

Pre-K Now  
Research Series

July 2007

## Pre-K for Military Families: Honoring Service, Educating Children



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**M** McCormick Tribune  
Foundation

July 2007

Dear Colleague,

As a child of a military family, a veteran of our Armed Forces, and a parent, I can attest to the immense rewards and the unique and difficult challenges that attend the military lifestyle. Frequent relocations and the cycle of deployment – preparation, separation, and reunification – all cause disruptions that can have profound emotional as well as educational consequences for military families.

States can do more to support those who dedicate themselves to protecting us by providing high-quality pre-kindergarten for their children. Research shows that pre-k helps young children develop social and emotional skills, which can help them better cope with the stresses of military life. Additionally, in an environment of repeated and often dramatic change, pre-k can provide stability and support to military children.

Providing high-quality pre-k for military children can also help our service men and women to be safer and more successful on the job. Military personnel regularly cite the welfare of their families as a primary concern during deployment. When our service men and women know that their children are well cared for, they worry less and concentrate more on the important work they do for our country.

On behalf of the McCormick Tribune Foundation, Pre-K Now, and the Military Child Education Coalition, I am pleased to present this new report, *Pre-K for Military Families: Honoring Service, Educating Children*, that demonstrates how high-quality pre-k can help to mitigate the challenges faced by military children and recommends actions that states can take to ensure that these children have access to critical early education programs. I encourage state leaders to adopt the strategies outlined in this report and to provide military children with the high-quality pre-k opportunities that develop social and emotional skills, promote stability and security, and foster success in school and in life.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David L. Grange".

Brigadier General David L. Grange, USA (Ret.)  
President and CEO  
McCormick Tribune Foundation

Pre-K for Military Families:  
Honoring Service,  
Educating Children

For the children of our nation's military personnel, frequent relocations and parental deployments present a unique set of social, emotional, and educational challenges. High-quality, state-funded pre-kindergarten programs provide stability and security and foster the skills these children need to cope with change and to succeed in school and in life.

State policymakers can better support our country's service men and women by ensuring that military children have access to high-quality pre-k programs.

## Introduction

Even as states across the United States make impressive progress toward providing pre-kindergarten for all three and four year olds, many children in urgent need of high-quality early education still lack access. As states look to expand pre-k by first targeting those with the greatest need, policymakers should consider how the children of our nation's military personnel are affected when their parents serve our country. Children in military families, like their civilian peers, benefit from the social, emotional, and academic skills pre-k fosters, and military families need consistent access to pre-k in all states to smooth the unique and frequent transitions they face.

Military families make many sacrifices in service to our country. They move three times more frequently than their civilian counterparts, and the possibility of extended separation from family is always present.<sup>1</sup> These families deserve the best possible support and education programs our country can provide, beginning with high-quality pre-k.

Military children need strong social, academic, and emotional skills and effective, accessible support systems to deal with transition. Studies have shown that parents are more focused professionally when they know their children are receiving quality care and education.<sup>2</sup> For military parents, separated from their children for long periods of time and working in hazardous conditions, this confidence and the resulting on-the-job focus are even more important.<sup>3</sup>

In fiscal year 2007 alone, state pre-k investments increased by more than \$450 million, providing thousands more children with access to pre-k.<sup>4</sup> Yet, pre-k eligibility varies widely from state to state, creating a revolving door for frequently relocated military children. For example, a military child who is eligible for pre-k in Georgia, where the program is open to all four year olds, would likely no longer have access to pre-k if her family moved to California, which provides pre-k to just 10 percent of its four year



olds. This disparity in pre-k access represents a tremendous challenge for our military families, and creates further disruption for children already exposed to repeated and often drastic transitions.

State policymakers can help support military families by ensuring they have access to high-quality, state-funded pre-k programs. In Kansas and Texas, lawmakers have done just that by expanding their states' pre-k eligibility requirements to include military children.<sup>5</sup> The “military child” is defined in these states as a child with a parent serving either in the Active Duty forces (comprised of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard) or in an activated and mobilized National Guard or Reserve unit. A child whose parent has been killed or wounded while on duty is also included. Additionally, in Texas, military children who begin pre-k in the fall remain eligible throughout the school year even if their parent’s status changes.

