

**Military Family Transition Working Group
Youth – School Transition
28 Feb 03 Update**

Bottom line. This topic, Youth-Schools Transition Challenges, is increasingly important to military families and, therefore, it is extremely timely that the Governor requested this information. In addition to local improvements, there is tremendous potential for the Department of Defense and the State of Florida to leverage this work and bring about improvements for military families outside Florida.

Purpose of the Working Group. Established to respond to Governor Bush's February 2001 request for input on issues impacting military families and their transition to Florida. The working group initially targeted military youth and schools transition.

Past Actions. As presented at the February 2002 Governor's Base Commanders Meeting, the Working Group completed the first step of their efforts...identifying school issues impacting military youth as they transition to/from Florida. A report detailing the issues/findings was sent to Base Commanders on January 25th.

Goal.

- Ensure no child is penalized as a result of the parent's military relocation; service to the nation.
- Ensure an equal educational opportunity and experience for military youth.

As a by-product, issues identified and response initiatives implemented have great application to increase the attractiveness of Florida for relocations by corporate entities. Solutions developed to mitigate the impact of challenges for military families concurrently make a community/state more attractive to the larger mobile population (corporate relocations, etc.)

Status of State Actions. With the support of the Governor, meetings occurred with the State Secretary of Education and the State Commissioner of Education. Both offices/staffs expressed their support to address the school-transition challenges facing military youth as they move. Though education is primarily a local issue, Florida sees an opportunity as a State to:

- Initiate, encourage, and support **State-to-State (interstate)** dialogue to identify actions to minimize the impacts of the issues identified (reciprocity, etc.) and support the Goal, above.
- Strongly support the **dialogue between local schools and local Commanders.**
 - As a sub-set, reinforce the economic benefit of easing relocations/transitions; both the economic impact of the military community and the larger economic benefit or potential from increased corporate relocations.

Status of Local Actions. During the last six months Commands have engaged in discussions with local schools, resulting in varying degrees of success. Provided below are status reports of discussions, initiatives implemented and outstanding issues for some of the commands. The listing is not all-inclusive.

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- **MacDill AFB, Central Command, Special Operations Command, 6th Air Mobility Command, and 347th Wing, Detachment 1.**
 - In response to concerns that military children may have difficulty with the FCAT test when arriving in school districts in the December to February timeframe (outside normal fall preparation period), they had the Hillsborough School District check the statistics for these children. Statistics revealed that all military students in this category passed the FCAT with no deficiencies in the March testing.
 - MOU with South Tampa Chamber of Commerce to enhance nine schools within Hillsborough County located on or near MacDill Air Force Base. There are coordinated efforts to provide mentors; arts and culture activities; school supply drives; providing turned-in computers whenever replacements are received; find business partners for items the school is unable to obtain; assist in preparing the nine schools and ground for each school year; and establish a good working relationship with area principals. They have established quarterly meetings to discuss activities and ensure all are aware of what is happening at the schools and the base.
 - MOU with Hillsborough County School District and T.R. Robinson High School for MacDill Aeronautical Academy. An academy was created within Hillsborough County School District to encourage students to pursue a career in aviation or the military. Students are provided the opportunity to learn about the aviation field and are given numerous opportunities to see MacDill AFB and actually get an internship prior to the senior year. This program is a four-year program with MacDill AFB providing speakers, tours, Civil Air Patrol involvement, downtown coordination for comparison between civilian and military counterparts, time on the simulators, and even an orientation flight. The students are also given time to meet aviation heroes such as the Tuskegee Airmen in the aviation industry, experience the NASA traveling display, visit Fantasy of Flight (vintage aircraft), and participate in the Sun-N-Fun annual activities. The Academy students, with supervision by maintenance personnel, give back to the base by periodically washing aircraft at the Mac Dill Memorial Par.
 - Positive information on their involvement with/membership in the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC):
 - MacDill AFB has been a member of the Military Child Education Coalition since 2000. They were very active when their annual conference was held in Pinellas County in 2001 and also were able to get representatives from their local school district to attend to hear firsthand how membership in MCEC would be advantageous to the school district. Hillsborough County School District provided audio/visual equipment as in kind services for principals and guidance counselors' attendance at no cost. School personnel also were volunteers before and during the conference.
 - Through the MCEC agreement, they have worked closer with the school district to get guidance counselors available during the summertime to meet the needs of military children transitioning into Florida during summer months. Each school now provides a guidance counselor half time to accommodate new students to Hillsborough County
 - They met with area supervisors, guidance counselor staff, and curriculum staff

