

Case Study: Enrollment and Academic Placement

Initial Email Communications

I am writing to request immediate assistance with our son's second-grade enrollment and to document the conflicting and misleading guidance we have received throughout the enrollment process with Elementary School A. We are an Air Force Family and my husband, XXX, is the active duty member. On Friday I emailed and called our school liaison and today both my husband and I have tried to call her again today, with no success. I understand that is not giving her much time to respond, but given the seriousness of the situation and the limited time we have before school starts, I am needing immediate assistance.

Our family arrived at the Air Force Base on June 20th. From the outset, the school A administration knew that we would be living temporarily in on-base lodging (TLF) while we searched for permanent housing and, therefore, would not remain at that address indefinitely. Staff at Elementary School A assisted us in completing the enrollment paperwork and specifically instructed us to use our TLF address in order to get our son registered for School A.

Enrollment paperwork was submitted mid-July after seeking clarification and guidance from the school multiple times. On July 28, we received an email directing us to create a parent portal account. We reasonably understood this notification to mean that our son had been enrolled and allocated a place at the school. After receiving the email, I called Elementary School A specifically to confirm whether any additional documentation was required. We were expressly told that no additional paperwork was needed and that he was good to go.

Relying on that confirmation, we completed our back-to-school shopping and purchased the supplies required by Elementary School A. Several of these items - including headphones, highlighters, colored pencils, dry-erase markers and an eraser, a three-ring binder, plastic prong folders, Post-it notes, and additional optional supplies - are not required by the school our son may now have to attend. These purchases have created an additional and avoidable financial burden and further demonstrate that we reasonably relied on the school's assurance that his enrollment was complete.

On August 10, however, we were unexpectedly informed that additional documentation was required, even after being told there wasn't on July 28th. Because we were no longer living in temporary housing at this point, and had made the decision to live off base, we were told that our son was no longer eligible to attend Welch and that we would need to pursue a Good Cause Affidavit. Now we are only 10 days from the beginning of the school year and still do not know where our son will attend school.

We submitted the Good Cause paperwork last week on August 12th. When I called the school today, August 17, I was told by XXX at the front desk that our Good Cause package was being submitted to the district. However, it remains unclear whether the school has actually submitted the package on our behalf, as staff told us last week that they would. Additionally, she told me that the second-grade classrooms at School A were full, that the Good Cause submission window had closed, and that the likelihood of our son being admitted was slim. This raises several serious questions. If our son had a place when we received the parent portal notification on July 28 and were subsequently assured that he was fully enrolled, was that place later given to another student? If so, when and why did that occur without notice to us? Additionally, why were we advised as recently as last week to pursue a Good Cause Affidavit if the submission

window had already closed or there was effectively no opportunity for the request to be considered?

Throughout this process, we have followed the school's instructions and repeatedly sought confirmation that we had completed every necessary step. Nevertheless, we were given conflicting or incomplete information at critical points. Had we received clear and accurate guidance from the beginning, we would not now be facing this uncertainty immediately before the school year begins.

The delay has also created consequences beyond school placement and unnecessary school-supply expenses. The after-school programs associated with Elementary School B, our zoned fallback school, are likely already full. This may create additional childcare difficulties and disruption for our family—consequences that could have been avoided had we been advised correctly and promptly.

We understand that enrollment procedures must be followed. However, our family acted promptly and in good faith based on the administration's direct guidance and assurances. Our son should not lose the opportunity to attend Elementary School A because the information provided to us was inaccurate or incomplete. Publicly reported school information further supports our request. According to Niche, Elementary School B has an overall grade of B-, including a C+ in Academics and a B in Teachers. Niche reports that, based on state test scores, 18% of School B students are proficient in math and 26% are proficient in reading. By comparison, Elementary School A has an overall grade of A, with A grades in Academics, Diversity, and Teachers. Its reported proficiency rates are 66% in math and 69% in reading. We recognize that ratings and test scores do not capture every aspect of a school or the work of its educators. However, these are substantial differences.

I have attached our Good Cause letter, which further explains why attending the school on base is so important for our son. Welch would provide him with the resources, stability, military-connected community, and support needed to ease his transition following our PCS and minimize the emotional and educational disruption he is experiencing. This has been an extremely hard PCS and adjustment for our family.

Given that school begins in only 10 days, we respectfully ask that this matter be escalated and reviewed immediately. Please confirm receipt of this email and the attached Good Cause letter, identify who will be reviewing our request, and advise us when we can expect a final written decision.

Respectfully,

Response to Initial Communication

The Commissioner reviewed the family's concerns and determined that there does not appear to be a violation of either the Military Interstate Children's Compact (MIC3) or the state's military-connected enrollment law.

