



MEETING MINUTES
ARKANSAS COUNCIL FOR MILITARY CHILDREN
Thursday, January 04, 2024
10:00 A.M.

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

The Arkansas Council for Military Children (Council) met Thursday, January 04, 2024. Chair John Kaminar called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M.

PRESENT:

Mr. John Kaminar, Chair
Ms. Jody Bergstrom
Rep. Karilyn Brown (proxy for Rep. Brian Evans)
Ms. Brittany Edwards
Sen. Jane English
Ms. LaShawnda Noel
Ms. Bobbie Olles (MFEL)
Ms. Christyal Parker
Ms. Jennifer Reynolds
Dr. Kerry Schneider
Ms. Emily Taylor (Proxy for Dr. Tony Thurman)
Dr. Janice Walker (proxy for Dr. Jeremy Owoh)
Ms. Terri Williams
Col. N'Keiba Estelle (DOD Liaison, non-voting)
Mr. Rick Porter (Special Education Liaison, non-voting)
Ms. Jessica Saum (Special Advisor, non-voting)

ABSENT:

Ms. Andelyn Wright, Vice Chair
Mr. John Ciesla
Ms. Loreena Hegenbart
Mr. James Hopkins (proxy for Rep. Brian Melton)
Dr. Karla Neathery

GUESTS:

Ms. Mary Perry, Special Assistant to Deputy Commissioner Stacy Smith, ADE

Dr. Darrell Smith, Assistant Commissioner for School Choice and Parent Empowerment, ADE

A quorum was established.

II. Pledge of Allegiance (J. Kaminar)

Chair Kaminar asked Ms. Williams to lead the Council members in the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Recognition of Host School District (J. Kaminar)

Chair Kaminar thanked Ms. Williams and Col. Estelle and the University Center at the Little Rock Air Force Base and also special thanks to Shasta Jamon who works with these STARBASE Arkansas program at the installation for allowing the Council to use their facility for this month's meeting.

IV. Approval of Agenda (J. Kaminar)

Chair Kaminar asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Ms. Reynolds made the motion, seconded by Senator English. Without objection, the agenda was adopted.

V. Approval of Minutes (November 7, 2023) (J. Kaminar)

Chair Kaminar asked for a motion to approve the November 7, 2023 minutes. Ms. Parker made the motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Ms. Reynolds. Without objection, the minutes were approved.

VI. Public Comments (J. Kaminar)

The chair recognized Col. (Ret.) Don Berry. Col. Berry asked to be allowed to speak at the end of the meeting. He offered the following comments before Chair Kaminar called for a motion to adjourn:

Col. Berry discussed the initiatives that Chair Kaminar reviewed from the annual business meeting. He mentioned that the time the Council spent on the family survey was the whole reason why this organization exists and no other state in the country conducts a survey similar to this. He went on to say that MIC3 only requires one meeting a year, and that not all the states met even that requirement. The 15th of November, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration held a webinar which was the best webinar that he has ever attended through the suicide prevention channels. Col. Berry said Arkansas is the model state and no matter what Virginia thinks, Arkansas is still way beyond it. Col. Berry said the Defense State Liaison office has an initiative for 2024, state support to Military Families with Special Education needs. This is a very high priority for DOD and he would like the council to take a look at linking these together, with ADE as well as the school districts in that conversation. Col. Berry said Arkansas is the only state that has DMEC's, with Col. Kaminar and Council members are involved in training them. Col. Berry said Arkansas is the only state that counts interstate transfers and is the only state that complied with the rule to

collect and report these data. Col. Berry gave his congratulations to the leaders in the state who helped made this happen, and congratulations to the Council for making a difference for children of military families.

VII. Chair's Report (J. Kaminar)

A. DMEC/SML Training Sessions

Chair Kaminar held training sessions for the Springdale School District on November 28, 2023 and Lonoke School District on December 7, 2023. They were conducted on request by those two districts. There will be another round of training held in the spring.

B. Purple Star School Update

Chair Kaminar reported 27 new Purple Star Schools have been added since the last meeting. 12 in Bryant, 11 in VanBuren and 4 in Lonoke. In addition, these schools have also completed Purple Star School District requirements. Bentonville completed its last requirement to become a Purple Star School District. Chair Kaminar stated that in a previous council meeting the Purple Star School application deadline was set for August 1, to coincide with school districts submitting their engagement plans. However, the Council has extended the deadline a few times for districts that were interested. Chair Kaminar asked for a motion to remove the deadline. Dr. Walker moved to remove the deadlines. Ms. Bergstrom seconded. No discussion. Motion carried.

