

Meeting the Needs and Expectations of Active Duty Military Families Relative to Their Child's  
School

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation contributes to the discussion surrounding the military family by answering the question, “What are the experiences, needs, and expectations of active duty military families relative to their child’s school?”. Spouses of active duty military officers give their perspectives of what military life is like including how it compares and contrasts to civilian families’ lives. This study extends the literature on the topic of supporting the military family by pushing past the challenges and necessary supports needed. Participants are asked to identify how the army, the community, and most importantly, schools can be involved in providing those supports.

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## **Chapter 1- Statement of the Problem**

### **Overview**

More than 2.2 million Americans serve in the armed forces through active, National Guard, and Reserve components. Between September 11, 2001 and January 2011, more than 2 million troops were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Fifty five percent of the force was married and 40 percent had two children. (U.S. Department of Defense 2011) Life in the military is unique to the families in that situation. The experiences that soldiers bring back with them from deployments combined with the challenges that families face while the soldier is deployed and when reintegrating the soldier back into the family make it unlike any endeavor faced by individuals not connected to the military.

Not only is the country indebted to these soldiers and their families, it is a matter of national security in the sense that if soldiers can be more effective in their duties if they don't have to worry about the welfare of their families. For that reason, it is crucial for schools to seek to understand the experiences, needs, and expectations of the military family. Research has also shown that a family's ability to navigate the challenges of deployment significantly impact retention in the army as does the spouse's expectations about family resources provided by the army and the soldier's relationship with his or her spouse and family (Barker 2009). It has been reported that, "Although we enlist the individual in the Armed Forces, the decision to re-enlist is made around the family's kitchen table."

Because support of military families is so crucial to the fabric of our country, we must find an answer to the question, "What are the Experiences, Needs, and Expectations of Active

Duty Military Families Relative to Their Child’s School?” This forms the guiding research question of this study, a question that is relevant to the researcher not only because of the implications for national security and doing the right thing for those that have laid their life on the line for us, but also because of a personal experience with the military community. Prior to 2012, I had an affection for military families, but from a distance because of a lack of personal connection to the military. In 2012, however, I was hired to be the principal at Patton Junior High, an assignment that would place me in direct, daily contact with military families. This experience let me to a deeper appreciation for the commitment soldiers and their families make to protect their country. It also led me to an understanding of the challenges that military-connected children face growing up in their circumstances. It became my own personal initiative to dig deeper into these challenges as well as how schools can provide supports to mitigate some of those challenges for families.

A crucial step to understanding the military family is understanding the communities in which they live. According to the U.S. Department of Defense (2011), 37% of military families live on a military installation, but many more are connected to the community through work, recreation, and other activities that meet their daily needs such as grocery shopping, use of military child care, and use of military services. Military communities support one another in times of crisis as well as in times of success. Military bases are an example of a community in which its residents feel connected through many commonalities. In this example, individuals are tied to one another through a common living space or at least frequent use of the military installation. Those active duty military personnel and their families that live on post, reside within the confines of a wall regulated by controlled access gates. These walls provide security to the post from outside invaders, but they also give the perception that the living space within

the walls is sectioned off from the larger community that exists just beyond the walled perimeter. Military personnel are also united by a common purpose; defending the nation. As is the case with other communities, military communities also pull together in times of crisis. This includes during times of deployment. When a family member, or in many cases, the entire platoon, deploys for training or to go to war, many families pull together to assist one another. This support can take on a variety of forms including anything from watching each other's children to emotional support of one another. In some cases, the family members that remain on post have to emotionally prepare for the possibility that the deployed family member may not return.

In order for schools to appropriately identify and meet the varied and sensitive needs of the military-connected family, they must form relationships or partnerships with one another. Parent-school partnerships create the support, resources, skills, networks, and programs that allow schools to appropriately serve students' needs. (Bryan & Henry, 2012) These partnerships lead to a decrease in the "us vs. them" attitudes sometimes seen in schools. Parents feel like the school is invested in assisting their child to achieving their maximum potential. Parents are more interested in supporting the school by holding the child accountable at home for their behavior and academics exhibited at school. An increased connection to parents and the community also improves the chances of a bi-directional flow of information in which the parents share information about the child's home life (medications, diagnoses, behavior modification strategies practiced, events that have taken place that might impact the child at school, etc.). Because education doesn't take place in a bubble, it is crucial for the school to know about the world students set foot in when they leave the school grounds that often comes with them when they come to school. Teachers must be understanding to this world and make

accommodations/adjustments in order to maximize their instructional time and prepare the students for the world they enter when they leave the school.

Building partnerships with parents not only helps the school and the parents accomplish the common goals as described above, it also helps students to be more academically motivated, act ethically and altruistically, to develop social and emotional competencies, and to avoid a number of problem behaviors, including drug use and violence. (Schaps, 2003) The student is the character of focus in building these partnerships. He or she is not automatically changed for the better, when developing a partnership with their parents. Instead, the assumption is that by engaging and involving the parents, the student will feel cared for and thereby be motivated to produce desirable outcomes like increased academic performance or staying in school. (Joyce L. Epstein, 1995)

While there are many advantages that come from developing a strong partnership between the school and parents as listed above, the current reality for many schools is that developing a strong partnership has proven problematic. (Bryan and Henry 2004) In schools I've worked with, and through conversations with other educators I have found this to be true. I've known of schools that invite parents into the school to hear a guest speaker talk on topics that parents often report as important such as bullying and harassment, but only a handful of parents showed up.

Even the federal government has tried to capitalize on the positive effects that come from increasing parent involvement in schools. The Reagan administration introduced Goals 2000 legislation in 1986 that had a component of parent involvement. The Clinton administration reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1996 including a provision requiring the poorest schools in the country to use a portion of the federal funds they received to

create partnerships between schools and families. The Bush administration introduced No Child Left Behind legislation that had as one of its central goals, increasing parent involvement. In fact, schools were required to work with families and the community to develop a policy for school-family-community involvement. (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Domina, 2005)

Schools are looking for ways to create connections with parents that don't necessarily require the parents to come to the school. Many schools have turned to technology as the way to accomplish this. It allows schools connect with parents in their homes through email and automated phone systems that call large groups of parents at once. This allows even parents who may have many stressful things to manage in their home to be informed of school events like Parents as Teacher meetings, parent-teacher conferences and other parent outreach efforts. Technology is also being used to support parents' ability to support their children academically. Teacher's grade books can be posted online allowing parents ready access to their student's grades including assessment scores and missing assignments. Another technology tool that can support the development of parent partnerships with schools is online learning management tools like Blackboard and Moodle. These online tools allows teachers to create an online virtual classroom in which students can take quizzes and tests, access resources, and continue their learning anytime and from anywhere. Parents also have the ability to access this virtual classroom environment so that they can see what their child is working on, or quickly respond when their child is falling behind.