High-quality pre-k is an important strategy for addressing the unique challenges faced by military families, and by expanding pre-k eligibility to include military children, policymakers can support the work of our dedicated service men and women. Pre-k provides Active Duty personnel with the assurance that their children are receiving the strong educational, social, and emotional foundation that they and all children need to thrive and succeed.

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### Pre-K Complements Existing Department of Defense Child Care Programs

Understanding the impacts that a mobile, military lifestyle has on families with very young children, the Department of Defense (DoD) has worked with each service branch to establish a renowned child care system, devoted to helping military personnel find and afford the care they need for their children. Additionally, they have partnered with the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRA) to help families living off base secure high-quality child care. Combined, these programs provide more than 200,000 children (ages six weeks to 12 years) with access to child care on a daily basis.\*

Yet, families need high-quality pre-k in addition to child care in order for their children to be prepared for success in school and in life. Many military families still struggle to find high-quality, affordable pre-k for their children. Now is the time for state policymakers to take action and make it possible for these military parents to secure pre-k for their children.

When policymakers make military children eligible for state-funded pre-k, they provide these children with the opportunity to begin school prepared to succeed, while simultaneously building the quality and capacity of the entire early care and education system. When military-connected three and four year olds are enrolled in state-funded pre-k, more DoD child care funds are available to parents who need care for their infants and toddlers. Additionally, these funds can be used to support wraparound care for children enrolled in part-day pre-k programs. When states partner with the military in this way, young military children are more likely to enjoy the benefits that research shows come from a continuum of high-quality early care and education.

\* “Child Care,” Military Advantage, <http://www.military.com/benefits/resources/family-support/child-care>.

## Demographics: A Snapshot of Military Families

### Location

While military members and their families are located all over the world, the vast majority (84 percent) of military families are stationed in the United States and its territories. A closer examination of the trends reveals that nearly 70 percent of these U.S.-based families live in 10 states. (See Table 1.) Many of these states are also home to large numbers of National Guard and Reserve members. (See Table 2.) Among these states, there is tremendous variation in pre-k eligibility requirements and access. (See Table 3.)

### Military Families

Nearly half of America's Active Duty military members are 25 years old or younger, and the average age of Active Duty military members at the birth of their first child is 24.8 years. Nearly 40 percent of children of Active Duty military personnel are younger than six. National Guard and Reserve members tend to be slightly older, but even for these military personnel, 25 percent of their children are under the age of six.<sup>6</sup>

The realities of today's military families compel policy-makers to develop high-quality early childhood systems that are available to and can meet the particular needs of these young families. More than half of Active Duty spouses are in the labor force or are currently looking for work. Nearly six percent of Active Duty service members are single with children. The number of children with two parents on Active Duty in the military is also on the rise.<sup>7</sup> Unlike civilian employers, the United States military can make demands on its employees that cannot be postponed or refused; for example, in dual-military families, both parents can be deployed at the same time. In these instances, children often live with grandparents or other relatives. Access to reliable pre-k options and, whenever possible, continuity in familiar settings can ease the burden on parents, extended family members, and children alike.

For military personnel, whether Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserve, the experience of serving can be very similar, but there are significant differences for their families. Active Duty families often live on or near military installations (a base, post, or camp), are in contact with other military families, are typically more

**Table 1: Top 10 States with Active Duty Military Personnel**

State	Number of Active Duty Personnel	Percent of Total U.S. Active Duty Personnel
California	167,098	14.1
Virginia	137,681	11.6
Texas	112,283	9.5
North Carolina	101,563	8.6
Georgia	70,641	6.0
Florida	66,256	5.6
Washington	53,171	4.5
Hawaii	44,068	3.7
South Carolina	38,361	3.2
Kentucky	35,171	3.0

Source: U.S. Department of Defense. "2004 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community." Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy, 2004.

