took home honors for the H.G. "Pete" Taylor Partnership of Excellence Award: Maxwell-River Region Partnership for Educational Excellence in Alabama earned the 2020 Outstanding Partnership Award; The Cougar Cub Recycling Program partnership between Joint Base San Antonio and Fort Sam Houston Independent School District earned the Outstanding Individual Project/Program Award; Onslow Public School's Swansboro High School, in North Carolina, earned the top achievement for the MCEC Student 2 Student program: National High School of the Year; and Sesame Workshop was honored with the Dr. Mary Keller Award of Contributions to Science for its long-term support of military-connected children.

"That's why we have to make a choice... the choice to support them, to lift them up, and give them what they need to thrive."

-Dr. Jill Biden

The success and positive feedback from the Education Summit has warranted serious consideration for possibilities of another summit in 2021. At this time, MCEC can confirm plans are in place for its annual National Training Seminar in Washington D.C. scheduled for **July 19-21, 2021.**



MCEC[®]
EDUCATION
SUMMIT 2020


MISSION STEADY, FUTURE READY: MEETING THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF MILITARY CHILDREN IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

To Make a Difference, Leave a Footprint.

A military move can be disorienting for most children as they navigate new academic and social and emotional environments. When families move children with exceptional needs, that disorientation is magnified and most often affects the entire family: parents, siblings and the child alike. Where do they find the doctors, schools, programs and resources they need? How do they locate the caregivers and support systems that are so necessary? And, how do they begin to find their tribe - other families with similar concerns?

With that need in mind, MCEC® worked with subject matter experts from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the military's Child and Family Behavioral Health Program to develop individual Parent Action guides for families whose children struggle with three specific challenges: Anxiety Disorder, Depression, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Each of these guides is designed to empower parents to act on their children's behalf to ensure that all lessons learned are shared and then archived in their military communities to support the families yet to come.

Each of the guides includes a set of infographics that describe what families feel other families need to know about that specific disorder, from symptoms and diagnosis to treatments and resources. These were developed collaboratively during two MCEC National Training Seminars by professional and parent participants. The infographics are followed by Dialogue Guides that provide a template for families, educators, military staff members, and local providers to hold conversations that build sensitivity, understanding and support.



Packaged together, these Behavioral Health Guides are the epitome of families serving families, making a difference and leaving a footprint behind.

Visit our website to access these free resources at militarychild.org/behavioralhealth.

Written by Joan Patterman Barrett

SHOP the MCEC STORE!

>> **REDUCED ITEMS** while supplies last <<



Silicone Wristband (Adult & Youth)

\$1.25

Purple stretch wristband with grey print "Kids Serve Too." Show your support for Military Connected Children.



Rainbow Confetti Mood Cup

\$1.75

MCEC color-changing plastic cup changes color when filled with a cold beverage.



The Dandelion Pin (Patriotic) The Flower of the Military Child

\$3.50

The dandelion puts down roots everywhere and is very resilient! Show your pride in the military child!

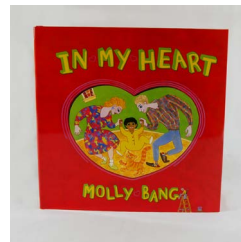


MCEC Purple Socks

\$10.95

Show your MCEC pride in these comfortable, stylish socks!

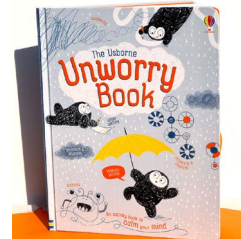
Affordable Resources
for Military Families
store.militarychild.org



In My Heart Book

\$5.00

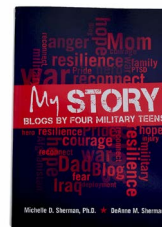
Beautiful story that reassures children that they are always in their parents' hearts, whether together or apart.



The Unworry Book

\$8.95

This book is full of ideas and activities to calm and distract you and help you enjoy living your life.



My Story Book

\$5.00

A compilation based on four teenagers experiences in dealing with deployment.



SUPPORT MILITARY KIDS

MCEC Latte/Soup Mug

\$7.95

Perfect for lattes, soups and ice cream!

VISIT militarychild.org TO ORDER NOW!



MCEC[®]

MCEC supports all military-connected children by educating, advocating, and collaborating to resolve education challenges associated with the military lifestyle.



STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

MCEC promotes a culture of inclusion through student leadership, resulting in improved academic performance and peer to peer interactions.



PARENT SUPPORT

MCEC empowers all parents to become informed, involved, and proactive supporters, allowing them to make a positive impact in the needs of their children.



PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

MCEC provides a variety of services such as professional learning opportunities and online and in-school support across multiple disciplines to address the unique challenges facing military-connected children.

SERVING THE CHILDREN OF
THOSE WHO SERVE US ALL.

MilitaryChild.org

