HEARTS APART

A School-based Support Model for Deployment

A toolkit for USD 207 Heart's Apart program at Fort Leavenworth, KS

Annual Business Meeting -2026



SESSION PURPOSE

What commissioners can take home:

Ideas to share with schools/districts for support of deployed family members in your state.

A usable starting point for districts that want to support students through parental deployment, training, separation, and reintegration.

01

Understand the model

How USD 207 organizes belonging, expression, and family connection.

02

Adapt with fidelity

Which elements should stay consistent and which should fit local context.

03

Launch responsibly

Staffing, referral, safeguarding, communication, and measurement tools.

04

Scale through states

Ways commissioners can equip districts without turning support into a mandate.

Hearts Apart at a glance

This program was created in 2003 when Fort Leavenworth students needed a safe place to talk about parents deployed to a variety of locations.

01	Purpose	A caring, safe setting for students to express feelings and support one another.
02	Leadership	A school counselor coordinates the group with staff and parent volunteers.
03	Cadence	Monthly after-school meetings, plus combined activities with the other Fort Leavenworth schools.
04	Access	Any student with a deployed parent may participate, with no cost for sponsored activities. (This includes students whose parent(s) may have recently returned or go on extended TDY's.)
05	Connection	Journals, keepsakes, and projects help students communicate with the deployed parent.

A district built around military-connected students



More than 90%

of USD 207 students are dependents of active-duty soldiers

USD 207 serves Fort Leavenworth residents through grade 9. Hearts Apart appears in both elementary and junior high activity listings.

Opportunity to Replicate:

Keep the program's core purpose. Redesign the delivery model for districts where only a few students identify as military-connected or where Guard and Reserve families live far from an installation.

Alignment with MIC3 priorities

CULTURE	Student-centered support	Students shape activities and describe what support feels useful.
FIDELITY	Consistent practice	A simple operating standard keeps referral, privacy, safety, and follow-up dependable.
ENGAGEMENT	Resources and partnership	Districts connect families with school liaisons, military supports, and local providers.
STATE LEADERSHIP	Shared tools	Commissioners distribute adaptable templates and share local examples.

This program aligns with MIC3's priorities: educating schools, sharing practices, providing relevant resources, and amplifying student voice.

What the public data can tell us

Current public data of the state-by-state count of members deployed is typically not readily available to schools or administration. Communication with families and military partners is a critical component to support.

1.10M active-duty members assigned in the 50 states and D.C.

721,611 Selected Reserve members assigned in the 50 states and D.C.

74% of active-duty spouses report a spouse deployment longer than 30 days during the member's career

62% of Reserve spouses with children reported new or higher child care expense during a recent deployment

Shared stress, different support environments

ACTIVE-DUTY FAMILIES

- Frequent moves can compound separation stress
- Schools near installations often recognize military life and associated challenges.
- Peers may share similar experiences and have an understanding mindset.
- More visible access to installation-based supports

SHARED

- Worry about the absent parent
- Experience changes in roles and routines
- Caregiver stress can affect school functioning
- Possible emotions of anxiety, anger, withdrawal, physical complaints, or reduced engagement

GUARD / RESERVE FAMILIES

- Usually remain in a civilian community
- The student may be the only military-connected child
- School staff may not recognize deployment-related needs
- Support can depend more on local community systems

Individual responses vary. Many children cope well, especially when family communication and caregiver well-being are strong.

How to support changes across the deployment cycle:



The program should allow students to enter, pause, return, or step up to individual support at any phase.

Five principles

01

Sense of Belonging before curriculum content

Students need a dependable group and trusted adult more than a dense curriculum.

02

Choice without spotlight

Offer ways to talk, make, move, or simply listen. Never require disclosure.

03

Connection without operational detail

Support family communication while avoiding mission locations, dates, or sensitive information.

04

Access without cost

Remove fees, transportation barriers, and supply burdens whenever possible.

05

Abridge to more help

The group complements counseling and crisis response. It does not replace either. Support with making connections to more assistance.

