

10-2017

Teachers of Teachers: what they may and may not know about military-connected children

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Recommended Citation

Conway, Brianna and Schaffer, Connie, "Teachers of Teachers: what they may and may not know about military-connected children" (2017). *Teacher Education Faculty Publications*. 104.

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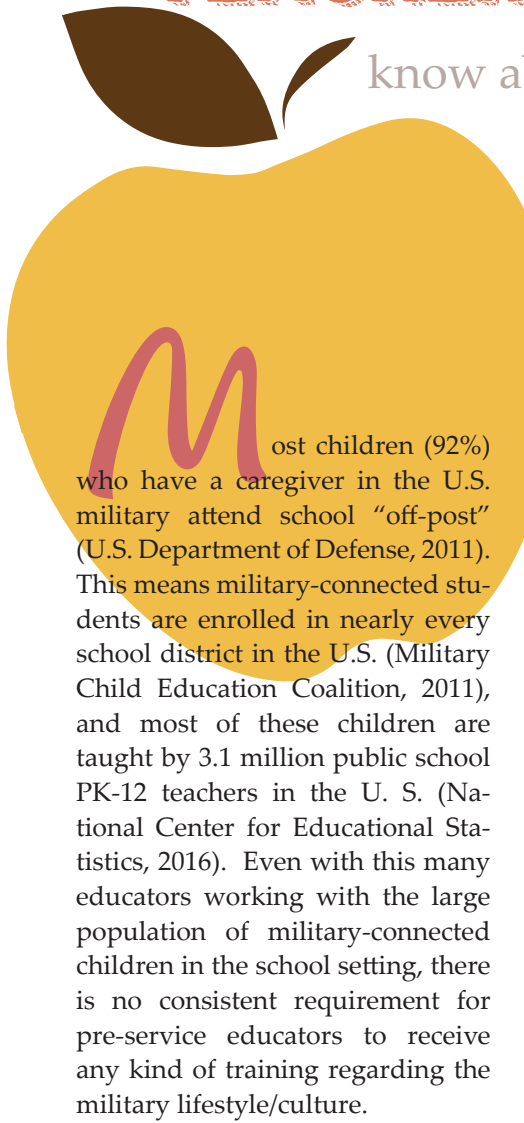




TEACHERS & TEACHERS

what they may and may not know about military-connected children

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Most children (92%) who have a caregiver in the U.S. military attend school “off-post” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2011). This means military-connected students are enrolled in nearly every school district in the U.S. (Military Child Education Coalition, 2011), and most of these children are taught by 3.1 million public school PK-12 teachers in the U. S. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Even with this many educators working with the large population of military-connected children in the school setting, there is no consistent requirement for pre-service educators to receive any kind of training regarding the military lifestyle/culture.

There have also been concerns about the growing disconnect between the civilian and military lifestyles. Today there is an increasing number of individuals who grow up with no connection to the military. Compare this to 60 years ago when almost everyone had an immediate connection to a U.S. service member before the military became an all-volunteer force (Zuchino & Cloud, 2015). This gap in lifestyle and understanding may have a large impact on many educators’ ability to effectively work

with and support military-connected students in the school setting.

Before they receive their professional license, most PK-12 educators complete a university program that includes courses on human growth and development, teaching methodology, and subject area content. Universities can play a significant role in preparing educators who can recognize and respond to the needs of military-connected students. However, there is little information regarding how university faculty are preparing future educators and school professionals. What do these teachers of teachers know regarding military-connected children and their families, and is this population of students and families addressed in the university preparation of future PK-12 teachers and other school personnel?

“What do these teachers of teachers know regarding military connected children and their families”

Researchers surveyed faculty members from one university who teach future PK-12 administrators, general and special education teachers, counselors, school psychologists, and social workers. Faculty members provided information regarding their general knowledge of military-connected children, feelings of competence in working with and meeting the needs of military-con-

nected children, knowledge of the military-student identifier requirements, inclusion of information regarding military-connected children in courses taught, and interest in adapting curriculum to include topics related to military families.

The responses indicated faculty members had limited knowledge of military-connected children which arguably would make it extremely difficult to teach this information to future educators.

- An overwhelming number (94%) reported their own preparation had included little or no time on military-connected children.
- Less than 10% knew a substantial amount of information regarding how the military culture/lifestyle might impact children’s mental health and education.
- Only 14% currently include information regarding military-connected children in their courses and 23% were aware of other faculty members within their program who might do so.

However, there is potential for change. Of the faculty surveyed:

- 80% indicated they would like to know more about preparing future educators to meet the educational and mental health needs of military-connected students.
- 83% understood the importance of including information on military families in their program’s curriculum.

- Most (80%) were interested in adapting their program's curriculum to include topics related to military-connected children and their families.

Based on the findings at this university, faculty members need and want to include more content regarding military-connected children and their families into their programs. This may be particularly true in universities near military installations where future teachers and other school professionals often complete internships or student teach in schools with high enrollments of military-connected students and many graduates find employment in these schools.

Those who teach our future educators are willing to learn more about military-connected children. This represents a powerful opportunity to increase the skills of teachers and also the support provided to approximately two million children of military personnel who attend school in the U.S. With more education and greater understanding, we can hopefully begin to narrow the disconnect between the military and civilian cultures within the U.S.



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