Developing partnerships with parents is often a long-term project that takes sustained, focused effort. That effort rarely renders immediate, observable results. While most educators would likely agree that it is a valid and worthwhile task, there are other more pressing things that pull the attention of the school staff away from this much needed cause. State assessment scores

are often looked at as the gauge by which school quality is measured. Since there are no metrics that measure a school's effectiveness at caring for and supporting families, schools sometimes focus their efforts on these measurable assessments. Another thing that often takes priority over engaging with families is student discipline. Managing student misconduct can take up valuable time for both teachers and administrators. Tending to requests of the staff, district administrative meetings, conducting interviews for new staff, evaluating teachers, organizing faculty meetings, tending to facility maintenance, organizing transportation needs, and supervising events are all important to the daily operation of a school building, but tend to preclude the administration from focusing on creating an organized approach to meeting the needs of families. Because these other management duties are often pressing issues that require immediate attention, they receive prioritized attention while developing partnerships with parents moves to the back burner. Something that often escapes the attention of many administrators is that by understanding the experiences of military families and participating in meeting their needs and expectations is a proactive approach to accomplishing the larger goals of many schools. They must remember that when a child's physical, social, or emotional needs are being met they're able to learn and behave to their maximum ability.

This research sheds light on the experiences, needs, and expectations of military families, which will prove important to all educators and educational leaders regardless of whether they are in a military-connected school or not because even schools not attached to a military installation become associated with military-connected students through military retirements, kids living with relatives during deployments, and duty assignments away from a military installation. This research will serve educators in understanding what students and parents may

have been through prior to arriving at their school, and give strategies for identifying ways they the school can support their needs and meet expectations.

In the last two decades, the body of research on military families has gradually increased, but there are still gaps in our understanding. (De Pedro 2011) The study that follows hopes to fill some of those gaps in that it focuses on exploring the perceptions of non-military spouses. Much of the current research uses active duty military and their dependent children for participants. While the topic of supporting the military family has been conducted by a number of studies, this study will also shed light on areas of support that can be developed between the school and parents that may not already be accomplished through the military and community-based support.

In the following pages, a review of relevant literature will be explored along with a proposed method for studying the strategies being used successfully to build community in military schools today.

## **Chapter 2- Review of Literature**

With US involvement in the Middle East, specifically, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), deployments of American troops has drastically increased. This increase in deployments has created a strain on the American military family, which has prompted an increase in research on the topic over the last decade and a half (Barker 2009).

### **Challenges Faced by Military-Connected Families**

Lars Gustafson (2000) points out that children are invariably the great losers in war. Military-connected children and families go through many challenges associated with military life that civilians simply don't understand. These challenges include deployments of one, and in rare cases, both parents. The deployment of a parent has been positively associated with higher levels of adolescent depression, worse academic performance, increased irritability and impulsiveness, and greater demands for attention. Research also shows that concurrent family stressors and/or maternal psychopathology likely determines the child's behavior response and emotional health during noncombat or routine deployment (Mmari et al 2009). Hoshmand and Hoshmand (2007) also report that military families are at high risk for domestic violence and child abuse, with 15,898 reported case of child abuse in the military in 2002. Further, because many families are young, enlisted and low-ranking officers face financial stress and are exposed to occupational violence at an increasing rate.

Kristin Mmari et al (2009) found that part of the reason so many youth struggle to adjust during a parent's deployment is their difficulty in expressing emotions, resulting in externalized problem behaviors as a way of coping with repressed emotions. This emotional stress and

anxiety plays a toll on both parents, and in some cases can cause them to become physically ill as a result, which sometimes has the impact of hurting their relationship with their children.

Deployment also causes a change to family roles and responsibilities. The remaining parent has to take on the roles and responsibilities of the mother and the father. Another issue with parental deployment arises in the form of changes in family routine and process. When the deployed parent returns after an extended time away, there is frequently confusion in the family in getting to know that parent again as well as figuring out which roles each member of the family will continue to play. In some ways, the family has managed without the deployed parent for a period of time, and the returning parent comes back and throws off balance to the systems that have been in harmony. Finally, the deployed parent missing important events in the lives of the family can be a tremendous source of sadness because of milestones missed. Even missing negative events such as child misbehaviors can cause the returning parent to have a lack of understanding when they return. Feelings of loss are common for both the parent and the child when the deployed parent misses these important events in the child's life like walking or crawling, participating in an exciting event like school plays or sporting events, and specific milestones like graduation and birthdays (Lester and Bursch 2011). Barker and Berry (2009) found some other issues with the reintegration process including the child having trouble sleeping in their own bed, not seeking comfort from the returning parent, not wanting the returning parent to leave the house, the returning parent losing authority as a disciplinarian, and preferring the non-deployed spouse over the returning parent.

De Pedro et al (2011) referenced the Deployment Cycle, which has three phases: pre-deployment; deployment, and post-deployment. Each phase has its own stressors and avenues for coping. In the pre-deployment phase, the family is preparing for the parent to depart. In the

deployment phase, the family adjusts psychologically to the absence of one parent. Family roles and responsibilities adjust. In the post-deployment phase, the family has to deal with the excitement of having the parent back while re-adjusting roles and responsibilities with the parent back in the home. Problems that arise during the deployment cycle include the redistribution of household roles and responsibilities, the left-behind parent's added stress and anxiety, and the child's fears and anxieties about financial limitations, possible geographic relocation, and parental injury and death. Trauma experienced by the military member during deployment can also create issues in the post-deployment stage including difficulty reconnecting with family members, being overly concerned about the family's safety, and/or being excessively emotionally reactive. Other concerns involve feelings of being overwhelmed, sad, and clingy, as well as complaints about their physical body, or developing aggressive behaviors. Seventy-five percent of families report that reintegrating the returning family member is the most difficult part of the deployment process, because the soldier is coming home after living in a warzone for an extended period of time (Flake et al., 2009; Lester et al., 2010). These difficulties can result in higher risks of marital distress and problematic parent-child relationships. (Lester and Bursch 2011)