C. Annual Business Meeting

Chair Kaminar reported on the Annual Business Meeting for the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission that Ms. Williams and Chair Kaminar attended in November in Richmond, Virginia.

The Commission adopted a budget, approved changes to some of the MC3 rules that were in effect, and elected new officers, meaning that the commission has a new national chair and past chair. And as a result Chair Kaminar is no longer the past chair. Chair Kaminar will continue to serve on the Compliance Committee of the national organization.

Chair Kaminar and a handful of other states were asked to speak about what they are doing on their local councils by way of best practices. Arkansas is the only state council that has a state logo. Arkansas is the only state that holds a Military Family Forum at least once a year for military families to come and speak, it is the only state council that is operating a newsletter for military families and educators and is the only state council that is actively involved in training personnel in school districts. Arkansas has more frequent meetings than other state councils. Chair Kaminar was asked to address a few items later via email, in particular the requirement to address the needs of military families as a requirement to become a Purple Star School, which got a lot of positive attention.

Chair Kaminar commented that Ms. Williams has gone above and beyond in her role as liaison and it was her effort that got STARBASE Arkansas put at the Little Rock Air Force Base. She is also working to get the STARBASE program set up at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in the Ebbing Air National Guard station.

VIII. Vice Chair's Report (A. Wright)

Chair Kaminar reported in Ms. Wright's absence that Purple Up Day at the Fort Smith School District is scheduled for April 18, 2024 at 5:30 p.m. and this is an open invitation for any council member that would like to attend.

IX. Reports by the Committees, Task Forces, or Liaisons

A. Awards Committee (Dr. J. Walker)

1. Outstanding Military Scholar Award

Dr. Walker reported that the Awards Committee met December 5, 2024. The Committee discussed working with the Arkansas Department of Education Secretary to publish a Commissioner's Memo to nominate persons for the Outstanding DMEC Award and the Outstanding Service to Military Families Award.

The Committee had also been working on the Outstanding Military Scholar Award. Chair Kaminar shared information on this award. The Outstanding Military Scholar Award is intended to be a very prestigious, statewide award given to a graduating senior child of a military service member. One award is presented each year. The Committee's goal is to announce the program during the month of the Military Child 2024, and the first award to be presented during the spring of 2025. The Awards Committee essentially has finished its work on that packet and it is being vetted by some staff members at the Department of Education. The next step will be a legal review by one of the staff attorneys at the Department of Education. The award will be ready for the Council to vote on in March, then the Council can make that announcement in April during the Month of the Military Child.

The award will not be a scholarship, since the Council won't know the recipient of the award, or their future or educational plans. Prizes will include: a plaque, a laptop computer, and possibly congratulatory letters from the Governor, the Secretary of Education, and the Adjutant General.

Chair Kaminar mentioned the Cabot School District sponsors a scholarship program for a child of a Military Family. They had no prompting from the Council to do so. Their scholarship award amount is based on t-shirt sales for Military Child/Purple Up Month and last year they raised \$4,500.

Dr. Walker said the next award committee meeting is February 13, 2024 via zoom at 11:00 a.m.

B. Military Family Forum Committee (A. Wright)

Chair Kaminar reported on Ms. Wright's behalf. The next Military Family Forum Committee Meeting is scheduled for January 31, 2024 at 1:30 p.m. via zoom. The intent is to hold at least one forum event during the spring.

C. Outreach Committee (J. Kaminar)

1. Newsletter Update

Chair Kaminar reported the newsletter continues to do relatively well, although new subscriptions have tapered off. Currently there are 220 subscribers to the newsletter, and the majority of those are Military Service Members or members of their families.

Ms. Williams reported on dates for the Outreach Committee. January 23, 2024 is the Jacksonville/North Pulaski STEM event. January 24, 2024 is the STARBASE Social. In the month of February, a Teen Dating Violence event will be held at the Charter Middle School and at Jacksonville/North Pulaski Middle School. The quarterly Deployed Family Dinner is scheduled for February 14, 2024; this is a free dinner that the base hosts for anybody who has a deployed family member.