**Table 2: Top 10 States with National Guard and Reserve Personnel**

State	Number of Selected Reserves	Percent of Total U.S. Selected Reserves
California	61,213	7.3
Texas	52,955	6.4
Pennsylvania	36,754	4.4
New York	32,301	3.9
Florida	32,040	3.8
Ohio	29,747	3.6
Alabama	27,718	3.3
Georgia	27,211	3.3
Virginia	25,737	3.1
Illinois	24,906	3.0

Source: U.S. Department of Defense. "2004 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community." Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy, 2004.

**Table 3: Variation in Pre-K Eligibility Requirements and Access**

State	Eligibility Requirements						Percent of Children Served	
	Low Income	Additional Risk Factors	Military Status	Locally Determined Eligibility Requirements	Pre-K for All or No Eligibility Requirements	No State-Funded Pre-K	Three Year Olds	Four Year Olds
California	•	•					5%	10%
Virginia		•		•			0%	11%
Texas	•	•	•				4%	44%
North Carolina	•						None	12%
Georgia					•		None	51%
Florida					•		None	47%
Washington	•						1%	6%
Hawaii						•	N/A	N/A
South Carolina		•		•			4%	31%
Kentucky	•						11%	29%
Pennsylvania	•	•		•			2%	6%
New York					•		1%	29%
Ohio	•						1%	4%
Alabama					•		None	2%
Illinois					•		14%	23%

Source: Barnett, W. Steve, Jason T. Hustedt, Laura E. Hawkinson, and Kenneth B. Robin. *The State of Preschool 2006*. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006.

accustomed to the military lifestyle, and live daily with the possibility of reassignment or deployment. The communities in which they live also tend to be more familiar with the military lifestyle and with the challenges that military personnel and their children face.

By contrast, most National Guard and Reserve families do not live near a military installation and are not connected to other military families or the programs and services designed to support them. Some Active Duty members are also considered “geographically isolated” from an installation due to assignments in recruiting, Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs, or other special assignments. The communities in which Reservists and geographically isolated Active Duty families live often have little or no significant or permanent military presence. In practical

terms, these communities are likely to be less familiar with the day-to-day events affecting military families or the issues military children face.

Recent years have seen the largest call-up of National Guard and Reserve members since World War II.<sup>8</sup> The need is now more pressing than ever to provide the children of these men and women with the stable support available to their peers who live on or near military installations. States without many military bases are still home to many children who face the same challenges as their peers living in states with large-scale military installations. The reality is that military children are in almost every community in America, and no matter where they live, they need and deserve access to high-quality, state-funded pre-k programs.

## Pre-K, Academic Achievement, and Military Children

### Academic Achievement and Military Children

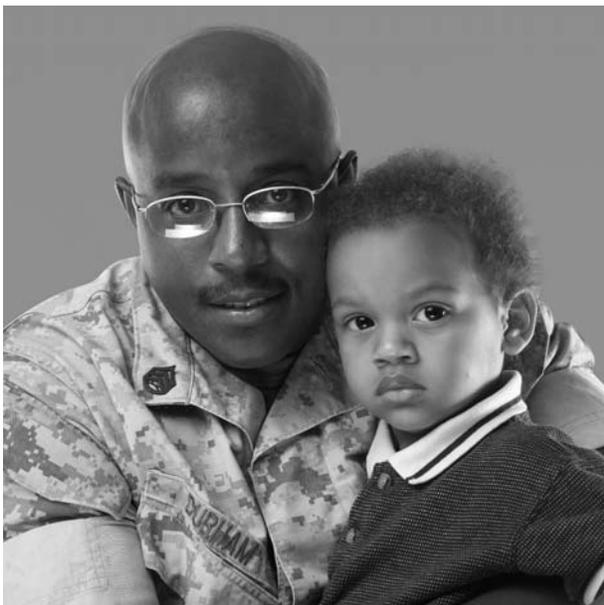
Ensuring a successful academic career for military children is a complicated and ongoing process, disrupted by frequent transitions to new schools, sometimes in the middle of a school year. A solid foundation in math and literacy is vital for military children to succeed in each new academic setting. With a growing national emphasis on learning standards and achievement, including varying state standards resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act, states have a vested interest in supporting the education of highly mobile military children.