Additional challenges faced by military families include geographic mobility (the average military family moves every 1 to 3 years due to reassignment), injuries and psychiatric illness of parents returned from deployment, death of a deployed parent, and the threat of war (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Finkel, Kelley, & Ashby, 2003; Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009; Lester et al., 2010; Ryan-Wenger, 2001). The children of active duty military parents don't just stress when their parents are deployed. They also have the stressors of parents being sent on trips domestically and internationally for temporary duty assignments, which the army calls

Temporary Duty Yonder (TDY). They also have the stress of the ever-present threat of war. Nancy Ryan-Wenger (2001) says, “The threat of war is a pervasive threat to the security and family-structure of children in military families.” Having a parent in the military means there is always the possibility of losing them as war breaks out, which is a constant threat as the United States focuses on the tensions across the globe. Even if war never materializes, the effects of the stress related to the possibility of war can have an impact on children’s sense of security and developing personality. Four critical pressures on military children have been identified: high mobility, episodic father absences, exposure to foreign cultures, and early military retirement resulting in drastic lifestyle changes (Ryan-Wenger, 2001).

### **Supports for Military Families**

Because of the stress related to deployments, temporary duty assignments, and orders for change of station, active duty army personnel and their families have access to community supports that other families may not have including Army Community Service (ACS), Family Readiness Groups (FRG’s), Army Emergency Relief (AER), Army Family Team Building (AFTB), Army Chaplains, and other families (soldiers and spouses) that are part of the soldier’s unit (Burrell, Durand, & Fortado, 2003). These resources are designed to help spouses and family members manage the stress, constant change, and isolation that come with life in the army. Burrell et. al’s (2003) research points out that families taking advantage of these resources are more likely to be interested in their active duty soldiers to remain in the army. This research points to the idea that army life is difficult not only for the active duty army personnel, but also for the family members that have to integrate into the army community and navigate the overall system.

While there are many obstacles to military families being successful, there are also a number of factors that allow military-connected families to thrive. Resiliency is a term frequently used in the military and military-related research. This term refers to the ability of military families to have positive outcomes despite the myriad of obstacles they face (Hoshmand and Hoshmand 2009, Department of Defense 2007, Noltemeyer 2015, Sapienza and Masten 2011, Lester and Bursch 2011). A more formalized definition of resilience was formed by Sapienza and Masten (2011), which defines resilience as “the capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development.”

There are many factors that impact a family’s ability to be resilient. One of these factors is the family’s access to support, which includes emotional support from family community and military installations. Structural support such as financial stability, stable parental employment and housing conditions, and family recognition of the “hero” status of the deployed parent also mitigate the psychological effects of wartime stressors (De Pedro 2011). Unit support is another source for providing positive outcomes for military families (Hoshmand and Hoshmand 2007).

Focusing on children and youth, resilience is most frequently determined by the presence of positive caring adults, effective care giving and parenting, intelligence and problem solving skills, self-regulation skills, perceived efficacy and control, achievement motivation, positive friends or romantic partners, faith/hope/spirituality, beliefs that life has meaning, and/or effective teachers and schools. (Sapienza and Masten 2011)

The chances of resiliency are also increased through the presence of protective factors such as caring and supportive adult relationships, opportunities for meaningful student participation in their schools and communities, and high parent and teacher expectations regarding student performance and future success. School-family-community partnerships are

promoted as an excellent protective factor for promoting resiliency in children (Bryan, 2005; Joyce L. Epstein, 1995). The research conducted by Burrell et. al also identifies some of the community organizations that should be involved as part of Epstein's (1995) overlapping spheres of influence, including Army Community Service (ACS), Family Readiness Groups (FRGs), Army Emergency Relief (AER), Army Family Team Building (AFTB), Army Chaplains, and other families (soldiers and spouses) that are part of the soldier's unit. These organizations and others should be involved in supporting the family both inside and outside of the school. This increased partnership between the school and other organizations can create greater support for the families while also assisting the school in helping students develop resiliency.

In January of 2011, under the direction of President Obama, The U.S. Department of Defense released a report (U.S. Department of Defense 2011) renewing the mission and commitment of the U.S. Government to support military families. This government-wide commitment would:

1. Enhance the well-being and psychological health of the military family,
  - a. By increasing behavioral health care services through prevention-based alternatives and integrating community-based services;
  - b. By building awareness among military families and communities that psychological fitness is as important as physical fitness;
  - c. By protecting military members and families from unfair financial practices and helping families enhance their financial readiness;
  - d. By eliminating homelessness and promoting home security among Veterans and military families;
  - e. By ensuring availability to critical substance abuse prevention, treatment , and recovery services for Veterans and military families; and
  - f. By making our court systems more responsive to the unique needs of Veterans and families.
2. Ensure excellence in military children education and their development;
  - a. By improving the quality of the educational experience;

- b. By reducing negative impacts of frequent relocations and absences;
  - c. By encouraging the healthy development of military children.
3. Develop career and educational opportunities for military spouses,
- a. By increasing opportunities for Federal careers;
  - b. By increasing opportunities for private-sector careers;
  - c. By increasing access to educational advancement; by reducing barriers to employment and services due to different State policies and standards; and
  - d. By protecting the rights of service members and families.
4. Increase child care availability and quality for the Armed Forces,
- a. By enhancing child care resources within the Department of Defense and the Coast Guard.

This report pointed out the need for improvement in many areas including an almost 20% increase in behavior and stress disorders when a parent is deployed.

In order for schools to be a participant in overcoming the challenges that military-connected families face, they must develop trusting partnerships with the parents. One of the most respected and cited researchers in the field of parent involvement with schools is Joyce L. Epstein. She has been publishing works in this area since the 1980s and her work continues to be relevant today, as it is often cited in current research and republished in recent journals. Epstein's work focuses not on just involving parents in schools, but extends the idea to involve the schools in the home (Joyce Levy Epstein, 2010). Epstein's work encourages what she calls partnerships between these three players in children's lives. She develops a model that she refers to as overlapping spheres of influence in which she encourages parents and schools to view the lives of children as having a foot in all three of these realms, and by increasing the overlap of the spheres, students are more supported and cared for. Parents in this model say things like, "I really need to know what is happening in school in order to help my child." Teachers are saying,

“I can not do my job without the help of my students’ families and the support of this community.” In the more traditional model of schooling, which Epstein refers to as separate spheres of influence, families could be overheard saying, “I raised this child, now it’s your job to educate her.” In this model teachers may have conversations with tones of, “If the family would just do its job, we could do our job.”

