



Issue Paper

Purple Star School Designation Program

(Updated May 29, 2024)

The Issue:

America's military-connected children experience academic and social-emotional challenges as they relocate to new schools due to a parent's change in duty station. These transitions create challenges since schools often have differing cultures, curricula, standards, course offerings, schedules, and graduation requirements. As a result, many students struggle to stay on track to be college-, work- and life-ready. This can impact military readiness by degrading retention of service members and indirectly depressing the economic viability of local communities and states that host military installations.

Many Military Children are Impacted:

Military-connected students must move whenever their active-duty parent receives a relocation order (called a Permanent Change of Station). A military-connected child can expect to move six to nine times from kindergarten through their high school graduation, with approximately 200,000 students transitioning to a new school in any given year. Over eighty percent of America's military-connected children attend public, private, or public charter schools.

With an estimated 1.2 million active-duty military-connected U.S. children enrolled in public, private, or public charter schools in the United States and abroad, the number of children affected by these transitions is significant. It is essential to include over 318,000 (40.1%) of National Guard and Reserves service member families experiencing deployment related transitions who impact local public, private, or public charter schools as well (Department of Defense Demographics, 2021, p.56).

The National Advocate for Purple Star Schools:

The non-profit Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is the national advocate for Purple Star Schools, a grassroots initiative that encourages states and school districts to establish Purple Star School programs. In collaboration with the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University (CPRL), MCEC conducted a comprehensive study in 2020 across four states to assess the effectiveness of the program.¹ In 2021, CPRL and MCEC

¹ The four originate from MCEC's 2001 Secondary Education Transition Study (commissioned by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center).

released a summary report highlighting the findings from the study. This report provided valuable insights into the current landscape of the Purple Star School program and offered recommendations for enhancing its implementation at the school, district, and state levels. [Read the original report here.](#)

Furthermore, a subsequent report published in 2022 builds upon the previous findings from the 2021 summary. This new report delves deeper into the evolution of the program over time and focuses on how stakeholders have collaborated to ensure the program's rigor and sustainability. The report offers detailed information regarding the implementation and progress of the program, providing a comprehensive understanding of its development and impact. Read [2022_Purple Star Program.](#)

A Purple Star School designation lets military parents know, whether they are on Active Duty, in the National Guard, or Reserves, that a school is dedicated to helping their child gain the educational skills necessary to be college-, work- and life-ready. It signals that a school also supports the social and emotional wellbeing of military kids adjusting to new schools and the absence of a parent during deployment.

Purple Star School designation is awarded by State Boards of Education to K-12 schools that have shown a strong commitment to supporting military-connected children through targeted measures. MCEC plays a vital role in increasing awareness of the Purple Star School initiative among states that have not yet implemented the program. As the most comprehensive resource available to states interested in initiating a Purple Star School program, MCEC provides ongoing professional development support and guidance throughout the entire process. Through these efforts, MCEC strives to ensure that military-connected children receive the transition support they need.

Purple Star School Programs - What they are and how they help:

Purple Star School programs are established by a state's education authority or by an individual school district. States may formally create the program through legislation or less formally through administrative procedures from the state capital or at the individual school district level. For example, the state education chief's office can create a program or a superintendent within a school district may do so.

While there is no one-size-fits all for these programs, the 2022 MCEC and CPRL Report recommends the following components to effectively implement the Purple Star School designation:

- 1.** Designate a staff point of contact for military students and families. The individual can be a counselor, administrator, teacher, or other staff member.
- 2.** Establish and maintain a dedicated webpage featuring information and resources for military families.
- 3.** Establish and maintain a student-led transition program.

4. Provide professional development for additional staff on special considerations for military students and families.
5. Utilize military initiatives to foster community partnerships and engage military-connected families.

In addition to the five recommended criteria, states may choose an additional criterion, such as a commitment by the school to hold a school-wide and community military recognition event; passage by the school district's school board of a resolution publicizing support for military students and families; or partnering with military installation School Liaison Officers to provide opportunities for military parents to volunteer in the school.

The main objective of these programs is to enable school staff to effectively address academic needs and navigate the planning challenges experienced by military-connected children during times of transition. These schools also seek to accommodate students who may have missed the normal cycles of sports and club activities. Finally, these schools acknowledge that every military-connected child has left behind friends, support networks and may also be coping with the absence of a parent due to deployment.

Benefits to States Starting a Purple Star School Program:

A statewide Purple Star School program provides the following advantages for states:

- **Alignment with the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children:** While the Purple Star School program operates independently from the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission, it shares the same objectives as the Compact. By implementing a statewide Purple Star School program, states demonstrate their commitment to ensuring a successful transition and academic support for military-connected students.
- **Safeguarding state revenue:** The U.S. military considers the quality of K-12 schools surrounding military facilities when making decisions on future basing and personnel matters. Communities with Purple Star Schools are more likely to retain military bases and attract military families, leading to economic benefits for local areas.
- **Promoting inclusive and supportive school environments:** Through their initiatives and training, Purple Star Schools create diverse and inclusive environments that benefit all students, regardless of their military connection. These schools prioritize fostering a supportive military-connected student atmosphere that contributes to the well-being and success of all highly mobile students.

Purple Star School legislation has been approved in over 38 states, while five states are establishing their own application process, implementation criteria, and state program evaluation procedures.

The Military Child Education Coalition, serving as the primary advocate for Purple Star Schools nationwide, offers professional development opportunities specifically tailored to Purple Star School initiatives and the facilitation of Professional Learning Communities providing a platform for collaboration and support among school leaders engaged in Purple Star School efforts. These resources aim to guide and empower school leaders to effectively implement and evaluate Purple Star School initiatives, thereby ensuring future designation and successful renewal of Purple Star School status.

Disclosure Statement: MCEC serves as the national advocate for Purple Star Schools; however, it is important to note that MCEC does not have authority over the state legislative process, state application process, program requirements, or state program evaluation procedures. Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that there is currently no centralized national database accessible for obtaining comprehensive nationwide data or conducting state-by-state comparisons of program evaluations.

For More Information:

Find out more at [MilitaryChild.org/purplestarschools](https://militarychild.org/purplestarschools). Or contact Kyra Bush, MCEC Vice President of Education Services:

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