### Pre-K and Academic Achievement

High-quality pre-k can provide children in military families with a solid foundation that will help them better cope with the instability they may encounter throughout their K-12 education. Decades of academic research illustrate both the short- and long-term academic benefits of high-quality pre-k. In the short term, children who participate in pre-k enter school

with stronger math skills, early reading skills, and vocabulary development than their peers who do not attend pre-k.<sup>9</sup> These skills provide a solid foundation on which our youngest students can build a successful academic career. Research consistently demonstrates that children who start school with strong academic skills remain ahead of their peers, reducing the need for remedial services, no matter where they go to school.<sup>10</sup>

Pre-k also has lasting benefits well beyond kindergarten; children who participate in pre-k maintain higher reading and math scores throughout elementary school, are 44 percent less likely to repeat a grade, and are 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who do not attend pre-k.<sup>11</sup> Since military children often face curricular differences and bureaucratic barriers as they move between different states and schools, the benefits of pre-k are critically important to their continued academic success. High-quality pre-k gives students the confidence and adaptability they need to tackle new ideas and to thrive in new academic and social environments.



# Pre-K, Social and Emotional Development, and Military Children

## Social and Emotional Development and Military Children

Children from military families typically face more frequent changes and transitions than their civilian peers. They move three times more frequently than their civilian counterparts, and the social transitions inherent in each of these moves is rated as a top concern for parents, teachers, and children.<sup>12</sup> In order to successfully navigate these experiences, military children need to become adept at identifying and understanding emotions, expressing feelings appropriately, and developing effective coping mechanisms.

These strong emotional foundations are even more critical during times of war, when military children face parental deployment and separation. For many families, the deployment cycle means a separation every two years. Depending on their age, developmental level, and connectedness to a military community as well as their family's communication style, military children will differ in their understanding of a parent's military duty and the potential for both short- and

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## A Continuum of Support

To ensure maximum success in school and in life, young military children need access to a continuum of high-quality care and education from birth through their entry into kindergarten. They need the consistency and support of high-quality child care combined with the educational focus of high-quality pre-k. In Illinois, policymakers have acknowledged the importance of these supports and incorporated them into the state's *Preschool for All* program. Eleven percent of every *Preschool for All* dollar is set aside to provide services for at-risk infants and toddlers, and research has consistently demonstrated that children who receive support in their earliest years are better prepared to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by high-quality pre-k. States with high concentrations of military families should consider policies such as this to promote the academic, social, and emotional development of military children.

long-term separations due to reassignment and deployment. Children often struggle to cope with all phases of the deployment cycle: pre-deployment, deployment, and reunion. Military children also are more likely to face additional stressors, such as the death or injury of a parent. Strong social and emotional skills learned in pre-k can help children to better deal with these difficult events.

## Pre-K and Social and Emotional Development

A compelling body of research indicates that pre-k has positive effects on children's social and emotional development in both the short and long terms. In high-quality pre-k, children learn to identify and label emotions in themselves and others. They learn the foundational social and emotional vocabulary with which to express their feelings (e.g., "I feel scared when my mommy leaves"). These skills are beneficial both in the classroom and when coping with the stresses of military life.

Additionally, through daily interactions with pre-k classmates and teachers, children learn to understand the perspective of others. This skill is critically important for the young military child in the context of the entire family; when a child is able to empathize with his or her parents and siblings, the family is better able to cope as a unit.

As with academic benefits, the social and emotional benefits of pre-k are evident throughout a child's life. Children who participate in high-quality pre-k have appreciably better classroom behavior and social adjustment and a significantly reduced incidence of criminal activity and delinquency than their peers who do not participate in pre-k.<sup>13</sup> When military children have these strong social and emotional foundations, they are better prepared to respond to the numerous academic and social challenges that they face.

## Access to High-Quality Pre-K among Military Families

Highly mobile military families often face a unique and important obstacle to securing high-quality pre-k: the lack of a local support network. While civilian parents tend to rely on recommendations from local family and friends when seeking high-quality pre-k for their children, military parents who are new to communities often do not have these supports. Before a move, parents don't have the same opportunities to visit schools, interview providers, or place their children on waiting lists for high-quality programs. Even after a move, resources and referrals may be hard to find, and programs may be full, especially when a family relocates during the school year. When state-funded pre-k is available in a variety of high-quality settings and when that quality is assured by state program standards, parents are able to choose confidently from a range of high-quality pre-k options.