### **Parent Involvement in Schools**

Parent involvement in schools is an important and often overlooked part of the school improvement process. David Peterson (1989) puts it eloquently when he says, “Children spend much more time at home than at school. Their parents know them intimately, interact with them one-on-one, and do not expect to be paid to help their children succeed.” Although the last part of his statement has not held true over recent years, as some schools have begun to pay parents for attending conferences (Fairchild, 2012) and students for good grades (Toppo, 2008), it still remains true that children whose parents are involved in their lives gain advantages over other children. These advantages include better grades, test scores, long-term academic achievement, attitudes, and behavior than students whose parents are not actively engaged in their schooling (Domina, 2005; Henderson, 1988). These positive benefits also extend beyond the short-term. Minority and low-income pre-school graduates with involved parents have been found to be outperforming their peers even into high school (Henderson, 1988).

Improved communication, understanding, and collaboration of parents could have dramatic effects on high school dropout rates. Sixty-one percent of teachers and 45% of principals see lack of support from parents as a factor in most cases of students dropping out (Bridgeland, Dilulio Jr, & Balfanz, 2009). Bridgeland et al. (2009) also found that the majority of teachers and principals felt increasing outreach to parents would decrease student dropout

rates, and that the relationship between the parents and the school is a key factor in increasing school performance.

### **Effective Parent Outreach Approaches**

A varied approach to involving parents in the school community may be the best approach. Schools should focus on working with parents to provide the appropriate supports for struggling students. Teachers and administrators should also develop parent engagement strategies that focus on teacher feedback regarding a student's progress and provide parents with better information and more tools such as information on graduation and college admission requirements, along with homework hotline supports (Bridgeland et al., 2009).

Research suggests that not only should multiple strategies be used to develop parent involvement within the school, but schools should also be using a variety of staff members. Bryan and Henry (2012) suggest that the school counselor be heavily used to not only develop an outreach plan, but also to create and sustain the plan through a seven step road map that involves a) preparing to partner, b) assessing needs and strengths, c) coming together, d) creating shared vision and plan, e) taking action, f) evaluating and celebrating progress, g) maintaining momentum. Others to involve in the planning for parent involvement may include the school social worker, who could implement school-based social services in which the services may not all be provided at the school, but allow the school to serve as the broker for connecting families to the appropriate agency. The school social worker can serve to link parents and schools in other ways too, including educating parents in their rights and responsibilities within the school environment (Brown & Chavkin, 1991).

## **Coterminous Schools**

Coterminous schools are different from other public schools in that they serve the children of military service members, who are dealing with the challenges described above. They are different from other public schools in other ways too. For example, Fort Leavenworth hosts over 100 officers from other countries around the world. Many of these International Officers (IO's) speak at least some English, but their children are often significantly less proficient. Increasing involvement with parents that have limited English proficiency can be another challenge. In meeting this challenge, parents and teachers can become wrapped up in obstacles such as misunderstandings and misperceptions, lower expectations, distrust, and stereotypes (S. S. Peterson & Ladky, 2007).

Language itself can become a barrier to parent involvement. Parents who speak English as a second or even a third or fourth language are often less likely to have the confidence to be involved in their children's school because of this language barrier. Peterson and Ladky (2007) state that while parental understanding of educational jargon such as instructional strategies and curriculum can be an obstacle for English speaking parents, this is even more true of non-English speaking parents.

Another barrier that often prevents International officers and their spouses from being involved in their children's schooling is attitudes toward education in their home country. An assumption of complete authority may exist within the parent's mindset. Some international parents think that by keeping their distance from the school they are being helpful.

## **Defining Key Terms**

Several key terms will be used throughout the research. It is important to define these terms in relation to how past research has defined them and how they will be used in this research study.

Partnership is a word that is common in general use and in more specific environments like the business world. For the purposes of this research study, I will be borrowing the definition used by Nancy Chavkin (1998) as she cites Franklin and Streeter's (1995) work on partnerships. Chavkin states that a partnership is an association where there is a joint interest, while Franklin and Streeter define a partnership as the middle state in a continuum of five states of increasing involvement (informal relations, coordination, partnerships, collaboration, and integration) where participants move from little or no change in philosophy or structure of the organization to systemic changes in how the participants operate (See Table 1).

In a partnership, leadership must come from frontline staff of the school who recognize the need for involvement by the outside agencies, and who will work to develop their involvement in the school. Continued planning must be part of a partnership, and consensus building should be an ongoing part of the relationship to define the role of the partner in the school. A partnership is not as structurally defined as higher states such as collaboration and integration, which require advanced levels of community involvement to include the involvement of health and social services in the school to support the outside community.

The partnership that is developed with parents impacts the achievement that schools are trying so hard to cultivate. Schools with higher levels of parent outreach have observed greater levels of student achievement as measured by performance on state assessments (Sheldon, 2003).

Table 1: Five Approaches to Linking Schools and Human Services for Successful Implementation

Implementation Factors	Informal Relations	Coordination	Partnerships	Collaboration	Integration
Commitment	Little commitment required	Some commitment to formal linkages required	Some formal commitment required for successful implementation	Major commitment from board required	A significant formal commitment from both state and local levels required
Planning	Minimum, usually done by pupil services teams	Some community planning and outreach done by school social worker or pupil services team	Formal contractual agreements based on district-wide planning	Comprehensive planning with human services	Comprehensive planning from state level with local input; process may be highly politicized
Training	In-training done by pupil services team	Staff, teachers, and pupil services team trained on student needs, service availability, and referral process	Training of all staff on roles and functions of partners	Ongoing and intensive interprofessional education	Ongoing and intensive interprofessional education and interdisciplinary teams work across levels of the system
Leadership Patterns	Frontline staff and pupil services team	Frontline staff, school social worker, and student services team. Minimum leadership from administration to coordinate with community services	Frontline staff along with administrative leadership from schools and executive leadership from community	Administrative leadership required along with participation from staff and human services personnel	State-level administrative and political leadership and local administrative leadership from schools and human services
Resources	Minimum time spent on services	School staff, time, space, and a viable community services system	Contracted staff, greater time and space, and a viable community services system	New personnel, time and space for colocation of staff, and a viable community services system	Redefinition and redistribution of resources and shared initiatives required
Funding	Minimal funding required	Some additional school funds for pupil services	Additional funding from school and community for new services	Additional funding from school and community to deliver better services to more students	Additional funding required for all systems with greater efficiency derived from restructuring agencies
Scope of Change	None	Minimal change to structure; linkages remain informal	Some reorganization needed to accommodate auxiliary services	Major restructuring and reinterpretation of goals and resources	Total reform of both the structure and process to produce second-order change
Impact	Minimum fragmentation causes difficulty in service delivery	Some benefits from link with service; provides additional services and solves problems for some students	Good benefits in terms of additional programs and resources and linking to larger community systems	Excellent benefits; New programs and resources developed	Maximum benefit through new and better service systems

Note: Taken from Franklin & Streeter (1995)

Involving parents in math-focused strategies has even been shown to support increases in school-wide math scores. Children whose parents participated in parent-child discussions at home about school or whose parents were involved in the school through volunteering or Parent-Teacher organizations performed better on math assessments (Sheldon, Epstein, & Galindo, 2010).