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- and discussed problems. As a team, they came up with workable solutions to problems.
- They created a quarterly meeting with area principals to discuss topics and ensure they are aware of what is happening on campus and on the base. They established great working relationships and now only a phone call away from any question. They see open communication as essential to resolving any concerns before they become problems
 - MCEC is currently in the process of providing computers for direct, secure transfer of transcripts from base to base for school districts that are MCEC members
 - Their local school district realizes that it is not only the military child that transition affects. Many corporations are transferring employees during the school year, so this applies to all children who transfer
 - MacDill AFB sends representation each year to the MCEC conference. For example, MacDill AFB is in partnership in aviation with the school district. At the conference they learned San Antonio, Texas has a partnership so the MacDill representative was not only enlightened, but also able to bring back information to assist in further development of the program.
 - Hillsborough School District Superintendent is more than glad to discuss/field questions on membership benefit with other school districts. (Earl Lennard (803) 272-4050; can also be reached via E-mail: Earl.Lennard@sdhc.k12.fl.us.
- Hillsborough School District is currently working on a homework website. It will be called "homework central" when it is operational. Currently each teacher provides their E-mail address where parents and/or students can send E-mails to the teacher. Each teacher is provided a planning period so they can respond to these E-mails if unable to respond during their non-duty hours.
 - Transferred 125 computers and 20 printers to the on-base elementary school to inspire students to develop technology skills.
 - Business partners in the local community donated computers to the local schools.
 - Developed and distributed press releases encouraging local newspapers to write articles on positive efforts by the schools (ie. stories highlighting specific programs such as food services, MacDill Aeronautical Academy, magnet programs, etc.)
 - MacDill AFB entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Big Brothers/Big Sisters to recruit volunteers for the schools near their base to enhance their MOU with the South Tampa Chamber of Commerce. The program will be an extension of their "Lunch Buddy" program that is currently in six schools.
 - **Continuing Issues:**
 - Overcrowded classrooms will continue to be a problem. Schools need additions instead of portable classrooms. Adding six, eight, ten classrooms is far easier than building new schools and redistricting students especially at the elementary school level (should be eased by latest State amendment on classroom sizes)
 - Need to add sessions to the school to decrease the demand for new schools. Adding one period in the morning and one in the afternoon could

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- accommodate many more students without new construction costs.
 - Need to add overhangs where students are picked up. It is quite unsafe to have students going into cars during lightning storms. This minimum cost construction would provide maximum safety for the students.
 - Exempt students from FCAT testing for those students arriving new to the Florida school system within 60 days of a testing cycle. Arrivals outside this 60-day window do not have sufficient time to adjust and prepare for testing. This places these students at a distinct disadvantage.
- **Suggestions for how the Governor can assist:**
 - Recognize unique programs (ie. special magnet school programs) to encourage more students into these programs. This could also result in helping to equalize the number of students in each school.
 - Promote more volunteerism in the schools. Getting more mentors can only help the students. Reading assistance, lunch buddy programs, and homework mentors all result in more adults engaged in the schools and taking a more active interest in the children.
- **Eglin AFB, Air Force Material Command and Hurlburt Field, Air Force Special Operations Command:**
 - **Eglin Air Force Base, Air Force Material Command:**
 - Education Consortium, established in 1992, continues to meet on a monthly basis to identify issues. Dialogue continues with the Okaloosa County School District regarding issues identified during the initial survey in 2002. Recent actions have addressed transportation issues of both public and private schools in gaining access to the installation.
 - No other significant action to report
 - **Hurlburt Field:**
 - Since 1990, have been working with the counselors in the primary and middle schools in Santa Rosa County on the effects of deployments on military children and subsequently on their school work
 - The first meeting between Hurlburt Field senior leadership and the Santa Rosa County Superintendent and high school principals on transition issues took place on 19 Feb 03
 - **Continuing Issue for both Eglin/Hurlburt:**
 - Statewide, students are counted for FTE dollars twice a year. As a result of some personnel deployments, some spouses have decided to move their families back to their home of record; and therefore will not be available during the counting period. Although in most cases they do plan to return before the end of the school year, once the students miss the counting period, the schools, through the District, may be required to pay back the dollars for the departed students. Lost revenue to the schools equates to \$1,500 per student, per semester. Contingent upon the amount of money lost by the school district, the school district may no longer be able to fully support some