The Commissioner explained that matters related to Good Cause requests, school choice, enrollment deadlines, and classroom capacity are governed by state and local policies and fall outside the scope of MIC3. As a result, the Commissioner does not have the authority to approve placement requests, waive deadlines, or direct the district to assign a student to a specific school.

The parents' concerns regarding inconsistent enrollment information, childcare arrangements, school supplies, school quality, and the family's preference for Elementary School A were acknowledged, and the family was encouraged to continue working directly with the district regarding the status of their Good Cause request and school assignment.

Parent Response

Good afternoon,

I am requesting an urgent review by the state Department of Education and the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission representative regarding our seven-year-old son's transition into the state's public school system.

Specifically, we are asking the Department to determine whether the enrollment, placement, and assessment barriers our son has encountered violate the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. We are also requesting guidance regarding his rights under his existing Section 504 Plan.

I previously emailed you regarding the Elementary School A District's decision for XXX to not be accepted to their school based on their 2nd grade class being at capacity. The school district let us know about this decision on August 18th, after he was fully registered and we were told he was good to go on July 28th.

This left us in a scramble to prepare our son to go into the school we are zoned for, Elementary School B, or to pursue another school choice option. We decided to pursue another school choice to Elementary School C since he had already made a connection with another 2nd grade student and this allow him an easier transition on the first day. Additionally, the school is recognized as a Purple Star school, which would further support him during this difficult transition. Additionally, comparing Elementary School A against Elementary School B, the academics just can't even compare. Niche reported proficiency rates of 66% in math and 69% in reading at School A, 62% in math and 51% in reading at School C, and 18% in math and 26% in reading at XXX assigned school, School B. School B falls greatly under the other two choices.

So, on August 19th, my husband, XXX, reached out to the School C in District C to see if there was even room in the school for him and if there was a chance. Ms. A informed him that there was room and a definite chance and to get all of the paperwork to her that day and she would get it in front of the board and get a decision. We submitted all paperwork to her on August 19th at 10:22am.

After several follow-up emails and calls, we were informed on August 27th that our son was ineligible for school choice because of his academic record.

Our son previously attended a small private Catholic school in State A with an accelerated curriculum. According to that school, its first-grade curriculum was more comparable to second-grade work in a traditional public school. He struggled primarily in reading and required additional support. After extensive advocacy, a Section 504 Plan was implemented on March 3rd, based on his medical diagnoses of ADHD and anxiety.

Although he requires reading support, he performs adequately in his other academic subjects. His State A standardized MAP assessment results placed him within the average range. His tutor of more than a year also believed that a traditional public-school curriculum would better match his learning pace.

After learning that he had been denied school choice, we met with Mr. B, the student services supervisor from School District C on August 28th. We explained our son's academic history, his 504 Plan, and the reading interventions he might need. Later that afternoon, the supervisor called and told us our son was "all good" to attend the requested school. For the first time in weeks, we felt we could breathe.

That relief lasted only through the weekend.

At approximately 11 a.m. on August 31st - the day our son was supposed to attend the school's Meet the Teacher event - we were told he first had to report for a DIBELS assessment to determine whether he could enter second grade or would be placed back in first grade.

As you know, DIBELS includes timed measures of specific early-literacy skills. This assessment is a tool that should be used to detect areas of where interventions are needed. It should NOT be a determining factor as to what grade to place a child in. Furthermore, for a child who is medically diagnosed with ADHA and anxiety, as well as an existing 504 plan - a timed, unfamiliar assessment administered without adequate preparation and during an already stressful interstate transition may not accurately reflect his overall academic abilities.

Based on the DIBELS results from the test administered this morning, they are holding him back to first grade. Not only do we think this will be a great academic disadvantage to him, the impact to his mental health over being held back will be devastating. He has lost the home he has grown up in thus far, his school, his friends - everything that was familiar to him. The only shining light was that he was going to get to go to a school where he at least had a familiar face. He was genuinely excited to go back to school. Now, to be hit with this 1 day before school is supposed to start is going to kill his spirit and make his anxiety even worse. His mental health is going to suffer.

Our concern is whether one timed literacy screening—particularly one that may be affected by his disabilities—can appropriately or lawfully be used to determine his entire grade-level placement.

The state's MIC3 statute states that the Compact is intended to:

- Prevent military children from being disadvantaged by differences in grading, course content, and assessment;
- Facilitate timely enrollment and appropriate student placement;
- Promote flexibility and cooperation among schools, parents, and students;
- Require receiving schools to initially honor certain prior placements and educational assessments; and
- Require reasonable accommodations and modifications for an incoming student with an existing Section 504 Plan so the student has equal access to education.

Does our son's situation fall within the protections of MIC3 as the child of an active-duty service member who relocated from State A to State B under military orders?

Note - waiting on our tutor here to send me her letter to the school regarding XXX's academic progress/standing. I can provide once I get it.

Respectfully,