Further, state pre-k eligibility requirements can present a significant challenge for military families. Families that move from a state with pre-k for all to a state with a targeted or under-funded pre-k program are frustrated to learn that their child can no longer attend state-funded pre-k in their new town. This shift can be especially jarring when it occurs in the middle of the academic year or in conjunction with a parental deployment.

Even among states that have targeted pre-k programs, inconsistent eligibility criteria can present a challenge for military families. States use different formulas to calculate income eligibility. So, a child who is eligible based on family income in one state may not be in another. This challenge is particularly salient for military families who receive housing allowances. Some states count a military family's housing allowance as income, thereby disqualifying them from programs targeted only to low-income children.

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### Federal Supports

The Federal Impact Aid Program is one of the oldest federal education programs, administered by the Department of Education to provide federal funds to local education agencies that have a "substantial and continuing burden" because of federal activities – including the presence of children from military families attending public schools. Generally speaking, a local school system can qualify for federal impact aid if 20 percent of its students are military dependents. The definitions in the law, unlike many other federal program definitions, include pre-k as a qualified expense that can be reimbursed by Impact Aid even if a state's law does not provide pre-k to all pre-k-aged children. It is beneficial, then, for school districts to provide pre-k services to military children not only for the benefits to the children themselves, but because the cost of the program can be covered by federal reimbursement.

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The priorities of parents in the U.S. military are the same as those of all parents, but the needs of their families are unique. All parents want to know that their children have access to stimulating educational opportunities provided by caring adults. Research indicates that when parents are confident that their child is in a high-quality pre-k environment, their workplace productivity increases.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, military parents often struggle more than their civilian peers to enroll their children in high-quality pre-k programs. Deployments, frequent transitions, and separation from established support networks necessitate that states establish comprehensive systems, including high-quality pre-k, to support military families.

## Case Studies

Two states, Kansas and Texas, are leading the movement to support military families with young children. Both states have passed innovative legislation that meets the pre-k needs of military families. The programs have received an overwhelmingly positive response from policymakers, families, teachers, and military personnel and have become an integral part of the states' early education systems.

### Kansas: Piloting a Course

Kansas, a state that is home to only a small number of military personnel, took a creative approach to pre-k expansion. Instead of making modifications to the state's existing low-quality, targeted pre-k program, advocates worked with the governor and legislature to create a high-quality, pilot pre-k program, available in limited areas of the state and open to children of military personnel. In 2006, after extensive policymaker-education efforts on the part of the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, the *Kansas Pre-K Pilot Program* was approved by the legislature and, with a \$2 million initial appropriation, began serving 600 children in six counties statewide. The program is run through the Kansas Children's Cabinet and provides funding to school districts, nonprofit organizations, and community collaborations through a competitive grant process. To ensure that the most at-risk children are given priority for enrollment, no less than half the children enrolled in the pilot programs must meet at least one of the following criteria:

*1) children eligible for free lunch, 2) children eligible for reduced lunch, 3) single parent families, 4) teen parents, 5) parent lacking a high school diploma or GED, 6) referrals of at-risk 4 year-olds from early childhood programs, 7) limited English proficiency, 8) developmentally or academically delayed based on assessments or 9) SRS referral, and 10) children of active duty military. (emphasis added)<sup>15</sup>*

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### Building a Comprehensive Support System

As the pilot pre-k program for four year olds got underway at Fort Riley, a complementary initiative to support families with infants and toddlers also took hold at the base. Coordinated by Zero to Three, a national advocacy group for our nation's youngest children, and supported by the McCormick Tribune Foundation, the "Little Listeners Project" was launched to provide parents and caregivers with the knowledge and resources that they need to effectively support young military children.\* The project was tremendously successful at Fort Riley, and in spring 2006 it was expanded into a larger initiative, "Coming Together Around Military Families," that has taken hold at a dozen military installations throughout the country. Kansas's unique combination of support services for military children from birth through age five is a high-quality system that should serve as a model for other states looking to expand their services for military families.