Joyce Epstein's (2011) work in overlapping spheres of influence is helpful in creating a framework for developing partnerships with parents. Epstein described six different partnership activities that schools should focus on in engaging parents. These activities are:

- 1) Parenting: helping all families establish supportive home environments for children
- 2) Communicating: establishing two-way exchanges about school programs and children's progress
- 3) Volunteering: recruiting and organizing parental help at school, home, or other locations
- 4) Learning at home: providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related materials
- 5) Decision making: having parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives and leaders on school committees
- 6) Collaborating with the community: identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs (J. L. Epstein, 2011; Sheldon, 2003; Sheldon et al., 2010)

When schools focus on these six types of involvement, they begin to reap the benefits of the partnerships, through increasing the overlap described in Epstein's three overlapping spheres of influence described above. As Sheldon (2010) puts it, "Greater overlap among the three contexts means that schools are more family-like, families are more school-like, and communities support schools, students, and families."

There are 2.2 million servicemen and women associated with the military. These men and women are the parents of two million children who attend schools domestically and in

American schools internationally. Fifty-eight percent of active duty military personnel have family responsibilities and forty percent have an average of two children (Flake et al., 2009). While it is apparent that there are a significant number of children with parents connected to the military, there isn't a lot of research that has been conducted in this area. Additional research on how to meet the needs of these at risk children is necessary.

The topic of parent involvement is of high importance to both schools and parents. Many school districts benefit from excellent parent involvement at the elementary school level, but as students grow older and enter middle and high school, parents pull back in an effort to allow their students more independence. This approach is a natural response to children who want to start experimenting with leaving the nest on their own, but parents who completely pull away from involvement with their school put the school and students at a disadvantage (Joyce L. Epstein, 1995; Fishel & Ramirez, 2005).

The research related to parent involvement in public schools is quite extensive, but problematic. The research on partnerships between schools and parents goes as far back as the 1960s, but much of the research is flawed. In Nancy Chavkin's (2001) review of the existing literature, she found that 72.8% of the articles were authored by researchers simply giving opinions or summarizing existing partnerships that were known to have some success, 24.8% were descriptions of individual partnership programs, and only 2.4% of the articles were research-based. This review indicates that there is room for the body of research in this area to be developed. Chavkin's (2001) recommendations for further research in this area include detailed case studies to form a baseline of repeated measures, defining terms precisely, being clear about the outcomes being sought, understanding the relationship between the theory of school-family-community partnerships and the partnership activities, involving participants in

partnership research, isolating the specific parts of partnerships in studies, using objective measures rather than self-report measures whenever possible, considering levels of intervention, and recognizing unanticipated benefits. Some of Chavkin's (2001) recommendations have been accounted for as I've developed the methodology for this study. Some of the recommendations could not be used due to the scope of the study. For example, Chavkin (2001) recommends involving participants in the partnership research by allowing them to develop the questions and give input on the research design. Because the research questions and study design must be approved in advance of working with participants, it wasn't possible to pursue this recommendation.

Researchers have studied the link between schools and parents to determine what effects these links have on students. Strategies for increasing parent involvement have also been analyzed. (Blum, Libbey, Bishop, & Bishop, 2004; Joyce L. Epstein, 1995). This research builds on previous work done in the area of parent involvement in the sense that it focuses specifically on a public school that serves the children of active duty military personnel.

### **Chapter 3- Methods**

In order to answer the research question of, “What are the Experiences, Needs, and Expectations of Active Duty Military Families Relative to Their Child’s School?”, the study was set up as a qualitative, case study. The focus of this study is on Patton Junior High School, which educates students in grades seven through nine. Patton Junior High is a public school located on the grounds of Fort Leavenworth, an army post located in northeast Kansas. School districts that fit this description are said to be coterminous districts, because of the fact that they fall into a strange situation of being a public school, but unlike other public school districts the students eligible to receive an education there are limited to children whose parents are members of the military. Patton is part of the Fort Leavenworth School District, which is comprised of three elementary schools and one junior high school. Because the district has no high school, students attend another area high school outside the district for their education in grades 10-12, typically Lansing or Leavenworth High.

Fort Leavenworth is known as the "best hometown in the army" because of its open green spaces, services offered, and community atmosphere experienced by those assigned to the post. There are 6,266 active duty army personnel assigned to this post, which covers 8.8 square miles ("USAG Fort Leavenworth,"). These active duty personnel serve in a variety of roles including the guarding of the United States Discipline Barracks, which is a maximum security prison for the U.S. Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps. The majority of army personnel assigned to Fort Leavenworth are there to attend classes at the Command General Staff College (CGSC). Officers attend this army college as a route to advancement to higher ranks. CGSC has played a part in devising combat and training developments, concepts and doctrine, and force structures for the army since its inception. It was founded in 1827 by Colonel Henry Leavenworth as a

frontier army fort to support settlement and defense of the west because of its strategic position on the bluffs overlooking the Missouri River Valley. In its 186 year history, the fort has evolved from the military outpost into a state of the art facility (Partin, 1983). During this time, Fort Leavenworth has served as the home and workplace of many of the best known and greatest military minds including Dwight D. Eisenhower, George S. Patton, George MacArthur, Omar N. Bradley, Colin Powell, Norman Swartzkoff, and David Patreaus (LaMaster, 2010). In fact the first four generals previously mentioned are the namesakes for the four schools on post. From 1939 through present day, the United States has been involved in four major wars. Fort Leavenworth has played a major role in the defense of the country in all four of these wars (Partin, 1983).

