



Frequently Asked Questions

Suggested Use for Military Student Identifier Code

The **Military Student Identifier (MSI)** was mandated in the [Every Student Succeeds Act¹](#) (ESSA 2015), which requires states and districts to report on the performance of students with a parent in the military. With the adoption of ESSA, military-connected students became a distinct subgroup. This subgroup comprises students with a parent serving in the armed forces as defined in section 101(a)(4) of title 10, United States Code.

This document responds to frequently asked questions regarding the Military Student Identifier (MSI) and provides examples for effective implementation for state education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs). See the [MCEC MSI Position Statement²](#) for additional background information and future recommendations.

What is the definition of a military-connected student as required by ESSA?

The Military Student Identifier Code (as it is commonly referred to in the field) indicates a student with a parent who is a member of the armed forces (as defined in section 101(a)(1)(4) of title 10, United States Code) on active duty (as defined in section 101(d)(5) of such title).

Military-Connected Student Definition:

In accordance with the September 3, 2024, [U.S. Department of Education](#) guidance for state and local education agencies, annual reporting data include a military-connected student definition. Military-connected students are defined as students with a parent on active duty or on full-time or part-time National Guard or Reserve duty in the armed forces (Air Force, Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Space Force, Coast Guard). While the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) does not explicitly require individual school report cards, states typically fulfill these requirements by publishing separate LEA and school report cards.³

The [National Defense Authorization Act of 2020⁴](#) revised section 1111(h)(1)(C)(ii) of the ESEA to expand the definition of “military-connected” by removing the term “active duty.” As a result of this amendment, the designation for student group has been updated to “status as a student with a parent who is a member of the armed forces (as defined in [section 101\(a\)\(4\) of title 10, United States Code](#)).”

According to 10 U.S.C. 101(a)(4), the term “armed forces” encompasses the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and Coast Guard, which also includes reserve components such as the Army National Guard and Air National Guard, as well as the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard Reserves). At a minimum, this student subgroup must include students with a parent on “active service.” Under 10 U.S.C. 101(d)(3), this includes individuals serving on active duty, full-time or part-time National Guard duty, and full-time or part-time Reserve status.³

Additionally, consider that there are over 2.3 million youth caregivers who live with a wounded, ill or injured service member or veteran.⁵ A recent study by RAND found that about 40% of military and veteran connected children under 18 living in caregiver households help with caregiving tasks.⁶ The additional social, behavioral, and mental health challenges as well as extra responsibilities at home can be overwhelming and take the forefront to school success and the youth’s own mental well-being.^{5,6}



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While an SEA may establish a more expansive definition, the SEA must be able to report the military-connected student group consistent with the updated definition. The US Department of Education encourages each SEA to publish its definition of “military-connected” alongside this data, so it is clear to the public which students are included in the student subgroup.³

What about students of National Guard parents?

While the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) of FY 2020, Sec. 579⁴ Annual Report Card removed the “on active duty” requirement for the ESSA of 2015 in an effort to expand the definition of military-connected students, the [Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34 §200.2 \(b\)\(1\)\(ii\)\(D\)](#) and [§200.2\(b\)\(11\)\(i\)\(I\)](#)⁷ continues to include only students with a parent who is a member of the armed forces on active duty and serves on full-time National Guard duty.

Students whose parents serve on full-time National Guard duty, where “armed forces,” “active duty,” and “full-time National Guard duty” have the same meanings as outlined in 10 U.S.C. 101(a)(4), 101(d)(1), and 101(d)(5), are also provided with an MSI code.

“National Guard” refers to a member of the Army National Guard of the United States or the Air National Guard of the United States. The member’s status may reference the National Guard of a state or territory, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or the District of Columbia.

What are a school’s obligations for collecting MSI data?

- Schools (LEAs and public charters) must include the MSI question in their student enrollment procedures.
- Each SEA or LEA can determine policies regarding the MSI classification codes and clarify data collection procedures to meet reporting requirements.

How can schools ask the MSI question in an easy-to-understand way?

A straightforward way to ask questions regarding military affiliation is to break it into parts:

- Is the student a dependent of an active-duty member of the US Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, or Coast Guard)?
» **Check “yes,” “no,” or decline to answer.**
- Is the student a dependent of a full-time or part-time member of the National Guard or Reserve force of the United States military (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, or Coast Guard)?
» **Check “yes,” “no,” or decline to answer.**
- Is the student a dependent of a veteran or retiree of the US Armed Forces (including National Guard or Reserve forces) of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, or Coast Guard?
» **Check “yes,” “no,” or decline to answer.**

What if a parent declines to provide the requested information?