Six-step replication path

1	Listen	Students, caregivers, school staff, and military partners describe current gaps.
2	Scope	Choose ages, schools, program specifics, identification options, and referral process.
3	Safeguard	Set consent, privacy, emergency, communication, and supervision practices.
4	Equip	Prepare facilitators, activities, supplies, and partner contacts.
5	Pilot	Run a short cycle with a small group and collect student/family feedback.
6	Improve	Review outreach levels, experience, referrals, and access barriers before expanding.

A low-friction path into the group

1

IDENTIFY

Parent self-referral, student request, counselor outreach, or staff observation

2

CONNECT

Private caregiver contact explains purpose, consent, schedule, and limits of confidentiality

3

WELCOME

Brief student check-in offers choices and confirms group fit

4

PARTICIPATE

Monthly group with an open door for mid-cycle entry

5

FOLLOW UP

Caregiver updates, individual check-ins, or referral when needs exceed the group

Keep entry specific but flexible: Use the local definition of deployment or extended duty-related separation. Avoid requiring families to prove mission details. Include training and mobilization when the impact on the child is similar.

A generalized 60-minute session

10 min	Arrive	Snack, informal connection, optional one-word check-in
10 min	Settle	Review group agreements and use a grounding activity
25 min	Create or connect	Journal, project, game, service activity, or communication item
10 min	Share by choice	Students may share, pass, or speak privately with the facilitator
5 min	Close	Preview the next meeting and note follow-up needs

Keep the same opening and closing. Familiar rhythm reduces uncertainty even when the activity changes.

Adaptable activity menu

01 **Deployment journal**

Write, draw, collect memories, and save questions for later. (We use “Deployment Journal for Kids” by Rachel Robertson)

02 **Message studio**

Create letters, art, photos, audio scripts, or care-package items.

03 **Routine map**

Name what stays steady and who can help when a routine changes.

04 **Connection calendar**

Mark school events, family rituals, and flexible contact windows.

05 **Feelings through art**

Use color, music, collage, or movement without forced discussion.

06 **Peer problem-solving**

Practice responses to awkward questions or hard school moments.

07 **Community outing**

Bowling, movies, or another simple shared experience.

08 **Reunion preparation**

Discuss mixed feelings, changed roles, and realistic expectations.

Deployment journals and connection rituals

USD 207 gives students a deployment journal with an envelope for items they want to share when the parent returns. [“Deployment Journal for Kids” by Rachel Robertson]

NOTICE	REMEMBER	CONNECT	LOOK AHEAD
What felt easy or hard this week?	Save a story, ticket, drawing, or school moment.	What would you like your parent to know?	What is one thing you want to do together later?

Facilitator guardrails	Journals belong to the student. Explain privacy limits before use. Never ask students to record operational locations, dates, or sensitive details. Offer a private storage option at school.

Belonging can be tangible

USD 207 pairs peer connection with concrete comfort and shared experiences.

1	Comfort item	A hand-stitched kissing pillow and a bear in military uniform offer a physical reminder of connection.
2	Shared outing	Bowling, movies, parties, and combined school events create normal moments with peers.
3	No student fee	USD 207 activities for deployed families in Hearts Apart are offered at no cost.

Adaptation: a comfort item can be handmade, donated, or replaced with a student-selected object. Preserve choice and avoid assumptions about age.

A lean operating model

SCHOOL CORE

- Counselor or student-support lead
- Administrator sponsor
- Backup facilitator
- Teacher referral awareness

PARTNER NETWORK

- School Liaison
- Family readiness or Yellow Ribbon staff
- Military and Family Life Counselor
- Community mental health referral

BASIC COSTS

- Journals and supplies
- Snacks
- Transportation or late bus (If available. USD 207 does not provide transportation home from monthly meetings.)
- Activity admission
- Facilitator time

Start with what is already funded

A pilot can use existing counseling time, donated materials, and a school-based meeting. Add outings only after access and supervision are reliably available.

Safeguarding and escalation

STANDARD PRACTICE

- Written caregiver consent and emergency contacts
- Clear limits of confidentiality in student-friendly language
- Two-adult coverage or district-approved supervision
- Secure records with minimal deployment detail
- Communication rules for photos, packages, and digital messages (permissions)

SAME-DAY ESCALATION TRIGGERS

- Risk of harm to self or others
- Abuse, neglect, or unsafe caregiving conditions
- Severe or persistent change in functioning
- Panic, traumatic stress, or grief beyond group scope
- Caregiver distress that requires adult services

Follow district crisis, mandated-reporting, and student-support procedures. Hearts Apart remains a support group, not therapy.