\* For more information, see "Military Families," Zero To Three, [http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key\\_military](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key_military).

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Geary County has capitalized on this opportunity to serve children from military families. Located adjacent to Fort Riley, one of Kansas's largest military bases, the program served 72 children in 2006-07, its inaugural year.

The successes thus far, both in the legislative language and at the Fort Riley pilot program, have established a strong precedent for including military children in Kansas's state-funded pre-k program, but much work remains. As the *Kansas Pilot Pre-K Program* expands, policymakers, advocates, and military families will need to ensure that classrooms continue to meet the demand from military families.

## Case Studies

*continued from page 9*

### Texas: Expanding Eligibility

Texas is home to more than 112,000 Active Duty military personnel, the third-largest Active Duty military population in the United States. Over 50,000 additional Texans serve in the National Guard and Reserves, making Texas second only to California in the Reserve Component.<sup>16</sup> With several of the most heavily deployed installations located in Texas, including Forts Bliss and Hood, military families in the state have faced unprecedented numbers and lengths of deployments. The ongoing 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) efforts also are greatly impacting the state, generating significant growth in several areas, including Fort Bliss, which is expected to continue over the next several years.

Approximately 65,000 children living in Texas have parents serving in the armed forces on a full-time basis.<sup>17</sup> The *Texas Public School Pre-Kindergarten* program is the nation's largest pre-k program and in 2005-06 enrolled 182,293 four-year-old children who were homeless, eligible for free or reduced price lunch, or unable to speak and understand the English language. While the military has a significant presence in Texas, military children were not eligible for the state's pre-k program prior to 2006.

In early 2006, an alliance of concerned organizations, including the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), the United Ways of Texas, and the Texas Early Childhood Coalition collaborated on the "Supporting our Troops, Building our Future" effort. This campaign educated policymakers and grassroots supporters about the issues facing military children and the importance of providing them access to high-quality pre-k. Campaign leaders won significant support from the media, editorial boards, the military community, and early childhood advocates. In 2006, state policymakers passed legislation making military children eligible for the state's pre-k program.

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**Major General Bob Lennox, Commander at Ft. Bliss, TX  
September 20, 2006, Pre-K Now National Satellite Conf.**

To have a program where you get fundamentally started in education at a very young age and it's grounded and it's well done, I think, is absolutely critical for our military families.

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Pre-k access for military children was accomplished through an amendment to House Bill 1 (HB1) during the spring of 2006. This amendment designated a new category of state-funded pre-k eligibility:

*the child of an active duty member of the armed forces of the United States, including the state military forces or a reserve component of the armed forces, who is ordered to active duty by proper authority; or the child of a member of the armed forces of the United States, including the state military forces or a reserve component of the armed forces, who was injured or killed while serving on active duty.*<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, under this amendment, a child remains eligible for pre-k even if their parent's duty status changes after the child enrolls.<sup>19</sup> In 2006, Texas was home to 5,395 three- and four-year-old military children, half of whom previously did not meet pre-k-eligibility requirements.

Once this legislation was enacted, MCEC worked with the Texas Education Agency, the organization responsible for implementation, to create a system by which military parents can prove that their children meet the new requirements.<sup>20</sup> The addition of military families to the program was the first expansion of the state program since its inception, and as a result of this legislation, thousands of military children have enrolled in Texas's pre-k program.

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## The Smiths Go to Texas

When Master Sergeant Benjamin J. Smith, his wife, Cathy, and their three daughters were relocated to Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, they left behind familiar places and good friends for an entirely new environment. Change is never easy, but the Smiths soon embraced El Paso and their new life. Sergeant Smith started work on a Ph.D. in human resources, and Cathy opened a new business and entered a psychology master's degree program.

The Smiths were also eager to find opportunities for their girls to adjust to their new hometown, to make new friends, and to grow and learn. They enrolled their oldest daughter, Sierra, in the local high school and began looking for early education options for their two younger girls, Benisha, four, and Brianna, three. When they researched pre-k options for Benisha, they learned that she was not eligible for the state-funded pre-k program, which targeted only low-income children and English language learners.

