



Montana
Office of Public Instruction
Denise Juneau, State Superintendent

Office of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 202501
Helena, MT 59620-2501
406.444.3095
888.231.9393
406.444.0169 (TTY)
opi.mt.gov

September 8, 2016

To: Governor Steve Bullock
Senate President Debby Barrett
Speaker of the House Austin Knudsen
Representative Don Jones, Chair, Education and Local Government Committee

From: Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau

Subject: Report on the Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

As required by 20-1-231, MCA, this report provides a summary of the state's participation in the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children and the activities and discussions of the Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children during the past two years. This report and other information associated with the Council are posted on the Office of Public Instruction's website at

http://www.opi.mt.gov/Media_Center/Index.html?gpm=1_5.

Purpose

In 2015, the Montana legislature approved Senate Bill 240, which continued Montana's participation in the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children beyond June 30, 2015. The purpose of the Compact is to remove barriers to educational success imposed on children of military families because of frequent moves and deployment of their parents. The state's participation in the compact is intended to facilitate:

- the timely enrollment of children of military families;
- the student placement process;
- the student's qualification and eligibility for enrollment, educational programs, and extracurricular academic, athletic and social activities; and
- the student's on-time graduation.

Council membership

The members of the Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, established in 20-1-230, MCA, include:

- Brigadier General (Ret.) Harold Stearns, Compact Commissioner, appointed by the Governor
- Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau, appointed by the Governor
- Vacant, Malmstrom Air Force Base, appointed by the Governor
- Captain Dan Bushnell, Montana National Guard, appointed by the Governor
- Superintendent Tammy Lacey, Great Falls Public Schools, appointed by the Governor
- Senator Edward Buttrey, Great Falls, appointed by the Senate President
- Representative Jean Price, Great Falls, appointed by the Council
- Mark Beckman, Exec. Director, Montana High School Association, appointed by the Council
- Leisa Drain, School Liaison Officer, Malmstrom AFB, appointed by the Council

The Montana Office of Public Instruction provides vision, advocacy, support, and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities.

As Compact Commissioner, General Stearns is responsible for the administration and management of the state's participation in the compact. The council is required to appoint a Military Family Education Liaison to assist military families and the state in facilitating the implementation of the compact. Leisa Drain, School Liaison Officer at Malmstrom Air Force Base (AFB) was appointed to serve as the Military Family Education Liaison at the Council's August 10, 2016 meeting. Carol Phillips served in this capacity previously for the Council.

By statute, the Compact Commissioner and the Military Family Education Liaison are non-voting members.

Activities of the State Council

The Council has met three times since July 2014. The meetings were held on August 26, 2014, at Fort Harrison in Helena; November 3, 2015 at Paris Gibson Education Center in Great Falls; and August 10, 2016 at the Great Falls Public Schools district offices.

The August 2014 meeting at Fort Harrison included presentations by MT National Guard Colonel Scott Smith about stresses on military families in Montana and how changes in the basic training schedule are affecting high school recruits, especially student athletes. The council received presentations on the MT National Guard Child and Youth Programs, the STARBASE Program, and the Counter Drug Program. Council members also took a tour of the Fort Harrison training areas, including the Simulation Center.

The November 2015 meeting in Great Falls began with a tour of Malmstrom AFB, a mission briefing for council members, and a meeting with military parents in a question and answer session. The meeting agenda also included presentations on the collaboration between Malmstrom AFB's Family Office and the Great Falls Public Schools to build support systems for military families. Carol Phillips, the School Liaison Officer at Malmstrom AFB, and Brad Barringer, Principal at North Middle School, have worked together to develop a structure, involving students and counselors, to ensure that all students are welcomed to the school. Middle school student volunteers pair up with new students to introduce the new students to their school. Colonel Denise Cooper, Commander of the 341st Mission Support Group, discussed the importance of the liaison role in supporting families and building understanding among school staff of the unique issues facing military families.

Mark Beckman of the Montana High School Association (MHSA) shared information on the challenges that students from military families face in terms of eligibility and try-outs for high school sports. Under the Compact, state and local education agencies must facilitate the opportunity for transitioning military students to participate in extracurricular activities, regardless of application deadlines, with consultation with the high school athletic association, to the extent that the student is otherwise qualified.

At the August 2016, the council received updates from the principals of Loy Elementary School and North Middle School about their efforts to welcome students to their new schools and to help

with the transition. Military parents and children in both schools are encouraged to provide feedback. Classroom teachers display pictures of parents who are deployed on their bulletin boards. Students write to family veterans to thank them for their service.

