

Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children
January 31, 2014
Minutes

Attendees: Denise Juneau, Hal Stearns, Tammy Lacey, Edward Buttrey, Renea Dorvall, Benjamin Aylward

10:00 a.m.

Superintendent Juneau convened the meeting of the state council. The group began the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Each member of the council introduced himself/herself to the group.

- Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau is serving in her second term as state superintendent. She is designated by statute as the chairperson of the Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.
- Great Falls Superintendent Tammy Lacey was Principal for eight years at Loy Elementary School, which is adjacent to Malmstrom AFB and is the school with the highest concentration of children of military families.
- Senator Ed Buttrey sponsored SB 203, the legislation establishing Montana's participation in the Interstate Compact on Military Children. Senator Buttrey considers himself a military advocate.
- Major Renea Dorvall works at Fort Harrison in the support branch. She oversees family programs, sexual assault, transition, re-employment rights, yellow ribbon program, re-integration.
- Master Sergeant Benjamin Aylward works at Malmstrom AFB in the family readiness and key spouse programs.
- Brigadier General Hal Stearns is a retired Montana Commander of the Army National Guard. He has many years of teaching experience in K-12 and post-secondary. Governor Bullock appointed General Stearns to be the Compact Commissioner for Montana.

Senator Buttrey reviewed the highlights of SB 203 (2013 legislative session). He emphasized that the major barriers affecting military children and their families can be categorized as 1) enrollment and the transfer of student records – including immunization records; 2) student placement in programs and courses – including provision of special education services and attendance flexibility; 3) eligibility to participate in extracurricular athletics and activities; and 4) meeting graduation requirements and obtaining course waivers when the student has already completed similar course work at a previous school.

Senator Buttrey explained that there had been two previous attempts in the legislature to approve Montana's participation in the Interstate Compact on Military Children. The legislation had not passed previously because of concerns about maintaining state sovereignty, concerns about the budgetary commitments, and concerns about how difficult it would be for the state to leave the compact if it chose to do so.

During the interim between the 2011 and the 2013 legislative sessions, the federal Base Re-alignment and Closure Commission indicated that, as it considered base closures, it would take into consideration whether a state participated in the interstate compact. Points would be given to states and bases for being part of the compact. In advocating for the state's participation in the compact, Senator Buttrey pointed out that the council should be concerned about the children who are leaving Montana in addition to the children that are transferring into Montana schools.

(SB 203 and a summary of the legislation were included in the packets distributed by the Office of Public Instruction to the state council members.)

Major Renea Dorvall and Master Sergeant Benjamin Aylward are prohibited from voting because of their positions in the military service.

10:40 a.m. Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

Brigadier General, Ret. Hal Stearns presented a report on Interstate Compact Commission and the meeting he attended in San Diego, CA in November 2013. The Interstate Compact started with 11 states. There are now more than 40 states participating in the compact. The compact provides for the uniform treatment of military children transferring between school districts and states. It was developed by The Council of State Governments' National Center for Interstate Compacts, the Department of Defense, national associations, federal and state officials, departments of education, school administrators and military families. General Stearns shared a Power Point presentation highlighting the work and the focus of the Interstate Compact Commission. The website for the commission is www.mic3.net.

Within the Great Falls Public School system, there are a total of 1,019 military-connected students: 594 children live on Malmstrom AFB and 425 children live off base.

11:15 a.m. Identifying and Tracking Students of Military Families

Madalyn Quinlan, OPI Chief of Staff and Denise Bond, Operations Research Analyst in the OPI Measurement and Accountability Division, reviewed the progress that OPI is making in adding an identifier for military children to the statewide student information system, AIM.

Senator Buttrey raised a question about how to include students whose parents are transitioning from active duty (Title 10) to traditional duty (Title 32) and moving back to a Montana community. He requested that OPI add a data field to indicate that a student is returning to Montana after the parent has completed an active duty tour.

11:45 a.m. Great Falls Public Schools' (GFPS) Outreach Efforts

Great Falls Superintendent Tammy Lacey showed the GFPS webpage for Military Families. The school district has an information booth at Malmstrom AFB to help enroll students, promote the supportive efforts of the school district, and address student mobility issues.

12:00 p.m. Lunch break

1:00 p.m. Panel discussion – Perspectives of school staff and military families

Teresa Sprague, Principal, Loy Elementary
Katrina Clark, Counselor, Loy Elementary TROOPS
Steve Yates, Student Advocate, North Middle School
Tabitha Copper, parent of elementary and high school students
Brenda Lowery, Counselor, C.M. Russell
Brandon Brooking, C.M. Russell high school student

Teresa Sprague, Principal, Loy Elementary described the demographics of the Loy School: 93% of the students are from active military families. The school experiences a 25% mobility rate during the school year. She also discussed some of the challenges facing military families and the responses/initiatives the school district has developed.