The Smiths were deeply frustrated that their hard work and success could mean their children were denied access to important educational opportunities. As Cathy put it, "Right now [Benisha's] at that age where ... she just picks up everything, and...I want her to be in the proper place to learn the things she's supposed to be learning. We believe in education, so for them to tell me that my daughter cannot go to pre-k because we're doing the right thing, you know.... It was a slap in the face. All four year olds should have the same right to go to pre-k."

The Smiths were told that military families regularly encountered this problem when coming to Texas, and they learned that, "In other states like Oklahoma, Georgia and Florida, had we been stationed there, we would not have had this problem," because these states offer pre-k to all four year olds. So Cathy made it her "summer project" to get access to state-funded pre-k for Benisha. She began writing letters to the mayor, district representatives, school system officials, and civil rights groups, anyone she thought might be able to help.

Cathy's efforts won support from advocates and leaders across the state, and the movement to expand pre-k eligibility in Texas grew. In May 2006, Texas law was amended to make military children, like Benisha, eligible for the state's pre-k program. Benisha's pre-k year began in August 2006, and Brianna will be in pre-k in 2007-08.

Sergeant Smith and his family value education highly and know that pre-k is as essential as kindergarten or first grade. He also knows that programs like publicly funded pre-k support military families by easing the disruption of frequent moves and providing peace of mind for deployed parents. As he puts it, "I see a lot of joy in Benisha, and we all are proud of her because she wants to go to school.... So it's just a great thing.

"Family is very important to every soldier, and when we're serving in a combat situation overseas, if our families are taken care of back home, we're better focused out there."

## A Call for Further Action

All children benefit from high-quality pre-k, and the unique circumstances of young military children make access to pre-k even more important. Whether their parents serve in the Active Duty forces, National Guard, or Reserves, military children benefit from the robust academic, social, and emotional foundations provided by high-quality pre-k experiences. As states expand their pre-k programs, they should consider adopting strategies that provide access for the children of military personnel. To this end, we propose the following policy solutions:

### **Include Military Children in Targeted State Pre-K Programs**

As state pre-k continues to grow and evolve, programs that do not currently reach all children must address the needs of military children. Whether states amend their eligibility requirements, strategically position pilot programs near military installations, or simply target funding toward military children, the results are strongly positive. Including military children in state-funded pre-k addresses the needs of these children, supports our service men and women, and in most cases, requires minimal changes to existing policy.

### **Educate Military Families about Current Eligibility Requirements**

Military families may be unaware of the state or local pre-k eligibility requirements when they move to new locales. Even if military affiliation has not been included as a qualifying criterion, military children may be eligible for a pre-k program under another existing category. States and localities should assign an office or agency the responsibility of outreach to inform transitioning families about available programs and services.

### **Support Parents as Their Child's First Teacher and Strongest Advocate**

Parents are children's first teachers, and support programs such as Zero to Three's "Little Listeners Project" (see page 9) provide them with critical resources to promote their children's early learning. Parents also must be informed advocates for their children within the educational system. Communities can ensure that children receive the full benefits afforded by early education, including high-quality pre-k, by helping parents promote school readiness at home.

### **Guarantee Pre-K Reciprocity from State to State**

Disparities in eligibility requirements between state pre-k programs can exacerbate the disruption military families experience as they transition from one state to another. Children who begin pre-k in the fall should be offered the opportunity to continue their pre-k education even if their family moves to a new state or locality during the school year. States can design policies that accept the pre-k guidelines from a transitioning student's previous location. This not only prevents disruption in a child's academic experience but also provides children an important source of stability during a time of change.

### **Encourage School Districts to Utilize Federal Impact Aid Funding**

School districts that enroll at least 20 percent military children and have a military installation within their boundaries can qualify for Federal Impact Aid dollars to support pre-k. Local superintendents need to be educated about and encouraged to take advantage of this pre-k funding opportunity. Outreach from military installations, local policymakers, parent advocates, and others is the best strategy to increase local awareness of federal funding sources.

