

The Challenges of Supporting Highly Mobile, Military-Connected Children in School Transitions

Center for Public Research and Leadership

Columbia University

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CPRL



Meet Alison

North High

- 2 years of high school
- Shy but growing more comfortable
- Moves for junior year

East High

- Started her junior year
- Military counselor made her feel welcome
- PCS'd after one year

South High

- Started Senior year-3 weeks late
- Had to retake US history and civics

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Discussion Question:

Is there anything about Alison's story that strikes a chord with you?



Agenda

1. Project Overview
2. Background
3. Persistent Challenges
4. Promising Solutions
5. Further Research
6. Discussion

Project Overview

The Military Child Education Coalition asked the Center for Public Research and Leadership to research the current environment of school transitions for military-connected children with the generous support of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. Through this project, we identified successes and persistent challenges while uncovering promising solutions.

The Need for this Project

- Changing schools is academically and emotionally disruptive for all children. Military-connected children face these stresses again and again.
- There are 1.2 million active-duty, military-connected children, and about 200,000 school-aged MC children move every year.
- Military-connected students change schools 3 times more often than civilians -- an estimated average of 6-9 times during K-12 career.
- 80% of military-connected children are in local public schools

“I guess [I’m] kind of nervous, no matter how many times I do it, [I’m] always really nervous, because I don’t know anybody. I’ll probably eat lunch alone, and then I’ll hate that.” – High School Student

Project Goals

- To develop an understanding of the current environment of school transition for military-connected children and challenges faced by the key stakeholders – students, parents, school personnel, installation personnel, and others.
- To understand and report back on current process components that help or inhibit successful transition for military-connected children.

Scope and Research Process

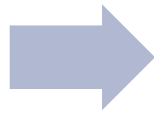
- Five-month study focusing on public school students in grades 6-12, concentrated on public schools with significant military-connected populations and/or close proximity to military installations
- Conducted comprehensive academic and general interest literature review
- Interviewed more than 70 school district personnel, teachers, counselors, students, parents, other stakeholders. Conducted site visit of school district near military installation
- Analyzed interviews and reviewed for themes and potential findings

Background

For the past 15 years, thanks to the work of MCEC and the implementation of the Compact, support for the transition needs of mobile military children has improved against a backdrop of repeated deployment and shifting education demands.

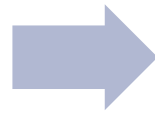
SETS & MOA
(2001)

- Identified challenges and best practices for military connected students



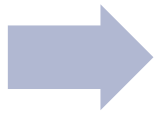
MIC3 (2006)

- Intensified efforts to standardize school transition processes



EMC-21 (2009-2011)

- Study documented improvements since SETS study



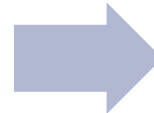
MIC3 (2015)

- MIC3 signed by all 50 states



ESSA & MSI (2015)

- Added mandate to implement Military Student Identifier



CPRL & MCEC study (2017)

- Snapshot of current transition challenges, practices, & potential solutions

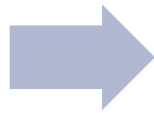
The Interstate Compact – MIC3

- Enrollment
 - Acceptance of hand-carried records
 - Kindergarten and first grade cut-off
- Placement
 - Initially honor course/gifted and talented program placement and IEP/504 of previous school
- Eligibility
 - Ability to try out for extracurriculars
- Graduation
 - Flexible application of requirements and testing rules

“It gives permission to our school counselors...to be a little more comprehensive in matching credits and courses” – Director of Student Services

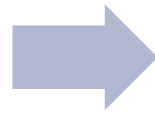
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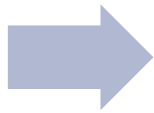
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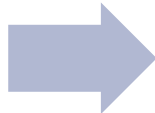
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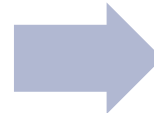
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Persistent Challenges


Our research suggests that there have been improvements in the experiences of military children moving from school to school, but key challenges persist. From adapting to new classes and teachers to making new friends again and again, military-connected students continue to face a range of challenges.