A small measurement set

Question	Simple measure	Review process
Are students finding the group?	Eligible students invited; enrollment; attendance	Monthly
Does the group feel safe and useful?	Three-item student check-in plus one open response	Every 6–8 weeks
Are access barriers present?	Transportation, timing, language, cost, or consent barriers	Monthly
Are needs exceeding group scope?	Individual follow-ups and referrals, reported only in aggregate	Monthly
What should change?	Student, caregiver, and facilitator feedback	End of pilot

Avoid program decisions and measuring outcomes based on attendance alone. Also data with student experience and access information.

Adraft 90-day launch plan

DAYS 1–30

- Name an accountable lead(s)/sponsor(s)
- Listen to students and caregivers
- Confirm scope and eligibility
- Map crisis and referral routes

DAYS 31–60

- Finalize consent and communication
- Train facilitators
- Schedule six sessions
- Gather supplies and partners

DAYS 61–90

- Invite students privately
- Run the first two sessions
- Check safety and access
- Adjust before wider rollout

Pilot decision at day 90: continue, revise, pause, or expand. Document why.

State commissioners can make replication easier

CONVENE	Bring districts, Guard and Reserve leaders, installation school liaisons, and family support partners together.
EQUIP	Share editable templates, implementation standards, and referral resources.
SURFACE	Collect local examples, especially from communities far from installations.
LEARN	Use a common, small measurement set and protect student privacy.
AMPLIFY	Bring student voice and practical district lessons into MIC3 engagement and training.

Resource map

PROGRAM EXAMPLE

USD 207 Hearts Apart

usd207.org

DEPLOYMENT AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Military OneSource, Plan My Deployment, school liaisons

militaryonesource.mil

SCHOOL PRACTICE

Military Child Education Coalition resources and student programs

militarychild.org

COMPACT AND STATE LEADERSHIP

MIC3 strategic plan, training, and state contacts

mic3.net

GUARD AND RESERVE

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program and community-based supports

yellowribbon.mil / Military OneSource

IMMEDIATE SUPPORT

Military OneSource confidential help and referral

800-342-9647

CONNECTION. COMMUNITY. SUPPORT.

Thank You

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Dr. Keith Mispagel, Superintendent

USD 207 — Fort Leavenworth Unified School District

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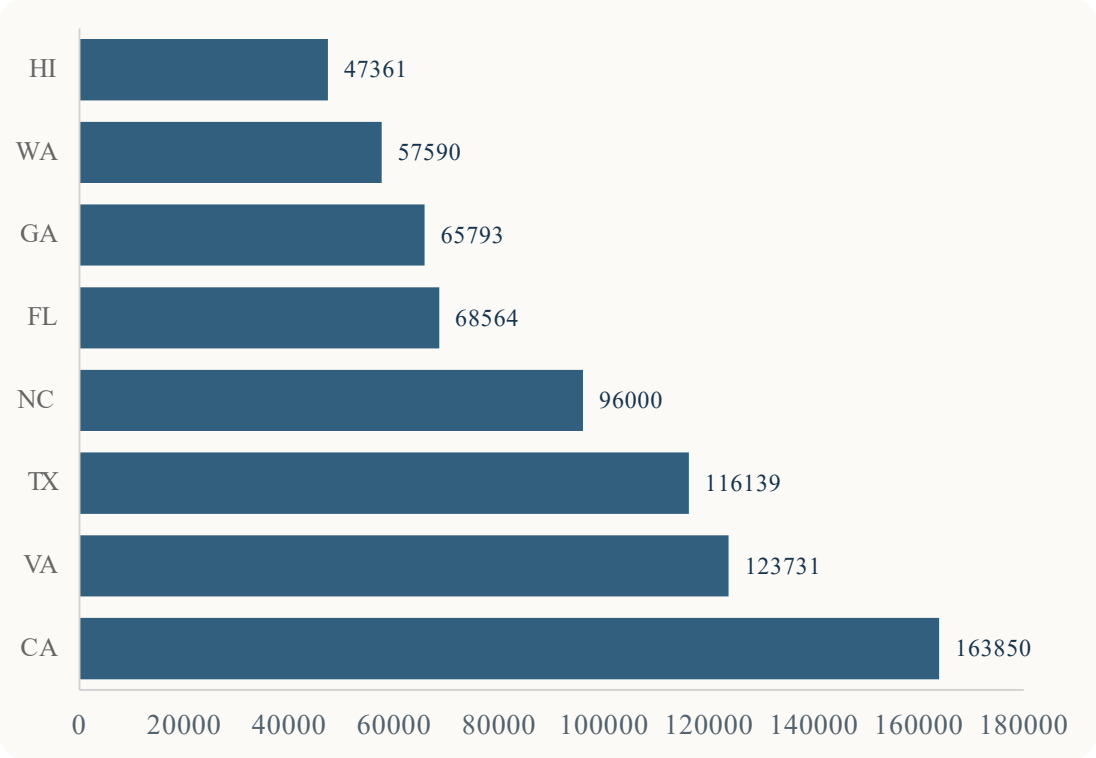
kmispagel@usd207.org · **www.usd207.org**