The Fort Leavenworth community and Patton Junior High School were chosen for several reasons. Fort Leavenworth Public Schools for the study site has many advanced officers that are selected to attend the Command General Staff College and their families usually come with them. Many of the officers already have advanced degrees by the time they arrive to Fort Leavenworth. Even the spouses of the officers often have bachelor's or master's degrees. This creates a community of parents that value education and seek to ensure academic success for their children. This unique community of parents has often had experiences in many other educational communities that were highly insightful to the study.

Another dynamic that makes Fort Leavenworth a great place to conduct the study is the fact that in addition to the officers and their families, there are a number of parents that are classified in the enlisted ranks and are non-commissioned officers who have achieved their officer position by being promoted through the enlisted ranks. This group of active duty personnel has a lower societal ranking in the military due to their lower salary, lower educational

attainment, and lower class housing. This creates two classes of officers in the community, but more importantly creates a working class in the military. While the spouses of officers can often afford to be homemakers, the spouses of enlisted men and women and noncommissioned officers usually have to be employed to supplement the family income. It becomes much more difficult to be involved in their children's schooling when they are holding one or more jobs to support the family. Fort Leavenworth is also home to a number of International Officers who are assigned to the post for training purposes. These two groups of officers and their families bring another dynamic to the study that will allow for a comparison of each group's perceptions.

Seven participants from each group (Non-Commissioned, Commissioned, and International Officers spouses) were invited to take part in the study. Individuals were chosen intentionally in order to garner a variety of levels of parent involvement. Of those invited, six Non-Commissioned Officers' spouses, six International Officers' spouses, and seven Commissioned Officers' spouses chose to participate. Each participant was interviewed individually to allow them to speak freely. Interviews took place between May 19 and June 3, 2014. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format so that consistency between interviews existed while allowing the flexibility to ask follow up questions in an attempt to dig deeper into each participant's responses. The questions for each participant (included in the appendix) were focused on developing participants' experiences, needs, and expectations related to their child's school, but in an effort to probe the participants without leading them the questions were not directly about those areas. Instead, I asked them to describe their favorite and least favorite experiences with duty stations, specific examples of schools that have been supportive, and other questions that allowed them to take an open ended approach to explaining their perceptions. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant had the opportunity to

share anything that we hadn't already covered. Most reiterated points they had made previously, but some expressed new thoughts that hadn't been elicited from previous questioning.

It is important to note that I not only served as the researcher and interviewer on this study, but I was also the principal at Patton Junior High School for two years between 2012 and 2014. I also had direct knowledge and relationships with each participant on some level prior to asking them to be a part of the interviews. Each participant was actively participating in the function of the school on some level through parent-teacher conferences, serving as a spectator at sporting events, attending site council meetings, or even simply through bringing concerns about their child's teacher or school programming. Through these interactions with parents, I developed my understanding of the plight of the military family and also learned which families would likely be excellent contributors to the study. It is important to note that although I was the principal of the school and sole interviewer, each participant was aware that I had resigned my position and was not going to be the principal for more than a couple weeks following the interviews, so there was very little pressure to contrive one's answers in an effort to gain a reward for positive answers or avoid negative consequences for speaking negatively about the school or their experiences.

In an effort to ensure accuracy and validity, several tools were utilized. The first was submission and approval of the proposal to the KU Human Subjects Committee prior to beginning the study. Consent forms were also provided to each participant so that they were aware of the ramifications and focus of the study. Second, each interview was recorded and transcribed. Transcribed scripts were sent to each participant for approval prior to the analysis and coding of the results.

After each participant approved the transcripts, I was able to create a general outline of the results that developed from the combined interviews. This outline served as the master guide for coding the transcripts. I, then, went through each transcription, color coding the responses so that I could later identify where in their transcription, the participant referenced a particular theme. For example, “Resources currently being provided by schools” was a secondary topic that was color coded green. The tertiary level topics of “improving communication, providing programs for students to get involved in their school, providing an environment where everyone else is in the same position (military schools), providing consistency, and having flexible attendance policies” were all shaded a different color of green so that I was able to quickly find the participants’ theme and where in the transcript it was referenced. The participant number was also written on the outline under the appropriate themes allowing me to quickly see which participants had supporting viewpoints in their transcript and to see how many participants had similar responses. This was allowed me to identify supporting details, and was especially helpful as I began the writing process to pull specific points, anecdotes, or even mottos that the family has lived by over their military career.

## **Chapter 4- Unique Experiences of Military Families**

After careful transcription and analysis of the participants' responses a number of themes became evident. While each participant had their own unique experiences these common themes could be identified regardless of their status of Commissioned, Non-commissioned, or International spouse. Likewise, there were some themes that were specific to each group, both challenges and advantages. The initial responses were beneficial to understanding the plight and benefits that come with being a family in the military, and the specific needs that come with such classification. These responses address the experiences that are unique to military families. They answer the "experiences" portion of the research question, "What are the Experiences, Needs, and Expectations of Active Duty Military Families Relative to Their Child's School?"

In the results that follow, NCO refers to Non-commissioned Officer, IO refers to International Officer, and CO refers to Commissioned Officer. These labels refer to the rank of their interviewee's spouse. After each rank, a number follows to identify the individual being interviewed.

### **Common Themes Among the Three Groups**

#### **Sense of community.**

The first theme that developed within the three groups was a sense of community that is developed within the army. For the purpose of this study, "sense of community" refers to the feeling of familiarity that comes from being among a group of people that has shared experiences, beliefs, and purposes. It provides a sense of safety and shared responsibility. Peter Senge (2000) further explains that community is not a place defined by boundaries but by the sharing of life.

Some of the posts in the army can be rather large, but Fort Leavenworth specifically is one of the smaller posts that allows families to get to know one another. Some families live off post due to choice or limited housing on post, but many of the participants mentioned the feeling of safety that life on post can provide, with children being able to walk around post without fear of harm. Several parents mentioned places that they've noticed where that sense of community didn't exist either because the post was so large (NCO-6 and 7: Fort Bragg), or as in the case of IO-8, their home country of Canada no longer has army posts like Fort Leavenworth that provide supports and a community:

We have, therefore, lived in the "civilian world" for the most part. The children have attended schools that are not familiar with the military way of life. They have had to integrate in communities where families have had multiple generations living there.

In other cases, military families are assigned to a duty station in a non-military community that can be many miles from a post. In these cases, the participants mentioned missing out on the sense of community that they feel at places like Fort Leavenworth where the community "will rally around you when you're in need...even if it's from having a baby, to having surgery, to I'm having a really bad week..."