Administrative

Enrollment &
Withdrawal

Course Placement
& Credit Transfer

Extracurricular
Eligibility



“In the past, if you hand carried [records], they weren’t considered official. But I make sure I always hand carry and get everything I can get, so at least we have something temporary, before the official documents get there.” - Parent

Administrative

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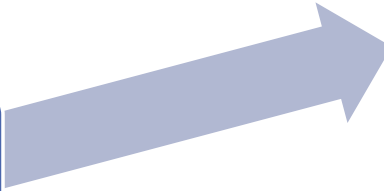
“At my last high school, US history [did] not translate into American history. I had to take American history, which is the same as US history.” - Student

Administrative

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Extracurricular
Eligibility



“One campus may say ‘Sure you can try out for a team, practice with us for a week and we’ll see.’ While others say ‘You’re part of the team but you have to sit on the sidelines’ -- it’s not a straightforward requirement.” -MSTC

Academic

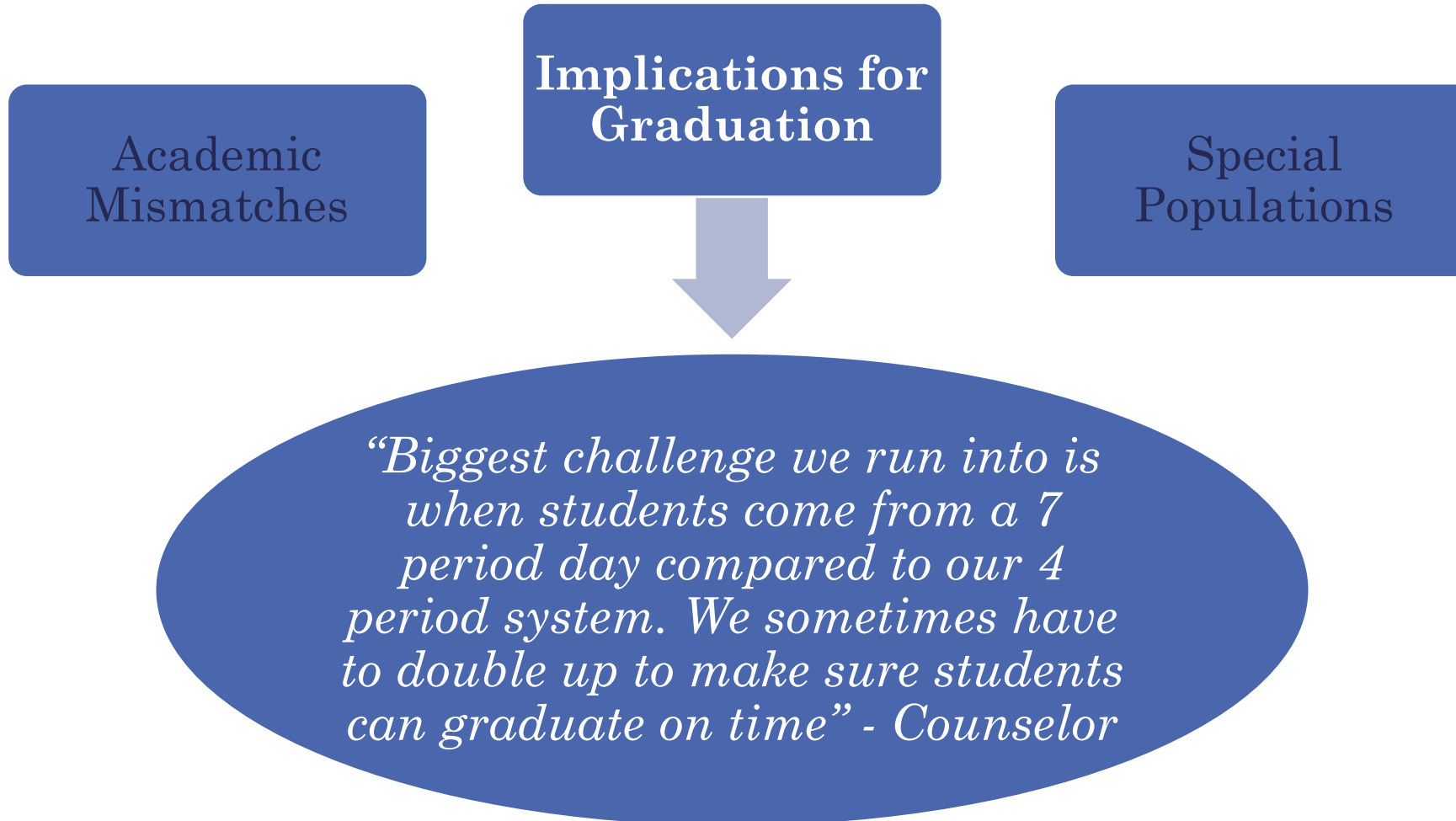
Academic
Mismatches

Implications for
Graduation

Special
Populations

“You want them to feel like they belong academically, too, but everyone else has been reading this book for 3 weeks, and you can't ask them to read 300 pages in one night.” -Teacher

Academic



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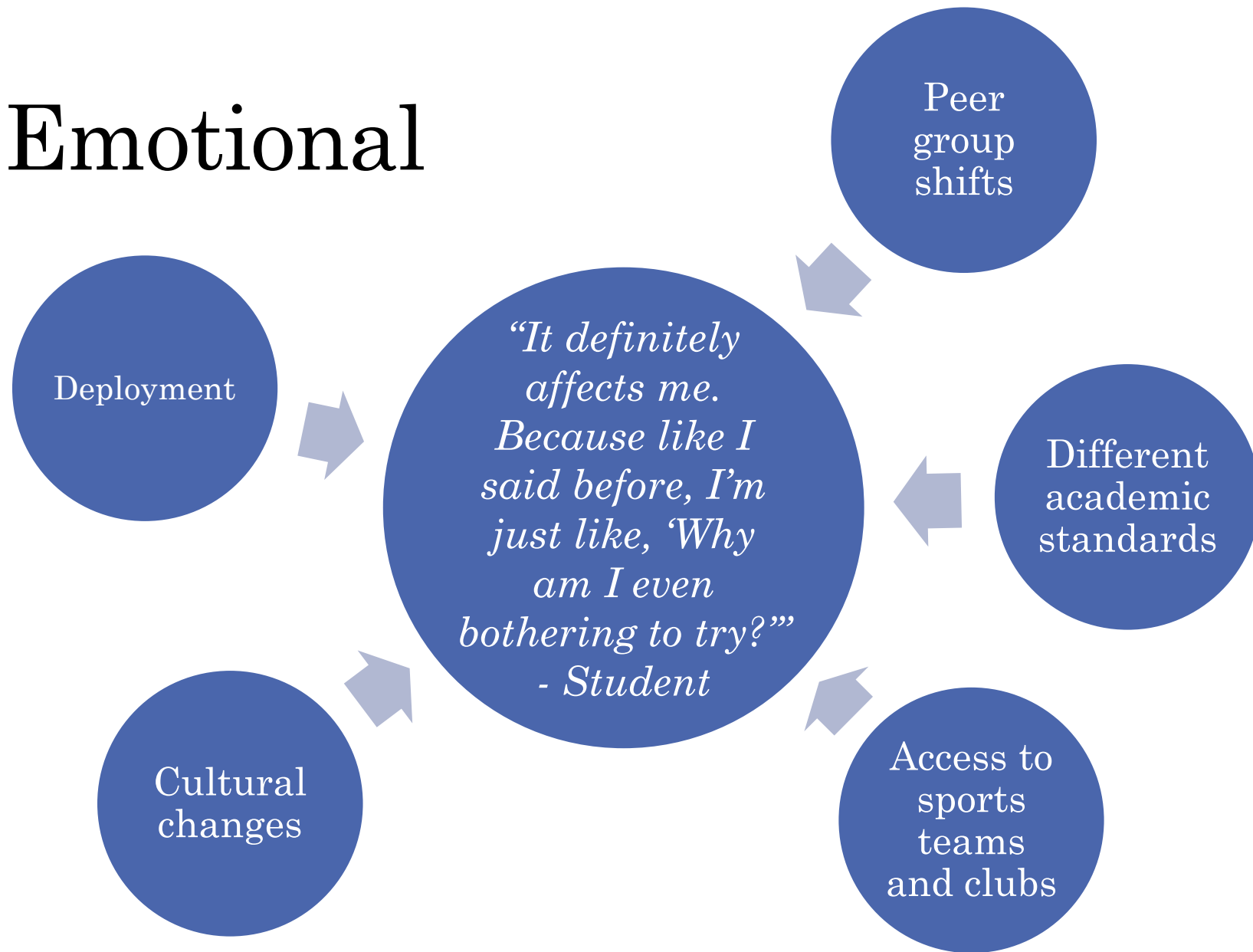
Special
Populations