## Conclusion

The challenges of military life combined with the strong developmental gains that all children realize from a high-quality pre-k experience mean that the children of our nation's service men and women benefit tremendously from access to high-quality, state-funded pre-k programs. Pre-k builds on the Department of Defense's Child Development Program, ensuring a smooth continuum of services to the youngest military children. As states work to structure early education efforts that generate the largest, longest-lasting impacts, the needs of military children can and should be addressed. States with targeted pre-k programs already in place may choose to amend legislation to include military children. Other states may choose to open a pre-k site near a military installation. Regardless of the specific strategy employed, the benefits are the same: military children who have access to high-quality pre-k gain strong academic, social, and emotional skills that lay the foundation for success in school and life.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Mary Keller, "Secondary Education Transition Study," (Harker Heights, TX: Military Child Education Coalition, 2001).
- <sup>2</sup> Arthur Emlen and Paul Koren, "Hard to Find and Difficult to Manage: The Effects of Child Care on the Workplace," (Portland, OR: Portland State University, 1984) ; Karen Shellenback, "Child Care and Parent Productivity: Making the Business Case," (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2004).
- <sup>3</sup> Joy S. Moini, Gail L. Zellman, and Susan M. Gates, "Providing Child Care to Military Families: The Role of the Demand Formula in Defining Need and Informing Policy," (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2006).
- <sup>4</sup> Pre-K Now, "Votes Count: Legislative Action on Pre-K - Fiscal Year 2007," (Washington, DC: Pre-K Now, 2006).
- <sup>5</sup> Additionally, in Tennessee, where pre-k eligibility is determined by a combination of state and local criterion, many districts have chosen to include children of military families in their programs; however, since this is not a statewide policy, it will not be a focus of this report.
- <sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "2004 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community," (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family Policy, 2004).
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Personnel, *Statement of the Military Child Educational Coalition*, March 16, 2005.
- <sup>9</sup> W. Steven Barnett, Cynthia Lamy, and Kwanghee Jung, "The Effects of State Prekindergarten Programs on Young Children's School Readiness in Five States," (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2005).
- <sup>10</sup> W. Steven Barnett, "Long-Term Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Cognitive and School Outcomes," *The Future of Children* 5, no. 3 (1995).
- <sup>11</sup> Walter S. Gilliam and Edward F. Zigler, "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Prekindergarten: 1977 to 2003," (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2004); Arthur Reynolds, *Success in Early Intervention: The Chicago Child-Parent Centers* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).
- <sup>12</sup> Keller, "Secondary Education Transition Study."
- <sup>13</sup> W. Steven Barnett, "Early Childhood Education," in *School Reform Proposals: The Research Evidence*, ed. Alex Molnar (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2002).
- <sup>14</sup> Emlen and Koren, "Hard to Find and Difficult to Manage: The Effects of Child Care on the Workplace;" Shellenback, "Child Care and Parent Productivity: Making the Business Case."
- <sup>15</sup> Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund. Grant Application and Instructions for Pilot Pre Kindergarten Programs (PreK). Request for Proposals, June 19, 2006.
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "2004 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community."
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> An Act Relating to Public School Finance and Property Tax Rate Compression, *Texas Education Code*, sec. 29.153 (May 31, 2006).
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Details on the required documentation can be found at "Free Prekindergarten for Dependents of Active Duty Members of the Military," Texas Education Agency, <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/curriculum/early/military.html>.

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This report was researched and written by Stephanie Surles and Amanda Akers for the Military Child Education Coalition and Jennifer Rosenbaum and Trista S. Kendall for Pre-K Now.

### Acknowledgements

The Military Child Education Coalition and Pre-K Now thank the following individuals for their contributions to this report: Jaclyn Collins, Jennifer V. Doctors, Libby Doggett, DeDe Dunevant, Danielle Gonzales, Mary Keller, Bela Moté, Kathy Patterson, Gerald Skidmore, Sara Slaughter, Stephanie Rubin, Albert Wat, and Sara Watson.

This report was supported by funding from the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

Pre-K Now is a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts and other funders to advance high-quality pre-k for all children. The findings and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Trusts.

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