### **Resilience.**

Resilience is a word that is used frequently in the military because of the way that families are forced to recover from a variety of challenges that seem to be around every corner. Resiliency is defined as the ability of a child to succeed despite risk factors that exist making it difficult for them to do so (Bryan 2005). In Julia Bryan's research, she found increased likelihood for resiliency in children who possessed protective factors such as caring and

supportive adult relationships, opportunities for meaningful student participation in their schools and communities, and high parent and teacher expectations regarding student performance and future success. School-family-community partnerships are promoted as an excellent protective factor for promoting resiliency in children (Bryan, 2005; Joyce L. Epstein, 1995). There is some crossover between the concepts of “sense of community” and “resilience” because aspects of the community provide some of the resources that become protective factors for military children and families to achieve resiliency, but they remain separate themes because of the differences that still exist.

The attitude of trying to keep things positive and ready to respond as a family was something that came up frequently in interviews. One participant mentioned a common saying that applies to military spouses is their favorite post is wherever they currently are because they have to maintain that positive outlook. When asked about her favorite duty station, CO-14 said:

Wherever I currently am. I don't have bad memories of any place... It's all about the people. I was really nervous about going over to Germany. I don't know the language, and I had really small children. [There were] phenomenal neighbors and friends that we met there. We traveled all over Europe. It was great. I would almost hate to go back because I don't know that we could duplicate that experience again, but everywhere we've been has been great. I think military families have a knack of looking at the positive and enjoying what you have while you have it.

Many families, currently stationed at Fort Leavenworth, supported that mindset that military families make the best of the environment that they are in even when things look bad. Another example of this is several of the families that have been stationed at Fort Irwin, which is a remote, hot post located in the middle of California's Mojave Desert. Families mentioned that in addition to the heat and the remote location, it is the home of the National Training Center, which means large units frequently come in and out for warfare training. This training involves

constant heavy arms fire at all times of the day and night. Even with these characteristics, some families found redeeming qualities such as the active duty member being home every day at 4pm, grilling in the cul-de-sac on weekends, and safety due to being so far removed from the rest of civilization.

One participant, CO-20, observed that her kids have developed more resiliency from watching her:

It teaches them how to be resilient, how to bloom where they're planted, to take the best out of what they find, and make lemonade out of lemons. Even though we might not be happy somewhere necessarily, we still get involved. It makes you jump right in and get involved in the community. You don't have time to sit around and wait and think 'Maybe someone will ask me to jump in.' My kids have learned that from me. They get involved right away.

This idea of making the best of difficult situations applies to International Officers and their families also. They too told of situations, mostly involving their children's educational experiences, and how they turned into positives. IO-12 told of a move to a small post in which the school had very few kids. They were worried about the quality of the education because of fewer resources, but the school was located on a military installation with a ranch. Due to the small class size and their access to the ranch, students were able to learn how to ride horses. Recognizing that each location has its positive and negative qualities, IO-12 said, "...we find a good way to live there and we like it. We change one thing for another."

### **Financial and job stability.**

Another common theme that was brought up about being a military family was the sense of financial and job stability that they feel as part of being in the military. This theme refers to the sense of security that military spouses have regarding their husband's ability to keep his job

along with the consistency of the paycheck and benefits that come with it. Financial and job stability are an aspect of military membership that keep families tied to the military. Outside of the possibility of death or disability, families feel as though they are in control of when their relationship with the military is severed because they don't have to worry about some of the economic downturns that face employees in the public sector. While competition for promotions is fierce, there is little likelihood that they will be demoted or even fired due to downsizing.

Not every spouse mentioned financial and job stability directly, but many of the participants that didn't bring up the topic referenced the ability to go see family, participate in many sports, and other activities that require some financial backing of a middle class and higher income. One participant (CO-15) mentioned that during economic downturns when her family knew of many people being laid off, she wasn't worried about her husband losing his job. This was a focus for Non-commissioned Officers' spouses as well even though they are on a significantly lower pay scale. The stability and guarantee of a paycheck was the focus for the Non-commissioned spouses. For these two groups, the ability to count on a reliable paycheck, job stability, and opportunity to advance were a major factor that allowed some of the spouses to be stay at home moms. For the International Officers and Commissioned Officers, another topic that was brought up as a financial support was health insurance, which is provided by the government for all officers and their families. Multiple International Officers' wives mentioned that they've made use of their health insurance while stationed here in the United States, something that was beneficial to them and their families.

### **Patriotism.**

Another theme that frequently came up as a benefit among all three groups of participants was the fact that having a family member that is an active duty soldier instills a sense of pride in

their country and in the work that the husband or father does every day. This higher sense of pride in one's country comes as a result of military membership and knowing first-hand the sacrifices that are made by their own family and that of others to protect the freedoms that American citizens enjoy. Military families know that they have played a role in protecting those freedoms, either directly through their own service, or indirectly at home in keeping the soldier's home life protected while he or she is away. "Patriotism" is related to the theme of "Sense of Community" in that patriotism is a common factor felt by nearly every member of the military. This is another example of the shared beliefs among the members that form the community.

The theme of patriotism was felt by long-time spouses of a soldier as well as spouses that are relatively new to the military. NCO-7, a relatively new spouse said, "It's something I've never felt before." According to CO-17, this sense of patriotism for the country happens because military families have a better sense than anyone of the sacrifice that soldiers make to protect the country and freedom. Another example that was mentioned by multiple participants is something that happens every day on post. Adults and kids on post will stop what they're doing, even if they are in the middle of a game of soccer, and salute the flag at 5:00 when retreat is played and the cannon goes off to signify the flag is being lowered for the day. These participants also mentioned that children in military families do this to show pride in and respect for their country because they understand the difference that their parents are making as an active duty soldier.

IO-9 said it this way:

The good thing about being in the military is that we can respect ourselves very much. We feel honored to be a member of the Japanese military family. I feel that my husband does something very special and very good, and that's what my children feel also.

## **Mobility.**

The life of a military family can present many challenges, but most of the spouses interviewed still had a very positive outlook on the path they've chosen in making a career out of the military. This duality of benefits versus challenges can especially be seen in the theme of "*mobility*" that was mentioned by every participant. They see mobility as both a blessing and a curse. Mobility refers to the nature of the military family to move frequently, in many cases, moving every 2-3 years.