Back-Up Slides

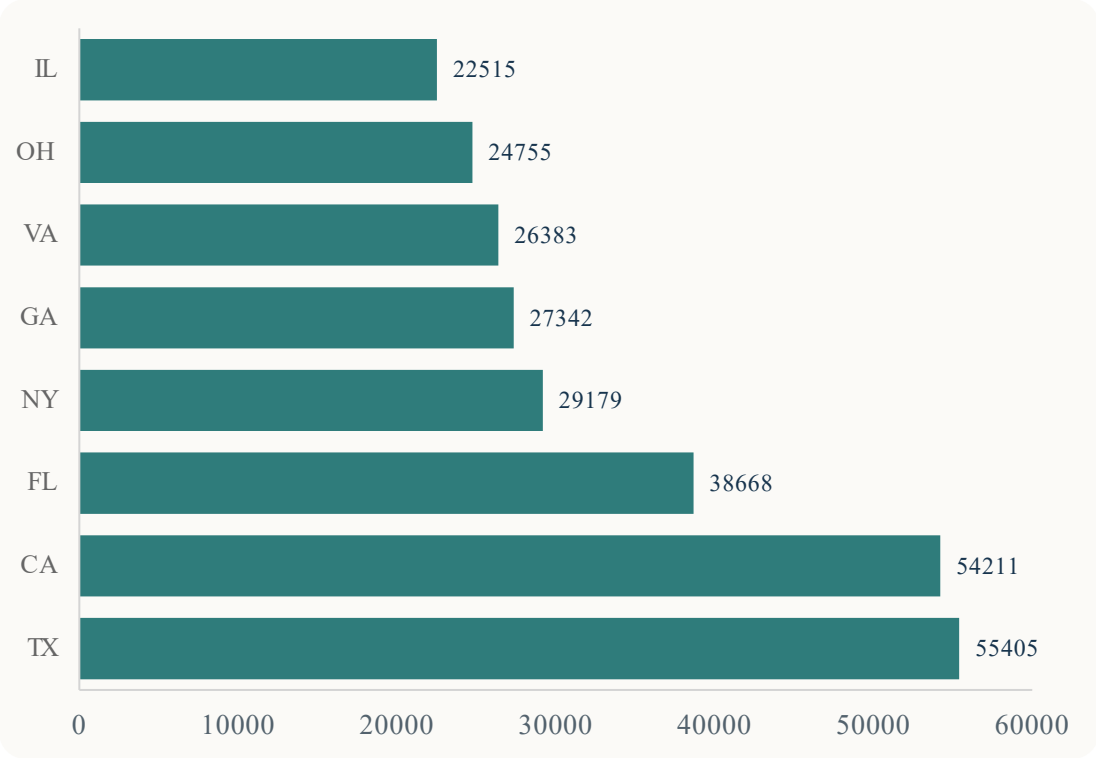
MARCH 2026 PERSONNEL LOCATION

Military-connected families live in every state

Largest state populations



ACTIVE DUTY



NATIONAL GUARD / RESERVE

50 states and D.C.: 1,160,943 active duty and 731,799 Guard/Reserve

Assigned duty location, not deployments