Compact Commissioner Hal Stearns gave a report on the National Compact Commission. The issues facing states are similar: graduation rates and different state academic requirements. Liaisons and transfer of enrollment records are key to successful transitions. Another issue is eligibility of athletics and the proper academic placement. He reported that several national educational associations are on board with the compact. The Department of Defense reports that there are 86,000 military students in the United States.

The council discussed the Every Student Succeeds Act, which was signed into law in December 2015 and requires states to create a military student identifier that will enable military leaders, educators and elected officials at all levels of government to understand how military-connected students are performing in school. The OPI added an indicator to its statewide student information system in 2013 to identify military-connected students. Specifically, OPI established data elements to indicate if a student is a dependent of an active duty member of the United States Military, National Guard or Reserve Force of the US Military. Also, OPI added four enrollment codes for military-connected students to the statewide student information system. The military-connected identifier and enrollment codes will be used to track on-time graduation, enrollment and eligibility, and will help school administrators understand enrollment and placement issues related to students of military families and assess where student support is needed.

Each April, the Council joined the Montana National Guard in co-sponsoring Purple Up! Day, which commemorates military families in our communities and honors the strengths and sacrifices of military youth. In April 2015, Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau, Senator Ed Buttrey, and Representative Jean Price hosted a group of military children and their parents from the Helena area to celebrate Purple Up! Day at the Capitol. At a lunch in their honor, each family member had a chance to introduce themselves and talk about their experiences moving among school systems. During the House and Senate floor sessions, the children were introduced by Senator Buttrey and Representative Price and recognized by House and Senate members.

In April 2016, Superintendent Juneau visited students at Loy Elementary School (Great Falls), where ninety percent of the students are military-connected children. She emphasized that students of military-connected families face a unique set of challenges because of deployments and frequent moves and that it is up to adults in each of our public schools to support these students and develop tools for helping military children succeed.

Two examples of the successful resolution of issues that have come to the Compact Commissioner in the past two years are related to the enrollment and placement of students.

- In Great Falls, the parents of a 4-year old wanted to enroll their child in Kindergarten even though the child would not reach five years of age by September 10. The district

evaluated the child and determined that the child was not ready for Kindergarten. The parents appealed to have their child enrolled, indicating that if the child lived in Colorado the child would have met the age requirement for kindergarten. After being contacted by the school district, Commissioner Stearns submitted the question to the staff of the Interstate Compact Commission, who determined that the Compact does not entitle the child to special advantages. The Montana laws related to enrollment of students in Kindergarten apply to the child of the military family.

- In Butte, the parents of two children, one with special needs, wanted to enroll both of their children in the same school. The program for special needs students was full in the neighborhood school, so the district made plans to move the special needs child to another school in the district. The parents appealed to have both of their children enrolled in the same school, explaining that the special needs child depended on her older sister. After being contacted by the parents, Commissioner Stearns contacted the school principal and told him about his own military and teaching career and how he had worked through issues. After explaining the Compact and the children's needs, a space was found for both girls in the neighborhood school.

The Montana High School Association works closely with school administrators on waivers of the 15-day transcript rule for students who encounter difficulties with the transfer of student records due to military moves. MHSA has found that the more administrators understand the unique challenges facing a military-connected student, the easier it is to work with the MHSA on eligibility issues. It is also important for administrators to better understand the mental health support that may be necessary for a student whose parent is deploying.

Areas of Focus for the State Council

The Council and the Office of Public Instruction have several areas of focus in the year ahead:

- 1) Train school district staff on identifying and reporting children of military families in the statewide student information system;
- 2) Educate school administrators, counselors and athletic directors on the challenges facing military-connected students and their families with the goal of fostering academic success for all students of military families and facilitating the participation of students in extracurricular athletics and activities;
- 3) Promote the role of the Compact Commissioner in helping to resolve issues for parents and school districts as students transfer into and out of Montana schools;
- 4) Develop a brochure for parents and school districts regarding eligibility to participate in extra-curricular activities;
- 5) Work with the Montana National Guard to promote life skills, resilience, and camaraderie among military youth;
- 6) Continue to co-sponsor Purple Up! Day with the Montana National Guard, a day that commemorates military families in our communities; and
- 7) Disseminate the *Guide for Parents, School Officials and Public Administrators*, which has been developed by the Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.