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programs; and in some cases, may need to terminate teachers. Each member school has been asked to track the number of families departing based on deployments. One school has reported losing eight families as a result of deployments. This could possibly become a state-wide issue, especially for those schools with heavy military dependent populations. To mitigate this loss of dollars, the State Department of Education should examine the effect of deployments upon schools across the state to assess the magnitude of the problem.

- **Naval Air Station, Key West and Joint Interagency Task Force – East:**

- The signing of the MCEC Memorandum of Agreement will be February 26th by Michael Lannon (Monroe County Schools Superintendent) and CAPT L. Cotton (CO NAF Key West). We, the military in Key West, have had great success with working with the Monroe County Schools and their willingness to work with incoming students. Most of the issues addressed in the MOA were already being done, but this will formalize our commitment to our children.
- A general assessment of FCAT data does not support the concern that military children are having difficulties with the FCAT. The results of the data are that all 36 students are performing at or above average in reading and mathematics on the FCAT 8th, 9th and 10th grade Sunshine State Standards Assessment. At all grade levels, their average in reading and mathematics are above the State's averages. Sixty four percent (64%) of the grade 10 and 11 students have met graduation requirements for reading and 100% have met the FCAT graduation requirements in mathematics.
- The Monroe County School Board hired a communications consultant to devise a Strategic Communications Plan. As part of the plan, the Military Liaison has been trained as a "Key Communicator" for Monroe County Schools. The Key Communicator role is to be an informed voice for school related issues. They are expected to communicate accurate facts about school-related issues and challenges to the local public and businesses, while providing rumor control and feedback to the schools.
- The Monroe County School Board held three round tables throughout the district. The Key West round table was held Oct. 16th. It was intended to be a listening forum for the School Board members and faculty to hear what the parents and community member's educational priorities are.
 - Results were:
 - Priorities 1 & 2 (tied in ranking): teacher recruitment/ retention and curriculum
 - Priority 3: class size (too high student/teacher ratio)
 - Priority 4: facilities (physical and technical)
 - Priorities 5& 6: safety and transportation (more buses after extra curricular activity transportation and "express" buses for students living in further up the Keys.)
 - Approximately 50 people attended including faculty members, and about 160

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total from all three-area round tables.