“When we moved, [the new school] wouldn’t accept the testing for gifted. But what about the Compact? We missed a semester of services.” - Parent

Special Education



Socio-Emotional



Promising Solutions

Schools and students present many moving pieces, complicating policy solutions. Political climates change, school personnel change, and, always, students and parents change. Within this dynamic environment, we have found some promising practices and steps toward potential solutions.

Data Tools

Promising Solutions

Military Student Identifier

In-depth student portfolios

Parent-centered research tools

User-friendly school and district websites

Strong Institutional Structure

Promising Solutions

State-level infrastructure and personnel

National task force of stakeholders

Institutionalized welcoming practices & counseling support

Reciprocal relationships and communication protocols between sending and receiving districts

Highly Skilled Personnel

Promising Solutions

Targeted professional development

Dedicated staff or staff time focused on military issues

Contact information of the POC for military-connected students easily accessible

Identify techniques to build socio-emotional awareness of military-connected students

Installation-School Partnerships

“Communication is the most important piece...you can proactively plan for deployments and PCSing... If the communication is open you are taking the burden of communication off the family.” - District Staff

“We started with a good garrison officer...We share a lot of resources and that was the direct outcome of the partnerships he promoted. The support came from the military.” - Principal

“If the SLOs could be better, it could be a wonderful thing. ... The best thing they could do is actually go to the schools in their area and get to know them.” - Parent

What You Can Do:

Teachers

- Find out if new student is military
- **Develop class-specific welcome packet and practice**
- Start or support student host clubs
- Attend PD on school transitions
- Develop curriculum prepared for mid unit transitions
- **Designate new student buddies**

Administrators

- Create user friendly website with clear contact information
- Designate staff for military issues
- **Support student host clubs**
- Invite military participation at school meetings and events
- Implement tool for identifying MC students at enrollment

Guidance Counselors

- **Attend and give PD on MIC3 and transitions**
- Apply flexibility around course placement
- Implement emotional screening test for transitioning students and create follow up plan
- **Create welcome binder and/or video**

Parents

- Use education specific checklists
- Contact SLO and EFMP prior to moving
- Visit school and meet with staff
- Find activities and programs
- **Learn credit requirements and child's academic needs**
- Keep up to date portfolio with education records

Military Personnel

- **Ensure SLO contact information is available on website**
- Include SLO and local school information in orders
- Maintain accurate school information on installation website
- Institute regular meetings with school/district personnel

Concluding Insights

- Significant improvements in past decade: Understanding of mobility issues and standardizing processes based on advocacy and Interstate Compact
- Substantial challenges: Course placement and credit transfer problems with potentially significant academic impact and loss of opportunity. Social-emotional difficulties in light of continued deployments combined with high mobility. Special education
- Barriers to good practice: Inconsistency, lack of sustainability, **lack of data**, and personnel changes
- The Parent Factor: Parents are the most knowledgeable and effective advocates for their children.

Further Research

- Impact on academic achievement
- Impact on post-secondary transitions
- Data on effectiveness of transition programs

“The more you move the more things can get lost in the shuffle. We try to set her up for college. I am worried that some of the decisions we made without all of the information are going to end up hurting her when we apply to college.” – Parent

Discussion