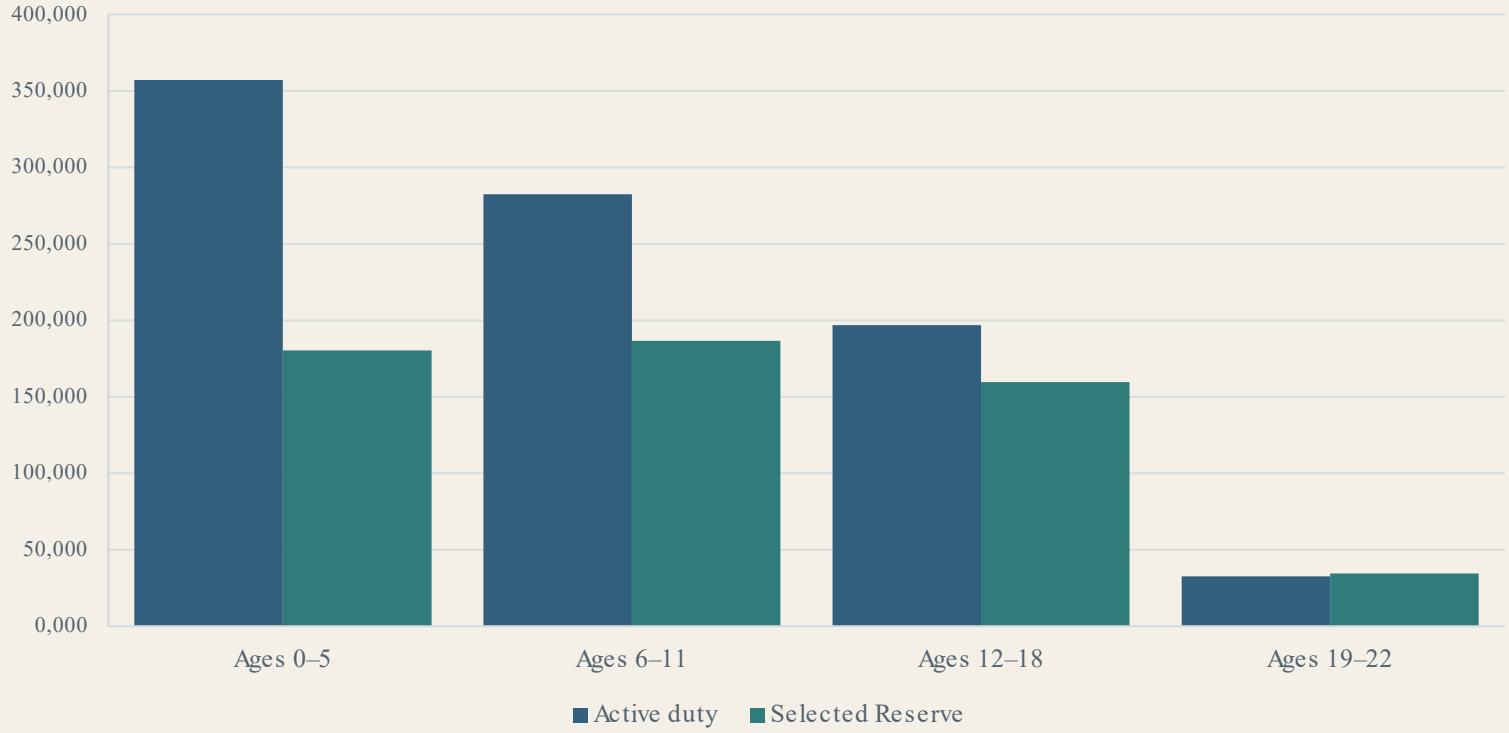
The school-age population is substantial

869,007

children of active-duty members

561,214

children of Selected Reserve members



Priority Consideration: Design for developmental differences. A second grader, a middle schooler, and a high school student need different ways to connect and talk.