- School counselors and staffs in Key West are committed to working with the incoming military children and are quite flexible and accommodating to the unique needs of a transient population.
- Monroe County Schools has a detailed website (www.keyschools.com) with a parental viewer portal, calendar and many other helpful and informative links. It also includes a virtual tour of the different schools, which can be taken on line by incoming students/parents. At anytime parents can view their children's assignments, attendance and grades via the parental viewer (student ID and password can be obtained through the guidance counselors), and the records are secure (no names). The website is maintained and updated at least weekly by the school webmaster/staff. This is a great tool for keeping parents informed without having to contact someone.
- A new and modern school is planned to replace two existing old schools, one is the main (95%) military attended elementary school, which will be called the Royal Poinciana Elementary Education Center. This facility will feature a school within a school concept from pre-Kindergarten through fifth grades, which is a focused approach of faculty, technologies and resources in each area with as much physical separation of each grade group within the facility as possible. The new school will also be designed to accommodate English (for) Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and have an inclusive approach to special needs children. District support facilities are also slated to be streamlined to make them more cost effective while providing a higher degree of service to our schools, families and community.
- Military members actively support local schools by volunteering and tutoring on a regular basis in the classroom and the Saturday Scholars Program.
- **Continuing issues:**
 - Difficulty recruiting and retaining quality teachers due to the high cost of living in Key West relative to teachers' salaries. Lack of affordable housing is the major reason that teachers are hard to recruit and retain.
 - Overcrowded classrooms.
- **Naval Education & Training (CNET):**
 - No significant activities to report.
 - **Continuing Issue:**
 - Military family transferred from Iowa and arrived in Florida mid-July. Son has a learning disability dealing with reading comprehension.
 - In Iowa he was allowed to listen to books on tape and write explanation/description.
 - Informed that in Florida he cannot use the tapes and he must pass the FCAT to graduate.
 - Requested a waiver and was denied
 - Parent still felt that an exemption from testing for students with certain disabilities while students with other disabilities were not exempt. She felt that this was discrimination.

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- Contacted the DOE , Mr. Ron Burton, who called and assisted the parent with suggested COA
 - Ms. Lezlie Cline, ESE Programs Office, indicated that Mr. Paul Gallaher of the same office spoke to the parent and sent her some materials.
 - Ms. Cline also indicated that the Governor's Blue Ribbon Taskforce on Testing Accommodation was looking into some of the issues.
 - No waiver was granted by the Blue Ribbon Taskforce
 - ***REQUEST state assistance to grant waiver.***
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- **Tyndall AFB, 1st Air Force, and 325th Fighter Wing:**
 - Collected information about Military Child Education Coalition-recommended MOAs from Cindy Smith, Director of Community Partnerships at MacDill AFB FL and Dr. Mary M. Keller, Executive Director Military Child Education Coalition.
 - Plan to explore developing a MOAs between the school districts and military installation like or similar to those recommended by the Military Child Education Coalition.
 - Working with base senior leadership on partnering initiatives with the local school district
 - Scheduled a meeting with Ms. Judy Harris, Bay County School Superintendent's Liaison Officer for 21 March to discuss military child transition issues, MOAs, etc.
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- **Southern Command/United States Army Garrison-Miami (USAG-M):**
 - Setting up meetings with the Superintendents of both Miami-Dade and Broward School districts to discuss results of the Army's Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS) and endorsement of Memorandums of Agreements like the one recommended by SETS and the Military Child Education Coalition in addressing needs of the mobile child
 - USAG-M established a school liaison officer position on its staff. This position will dedicate its time to working with the local school districts in addressing the needs of USSOUTHCOM's military children
 - USAG-M met with school liaison officers from Army's Southeast Region and from Ft. Lewis, Washington to help establish its strategic vision and baseline for initiating a formal action plan to address local educational needs
 - USSOUTHCOM SCQL Office held a teleconference in Jan 03 with representatives from Florida's Military Family Transition Youth Working Group to identify and discuss initiatives put in place with local school districts throughout the state for benchmarking purposes.
 - Concerns raised during this teleconference:
 - Inaccuracy of information posted on some school websites
 - Classroom sizes and doubling of sessions to accommodate teacher/classroom shortages
 - Key West's challenge in recruiting/retaining teachers due to the area's cost of living