D. Strategic Planning Committee (J. Bergstrom)

1. Purple Star Community

Ms. Bergstrom reported that the next Strategic Planning Committee meeting is scheduled for January 31, 2024, at 1:30 p.m. The Committee will be discussing Purple Star Communities, and other topics that from a federal and a state level, such as support for military families with special needs.

E. Military Family Education Liaison (B. Olles)

Ms. Olles reported the Computer Science and Science Department at DESE and across the state are looking for high schools willing to collect data during the eclipse. They have to attend a PD session, and then they will receive all the equipment they need at no cost. The department hopes to get a high school from each area of the state, they are still accepting applications.

F. Department of Defense Liaison (Col. N. Estelle)

Colonel Estelle thanked Ms. Williams for her passion and dedication and said that she has done tremendous work.

G. Special Education Liaison (R. Porter)

Mr. Porter reported the Special Education Unit working on putting together a resource page on their website that that will be a landing page for all of the parent resources throughout Special Education.

H. Special Advisor (J. Saum)

Ms. Saum reported the Arkansas Ideas course, on Fostering Positive Educational Transitions for Children of Military Families, was one of the courses listed on their Winter Professional Development Challenge.

Ms. Saum said since the course was posted she has had a few people reach out to her after completing the course and saying they had no idea about the resources that were available and the needs of military-connected families in the state.

X. Old Business

A. Meeting Schedule for AY 2023-24

Chair Kaminar reported the final meeting of the academic year will be May 2, 2024 at the Van Buren School District.

B. LRAFB Focus Group (DESE)

The Little Rock Air Force Base focus group is still on the table. Chair Kaminar is hopeful that the work will begin soon.

C. Survey of Military Families

Chair Kaminar reported some of the results from the survey of military families taken in the fall. The main focus is on meeting basic needs rather than simply on people's awareness of the resources that are available. The survey received 255 responses, slightly less than the previous survey. The survey results indicated that some military families in Arkansas are having difficulty meeting basic needs, such as food, healthcare and mental/behavioral healthcare, housing, and childcare.

In the report it shows some gaps that council needs to work with the District Military Education Coordinators in the areas that the report has identified so that they can start closing those gaps for the military families.

Chair Kaminar reported there were some trends that can be concluded from this report. For example, nearly 53% of the respondents who said that a member of their family needed mental health care services indicated that they were unable to access mental health care services. Nearly 26% with a family member eligible for Special Education services were unable to access services. Approximately 16% of the respondents reported being unable to access medical care or afford adequate groceries. And the greatest concentrations among these tend to be among the enlisted ranks, both junior enlisted and non-commissioned officers.

Chair Kaminar pointed out that with only 255 responses statewide, of those, the Council has not tapped into a large segment of our military population. He noted there is more outreach is needed before the depth of need can be determined.

Chair Kaminar will be sharing the data with school districts where the survey has identified clusters of needs. The survey did not collect any student identifiable information but once counselors have this information they will be able to figure out which of their families may be the ones in need and connect them with the resources that they need.

Chair Kaminar said he would like to summarize the findings for the annual report to the Governor, the House and Senate Education Committees and the State Board of Education, so they can consider what policies they need to make to help close those gaps.

XI. New Business (J. Kaminar)

A. Council Membership

Chair Kaminar shared the possibility of asking one or two students to serve as advisors to the Council. Ideally, this would be one junior and one senior for the upcoming school year with the understanding that the junior would serve for two years. As the senior drops off, the junior would stay on the Council and Council would add a new junior in the upcoming school year. The Council could spread this out so that one of those students was from an active duty service family, the other student from a Guard or a Reserve family. The students could also be spread across the state geographically. Chair Kaminar asked the Strategic Planning Committee to put together some parameters for how this might work, and have those ready for council for the March or May Meeting.

B. Spring Family Forum

Ms. Wright plans on having a Family Forum Committee Meeting on January 31, 2024 to plan for a forum this spring.

XII. Date/Time/Place for Next Meeting

Chair Kaminar stated that the next Council meeting would take place March 7, 2024, 10:00 AM, in the White Hall School District, 1020 W. Holland Avenue, White Hall, Arkansas. A zoom link will be provided.

XIII. Adjournment (J. Kaminar)

Chair Kaminar asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion made by Senator English, seconded by Ms. Hegenbart. No discussion. Meeting adjourned at 11:05 AM.

Minutes recorded by A. Cress.