Parents may opt-out or decline to respond to these voluntary questions.

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- If a parent declines, the answer is reflected as “no.”
- No parent should be asked to verify their military status. SEAs and LEAs are not allowed to request or retain copies of military identification or other DOD documentation. However, verification of military orders may be required if the school has a special program for which eligibility is a requirement, such as state-funded prekindergarten.

How can schools and districts use this data?

- States (SEAs) may choose to require LEAs or public charters to include this information in school report cards.
- Schools regularly disaggregate student demographic and performance data to evaluate program effectiveness and to ensure appropriate tiered resources are available.
- MSI data can help to ensure tiered social, emotional, academic, behavioral, and mental health needs are recognized and supported, and that appropriate responses are systematically provided to all military-connected students.
- For example, MSI data can help schools review welcome and exit best practices, relocation planning, and the need for tiered academic or mental health support.
- Effective use of MSI data enables schools to recognize, engage, and support military families through school-community focused military initiatives.
- The MSI can help provide targeted responses for the unique military student population which involves frequent school relocations during the K-12 education years.
- Just as schools consistently concentrate on the unique needs of all students (e.g., English language needs, learning disabilities, economically disadvantaged), they can now include another unique group of students to their program planning and curriculum design.

Can schools get MSI data from the military rather than having to ask parents at registration?

- No. There is no current process available to connect students enrolled in schools and districts with their military parents. As you may expect, there are privacy and permission implications, as well as national security concerns, associated with sharing data among governmental agencies.



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Sample: Military Student Identifier Classification Codes Form

Military Student Identifier Code Classification:
Please complete this form, sign, and return with the enrollment packet.

Check box for military affiliation:			<input type="checkbox"/> Army <input type="checkbox"/> Navy <input type="checkbox"/> Air Force <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Corps <input type="checkbox"/> Space Force <input type="checkbox"/> Coast Guard
Yes	No	Decline to Answer	Check box that applies best to your student:
			<input type="checkbox"/> Dependent of an active-duty member of the US Armed Forces
			<input type="checkbox"/> Dependent of a full-time or part-time member of the National Guard or Reserve force of the United States military
			<input type="checkbox"/> Dependent of a veteran or retiree of the US Armed Forces (including National Guard or Reserve forces)
			<input type="checkbox"/> None of the above
			<input type="checkbox"/> Gold Star Family Member
			<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver of service member wounded in action

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Is there a Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) data definition for the military student identifier?

- Yes. The CEDS includes the definition below for military-connected students in the national standards. <https://ceds.ed.gov/elementsCEDS.aspx>

Is the MSI designation connected to Impact Aid eligibility?

- No. MSI data is collected for a distinct purpose, separate from Impact Aid. Similar to how data on economically disadvantaged students is gathered independently from data on ethnicity, sex, or participation in specialized programs, the intent of collecting MSI data is to equip local educators with relevant information about military-connected students. This approach supports informed educational decisions without implying preferential treatment or specialized programming.
- See ESSA Title VIII, SEC. 7003. PAYMENTS FOR ELIGIBLE FEDERALLY CONNECTED CHILDREN. (20U.S.C. 7703) for definitions of students identified for Federal Impact Aid. Federal Impact Aid encompasses military, Native American, and civilians working on federal installations, making it difficult to determine student eligibility solely from military student identifier codes.
- For more information about Impact Aid, go to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Impact Aid Programs at ImpactAid@ed.gov or <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/impactaid/index.html>

¹Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 [Public Law 114-95. December 10, 2015] www.congress.gov/114/plaw/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

²MCEC. (2025, January 9). MCEC MSI Position Statement. www.militarychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/MCEC_MSIPosition_20250324.pdf

³Schott, A. (2024, September 3). Reporting DCL 9.4.24. [Letter to Chief State School Officer]. U. S. Department of Education. www.ed.gov/media/document/reporting-dcl-9424

⁴National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2020 [Public Law 116-92. December 20, 2019]. www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ92/PLAW116publ92.pdf

⁵Elizabeth Dole Foundation, Wounded Warrior Project, Lilly Endowment, Inc., & Mathematica (2021). Hidden Helpers at the Frontlines of Caregiving: Supporting the Healthy Development of Children from Military and Veteran Caregiving Homes. Mathematica. https://hiddenheroes.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Hidden_Helpers.pdf

⁶Ramchand, R. et al. (2024, September 24). America's military and veteran caregivers: Hidden heroes emerging from the shadows. RAND. www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3212-1.html

⁷(2020). Title 34, Subtitle B, Chapter II, Part 200, Subpart A, Standards and Assessments §200.2. www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/section-200.2