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- Concern with timing of FCAT preparation with timing of some military students' arrivals in a school district (preparation normally takes place in the fall for March test dates; for those transitioning into the school districts in Dec/Jan, this will be an issue)
- Need to emphasize the Troops to Teachers Program as a possible partial solution to state teacher shortages
- USSOUTHCOM SCQL Office is collaborating with the Military Child Education Coalition and members from the Governor's staff on a possible letter for the Governor to send to school districts in Florida to raise awareness of challenges facing mobile children and how findings from SETS may have application to all mobile students in their school districts
- USSOUTHCOM SCQL Office is also working with the Non-DoD Dependent Schools Program Manager and the Department of State to address the unique challenges facing USSOUTHCOM members assigned to 26 Security Assistance Offices in support of US Embassies throughout South and Central America and the Caribbean
- ***Outstanding Issues:***
 - Overcrowded classrooms in Miami-Dade/Broward School district schools
 - Need State of Florida to assess need to change legislation waiving residency requirements for children of military personnel to authorize them John M. McKay scholarships for special needs education vouchers
 - The John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program is covered by Section 229.05371, Florida Statute
 - John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program was established to provide families with an option to attend a public school other than the one assigned to, or to provide a scholarship to a private school of choice, for students with disabilities for whom an individual education plan has been written in accordance with the rules of the Commissioner of Education or the State Board of Education. Meant for students with disabilities in grades K-12 who are mentally handicapped, speech and language impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, visually impaired, dual sensory impaired, emotionally handicapped, specific learning disabled, hospitalized or homebound, or autistic
 - ***Recommend state legislation be modified to waiver following eligibility requirement when a military member can not meet it:***
 - ***Student be enrolled and present in a Florida public school during the October 2001 and February 2002 surveys (in other words meet a 2-year residency requirement)***
 - USSOUTHCOM has a family with a special needs student in the Broward School District
 - Broward School District unable to support the student's special needs. School district advised parents that if the family had been State residents for 2 years, they would have qualified for a state voucher program (the McKay Scholarship Program) enabling their special needs dependent to attend a private school qualified to deal with the special needs

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- Military members transitioning through Florida often unable to meet residential criteria
- **Army Simulation, Training, & Instrumentation Command (STRICOM), Air Force Agency for Modeling & Simulation (AFAMS), Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division (NAWCTSD), Marine Corp Systems Command:**
 - No new significant activities to report
- **Naval Region Southeast (CNRSE)**
 - No new significant activities to report
- **Homestead Air Reserve Base (HARB)**
 - **Continuing Issues:**
 - Experiencing military members not having their family members accompany them or being forced to live long-distances from Homestead where better schools exist
 - Inadequacy of schools creating a recruitment problem
 - School problems:
 - Overcrowded
 - Low rated
 - Although there is a growth explosion of new homes in Homestead, the local school system has failed to address the anticipated escalation of an already seriously overcrowded school system
- **Naval Surface Warfare Center, Coastal Systems Station**
 - No new significant activities to report
 - **Continuing Issues:**
 - Coastal Systems Station (CSS), Panama City, has a concern with acceptance of courses/credits for transfer students:
 - A military family recently arrived at the command with a dependent who should have entered his Senior year in high school. The son attended high school in Tennessee; but after reviewing his Tennessee course curriculum with local high school officials, he was to be dropped back a year, effectively requiring him to reaccomplish his Junior year. Result was the dependent was returned to Tennessee to live with friends of the family to enable him to graduate on time. This situation created a one year separation from his family.
 - Request the State evaluate transfer requirements for high school students
- **7th Coast Guard District and ISC Miami (includes personnel from throughout the State)**
 - Richmond Middle School episodes of violence/assault were corrected after intervention with the Miami-Dade Superintendent's Office (Ms. Phyllis Hallberg)
 - Tampa Bay area schools are experiencing improvements in bussing and with overcrowded classrooms.
 - Report that Pine Lake Elementary Schools interaction with parents and children has

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- improved tremendously after a military member addressed the issue with the school
- ***Continuing Issue:***
 - Overcrowding in schools (this should be addressed by the recent amendment)
 - Lack of money to purchase supplies for the classrooms requiring teachers and/or parents to pay for the items needed
 - Low pay of teachers compared to other states creating quality teacher recruitment/retention problems
 - Perception that the quality of education provided by Florida schools is less than what is provided in other states
 - Problems for students from other states' gifted programs being able to continue to participate in a gifted program upon transfer to a Florida school
 - Majority of Coast Guard members transfer during the summer months (May-Sep), therefore Coast Guard dependants often do not experience some of the problems encountered by DOD dependents who may be transferred into the state outside the school summer break periods.