- Kindergarten – Sept. 10th birthdate as the cut-off for kindergarten enrollment (Date is not a hard and fast rule with military families. Students are assessed for readiness, including social and emotional readiness.)
- Special programs - bridging between sending and receiving schools in gifted programs, pull out programs
- Students that qualify for English as a Second Language
- Accommodations and supports, including supports for testing
- Immunizations – 30 day window
- Attendance requirement differences
- TROOPS – to meet the social and emotional components. One strategy is smaller groups in a subject area.
- “Deployment groups” – to ease the burden of homework on the single parent
- Vision Net – project holiday programs to deployed parents
- Junior student-to-student program partnering with North Middle School

Katrina Clark, Counselor, C.M. Russell High School talked about some of the strategies that the district uses to welcome military-connected students and their families.

- JS25 – military kids are very resilient
- Deployment luncheon – 60 kids attended
- Daddy and Mommy dolls
- New friendship groups
- Katrina can do staff development for other elementary counselors.

Tabitha Copper, Parent of Elementary and High School Students:

- When her family left Texas in 2011, she was able to hand carry her children’s education records.
- Kids have anxiety issues – kids may need one on one time

Steve Yates, Student Advocate, North Middle School:

- 798 students at North Middle School
- Military parents are more prepared/used to the transitions by the time kids are in middle school
- How to handle social/emotional issues
- The deployment could be a sibling
- The middle school does deployment groups
- Middle school – expect students to be brave
- Team Teachers for 2 years (7th and 8th)
- Testing – the student may have been gifted before and is now “average”
- Technology can help ease the transitions – skyping and texting

Brenda Lowery, Counselor, C.M. Russell:

- Amazed at the resiliency of kids
- Most difficulty happens when kids transfer mid-semester or later.
- Math is a particularly difficult area. Math dept. chair is good at determining what material a student has covered.
- Give credit for everything they can
- MT Digital Academy has helped
- Example of C.M. Russell HS granting a diploma to a student who transferred to TX in her senior year. Brenda worked with a TX counselor to work out the program.
- Weighting of grades is challenging. Awarding of credit
- Raise awareness with parents and military of the importance of telling schools that a parent is deployed.
- Example of a VA School District refusing to grant credit to a high school student when the student only had 3 weeks left in the semester
- Parents often hand carry the IEP.

Brandon Brooking, Student, CM Russell HS, has gone to eight different schools, including two different high schools. It was a difficult process to leave Texas and transfer out of Texas school. His teachers in Great Falls each sat down with Brandon. Teachers made sure Brandon had someone to sit down with.

Dick Kloppel, C.M. Russell High School Principal, said that students call ahead to ask about playing in high school sports. In Great Falls, the cut sports are basketball and volleyball.

2:30 p.m. Helena School District policy on Children of Military Families

Barbara Ridgway, Staff and Student Services Administrator for Helena Public Schools, reviewed the school district’s policy on Children of Military Families. The district implemented the policy in October 2013. The student policy (#3022) can be found on the Helena Public Schools website at <http://www.helena.k12.mt.us/district/boardoft/boardpol/index.dhtm>.

There was no public comment during the Public Comment portion of the agenda.

During the Next Steps portion of the agenda, the council discussed adding members to the state council and appointing a Military family education liaison.

Motion: Senator Buttrey moved and Superintendent Lacey seconded the motion that Dawn Beal be asked to serve as the Military Family Education Liaison. Motion passed 3-0. Master Sergeant Ben Aylward and Major Renea Dorvall abstained.

Next step: Tammy Lacey will check with Dawn Beal about her willingness/availability to serve in this capacity.

Motion: Senator Buttrey moved that Representative Jean Price be elected to the council. Superintendent Lacey seconded the motion. Motion passed 3-0. Master Sergeant Ben Aylward and Major Renea Dorvall abstained.

Madalyn Quinlan suggested that the council would benefit from representation from the Montana High School Association given that eligibility for extracurricular activities is one of the focus points for the Interstate compact.

Motion: Senator Buttrey moved that a representative from the Montana High School Association be invited to join the council. Superintendent Tammy Lacey seconded the motion. The motion passed 3-0. Master Sergeant Ben Aylward and Major Renea Dorvall abstained.

Next step: Madalyn Quinlan will contact the Montana High School Association.

Potential Topics for next meeting

Recommending a model district policy
ANB for four year olds who are in Kindergarten
April is Month of the Military Child
Tour of Loy Elementary School