State data: Alabama–Missouri

KEY

Top 10 States of Total Active-duty
Top 10 States of Total Reserve
Top 10 States of Total Combined Active-Duty and Reserve

State	Active duty (#)	Active duty (%)	Selected Reserve (#)	Selected Reserve (%)
Alabama	8,020	0.7%	18,531	2.6%
Alaska	18,841	1.7%	4,330	0.6%
Arizona	16,323	1.5%	14,239	2.0%
Arkansas	3,846	0.3%	10,979	1.5%
California	158,879	14.2%	53,433	7.4%
Colorado	35,307	3.2%	12,843	1.8%
Connecticut	5,745	0.5%	6,482	0.9%
Delaware	3,347	0.3%	4,827	0.7%
District of Columbia	9,183	0.8%	3,213	0.4%
Florida	63,597	5.7%	37,721	5.2%
Georgia	65,268	5.8%	27,279	3.8%
Hawaii	45,820	4.1%	9,453	1.3%
Idaho	3,431	0.3%	3,697	0.5%

State	Active duty (#)	Active duty (%)	Selected Reserve (#)	Selected Reserve (%)
Illinois	23,901	2.1%	22,460	3.1%
Indiana	1,017	0.1%	15,615	2.2%
Iowa	162	0.0%	10,820	1.5%
Kansas	19,962	1.8%	9,381	1.3%
Kentucky	28,660	2.6%	11,547	1.6%
Louisiana	12,486	1.1%	16,040	2.2%
Maine	232	0.0%	3,131	0.4%
Maryland	29,146	2.6%	18,044	2.5%
Massachusetts	2,235	0.2%	13,845	1.9%
Michigan	922	0.1%	13,643	1.9%
Minnesota	512	0.0%	17,316	2.4%
Mississippi	11,599	1.0%	13,790	1.9%
Missouri	15,509	1.4%	16,629	2.3%

Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), Military Personnel by Service/Component by State, as of March 31, 2026. DoD only (excludes Coast Guard). Selected Reserve = National Guard + Reserve. % = share of U.S.-based total (Active duty 1,120,212; Selected Reserve 726,182).

State data: Montana–Wyoming

State	Active duty (#)	Active duty (%)	Selected Reserve (#)	Selected Reserve (%)
Montana	3,437	0.3%	3,554	0.5%
Nebraska	6,390	0.6%	5,787	0.8%
Nevada	11,760	1.0%	7,200	1.0%
New Hampshire	1,342	0.1%	3,833	0.5%
New Jersey	6,169	0.6%	16,632	2.3%
New Mexico	13,596	1.2%	4,207	0.6%
New York	17,251	1.5%	28,835	4.0%
North Carolina	94,376	8.4%	20,274	2.8%
North Dakota	7,351	0.7%	4,420	0.6%
Ohio	6,684	0.6%	24,546	3.4%
Oklahoma	21,278	1.9%	13,114	1.8%
Oregon	555	0.0%	7,987	1.1%
Pennsylvania	2,164	0.2%	20,813	2.9%

State	Active duty (#)	Active duty (%)	Selected Reserve (#)	Selected Reserve (%)
Rhode Island	3,721	0.3%	4,259	0.6%
South Carolina	35,821	3.2%	17,663	2.4%
South Dakota	3,488	0.3%	4,488	0.6%
Tennessee	2,439	0.2%	16,318	2.2%
Texas	114,279	10.2%	55,080	7.6%
Utah	4,496	0.4%	11,881	1.6%
Vermont	94	0.0%	2,782	0.4%
Virginia	119,329	10.7%	25,978	3.6%
Washington	55,827	5.0%	14,067	1.9%
West Virginia	94	0.0%	7,020	1.0%
Wisconsin	681	0.1%	12,713	1.8%
Wyoming	3,265	0.3%	2,917	0.4%

Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), Military Personnel by Service/Component by State, as of March 31, 2026. DoD only (excludes Coast Guard). Selected Reserve = National Guard + Reserve. % = share of U.S.-based total (Active duty 1,120,212; Selected Reserve 726,182).