 - ***Patrick Air Force Base:***
 - Education liaison established a website with special sections for both students and parents to send him questions that he in turn forwards to the appropriate school for response. When the response is returned, he forwards it back to the student or parent. This system enables him to capture recurring issues
 - The 45th Space Wing hosts numerous school tours each year for students; i.e. tours of the space museum, military working dogs, and fire station.
 - The Patrick Air Force Base mascot, Snark the Shark, routinely visits the schools, along with other military members, in support of school activities such as DARE and other crime fighting programs
 - They established "Adopt a Shark Program," in which Brevard County students write letters to deployed service members.
 - They established volunteer mentoring programs throughout the Brevard County School District. For example, the Patrick Air Force Base Company Grade Officers Association arranges for junior officers to visit the schools for career days. They also have individuals from technical fields who volunteer to work with students in computer classes. They also sponsor "future astronaut" classes as a way to "thank the community." This program also helps promote the importance of math and science and encourages students to begin on a path that will lead to science and engineering career paths, critical to sustaining Florida's science and engineering industry.
 - They participate in the "Take Stock in Children Program" in which military members work with 7-9th graders considered "at risk" of not completing school
 - Recently created a web page with a newcomer's link that allows parents and students to directly connect to the school district's web page
 - They are implementing orientation tours for the Superintendent's Leadership Team comprised of board members, district level administrators, and school principals. The initial tour will be divided into four separate visits enabling a comprehensive mission overview and will promote educational ties between the installation and the county school district. This program is tentatively scheduled to kick-off in April 2003.

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- ***Outstanding issues:***
 - Conveyed concern with inaccuracy of school websites. Believes inaccuracy of information posted may be because this task is often an additional duty for teachers or other school staff members therefore not enabling time needed to keep the websites up.
 - There has been concern with regard to overcrowded classrooms (this should be resolved through voter approval of the recent State amendment). Although an average class size of 25 may appear low, this often doesn't tell the whole story. For example, a gifted class may have only 10 students and a history class may have 40, averaging out 25 students. Therefore, average classroom sizes can be misleading in certain circumstances.
 - Opportunities for Advancement Placement. Early close-out of Advance Placement (AP) enrollments does not allow for the late summer relocations of military family members
 - Opportunities for Sports Participation. Children could not participate in school sports programs because transcripts from previous school had not been received.
 - School Registration. Children cannot register without civilian lease agreement or government assigned housing paperwork resulting in enrollment delay. Parents residing in temporary living facilities (TLFs) and will be attending Cocoa Beach and Satellite High School can register. But if they will be attending school in another part of the county, they cannot register or enroll in that school
 - FCAT. Students must participate in the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test no matter when they officially enter the school district. For example, if they transferred from New Jersey on a Monday and the test was scheduled for the next Wednesday, the new student would be expected to take the test. Need to assess need to waiver FCAT requirement for those transitioning within a prescribed period prior to the test.
 - Finger printing fee. Concern has been raised by some military members, who have been willing to volunteer at schools for one-on-one mentoring, that they have to pay a \$47 dollar fee. This applies to service members who have secret and top secret clearances. One-on-one mentoring individuals are classified as “registered volunteers and must have a finger print background check. Individuals who volunteer with groups are classified as “listed volunteers” and do not require a finger printing background check.
 - Honor Classes. There is a problem with reciprocating honor classes from other states. Students are held out of local honor classes because their transcripts stating they have taken honor classes are not being recognized
 - Achievement Test from other States. Florida has the FCAT, but there are students who have taken similar achievement test in other states. To assist students and parents, need to explore reciprocal agreements with other states to accept these tests in lieu of current state of residency's test