### ***Benefits of Mobility.***

Fifteen of the nineteen spouses interviewed and all seven of the commissioned officers spoke positively about the fact that there are some benefits to the travel required with the military. The travel that they referred to entails not only the various stations around the country and globally, but also when families are stationed around the world, they have the opportunity to do family vacations when the active duty spouse is off duty or deployed. This is particularly true in Europe. Many of the Commissioned and Non-commissioned spouses have spent time in Germany or England at some point in their careers. Because of the close proximity and relative size of the neighboring countries, living abroad affords a great opportunity for families to experience different countries, cultures, and historical sites with less effort and financial strain than if they were living back in the United States. Families stationed there frequently mentioned that they take the opportunity to travel to other European countries and gain experiences in those other cultures. CO-14 mentioned, "We moved once inside the country from one location to another. We loved traveling in Europe. It was an amazing experience for the kids. They are now reading about the things in textbooks, and they've actually been there. They've walked the halls of the Basilica and been all over Germany for World War II and even World War I. We did a lot

of battle field studies because dad is a big history buff and we toured the Rock of the Marne, Bastogne, Waterloo, and the whole bit. They got a great deal of opportunities a lot of their civilian counterparts don't have. They have different challenges obviously, but it's not necessarily a bad thing, it's just different."

Likewise, the International Officers' spouses shared similar experiences with traveling the United States while living away from their own homes. All of the International Officers' spouses that were interviewed have been placed in the United States as part of an assignment from their home country. Many International Officers are assigned to the Fort Leavenworth as liaisons for their country. This was true of all of the International Officer spouses interviewed with such home countries as Canada, Japan, Spain, Brazil, Mexico, and Chile. Some of them, as in the case of IO-8 and 9 have been stationed with their husbands in other countries prior to coming to the United States. When asked how her spouse's career in the military has impacted her and her family both positively and negatively, she stated:

We have had some great adventures. We have had the opportunity to travel the globe and immerse in places that perhaps we would not have been able to had we not been in a military family. We have been able to broaden our way of thinking and better understand the ways of the world. We appreciate on a different level how very lucky we are to be from North America. The boys learned how to ski in the Rockies. They learned how to boogie board in Nova Scotia.

The Non-Commissioned and Commissioned Officer's wives talked about the cultures, places, and the people that they've gotten to experience as a result of accompanying their husbands to overseas assignments. NCO-6 mentioned that Germany was one of her favorite duty stations because of the German culture, the beautiful scenery, shopping, and dining. She was able to enjoy these aspects of the country even though her husband was usually either deployed or training in the field during most of their time in the country.

Several of the participants mentioned the challenges that they faced when first arriving at their duty station in a foreign country, but then went on to talk about how they made it through that experience and came out on the other side viewing it favorably because of the people they meet through that trying time like NCO-2, who said, “When people are overseas....they tend to stick together more....because you lean on each other more and also there are a lot of activities that are hosted in the other countries, near the soldiers and near the post for the soldiers to enjoy. Not only the soldiers, but also the people from the country, your neighbors to enjoy. That was the most important thing in Germany, the children are really valued and it is more family oriented than America is now.” She went on to say that when they first arrived in Germany, they were placed in a nearly empty barracks, which caused the family to come together as a family unit, roasting marshmallow over the stove, watching tv, and camping out.

CO-18 also talked about the way that the initial challenges the family’s move to Germany caused them to rely on others. She shared that they had just arrived and found out that their belongings, including their car and clothing, would not arrive for six more weeks. “We lived in a guest house... They are like family now because we lived there with them. They helped us that much. He took us around to help find a house.”

Other spouses talked about the connections they have built with others as a result of their military-connected travel. Because of the friendships that they’ve developed with others over the course of their career in the military, it is easier for the family to continue to travel even after exiting the military through retirement or discharge. One example of this is CO-15, who mentioned that they recently spent time in Panama where they stayed with friends that they had known from the military that now live there. She stated that had they would not have gone to Panama had they not known someone there and had a place to stay, but this friendship allowed

them to experience this travel for pleasure. CO-16 said, “Meeting people, getting to see different places, but the families that you meet, the friendships that you make, it’s like part of your family, as strong a bond as family.”

CO-19 stated that she felt that the best way to form bonds and get to know the people whether abroad or domestically is to assimilate into the community and become a part of what’s going on there. CO-17 echoed this sentiment in saying that children get used to blending in. When they come to school, “they have to blend in with different teaching styles, different cultures, different backgrounds, everything. It’s just a mish mash of everything, but that’s a good thing.”

One participant mentioned something that came up as a common theme not just across multiple participants, but also was given as a response to several different questions. That theme is the way that many civilian kids that move don’t do so frequently, and the students in the receiving schools aren’t as understanding of being in that position so they are less receptive to “the new kid.” Military kids are more understanding of what it’s like to be in that position, and therefore are more receptive to the new students and more likely to be receptive to students that look and act a little outside of the norm. CO-14 mentioned that “They [children in military families] know what it’s like to be that one kid on the block that nobody knows or is sitting by themselves at lunch. They are extremely open to diverse cultures. They’ve been the minority. They lived in Europe where they were definitely the minority on many of the traveling trips that we took-the vacations. They appreciate different cultures a lot more.” She went on to say that she doesn’t have the typical fears about her children going off to college regardless of where it is whether an hour away or in a different country because of the exposure they have to different people and cultures.

### *Challenges Related to Mobility.*

Life in the military means moving frequently. Of the participants interviewed, their time spent at Fort Leavenworth varied between less than a year and nine years. The longest tenured participants mentioned that this was the longest they had been anywhere and that it is rare to stay for so long. In these cases, the only reason they were able to stay was due to their active duty soldier deploying or being reassigned to a different position at Fort Leavenworth, allowing them to stay for a longer period of time. In most cases, soldiers are moved from one duty station to the next quite frequently (every one to three years), and in most of these situations, the family makes the move as well, creating the same issues that arise with civilian families that also move, but on a grander scale because of the total number of moves, their frequency, and the anticipation of another move soon after. Military families understand that this is their way of life, but they also seem to long for more stability. CO-15 referenced this instability when she said, "I think that civilian families have more stability...with their schools, their churches, their whole community. They know where they're going to be in three years. When they're in elementary school, they typically know what high school their kid will go to." IO-12 mentioned a similar feeling of instability in saying that when they start to get comfortable and make connections at a duty station, it's usually approximately a month later when they get moved to a new place. Other spouses talked about the fact that they have moved so many times that they have developed strategies for moving. They know which things can be trusted with the crew that comes in to pack up their things (furniture and things that can be replaced) and which things they need to pack and move themselves (birth certificates, pictures, and items with sentimental value that can't be replaced). They cordon off a room with the things that aren't to be touched by the packers with a sign stating that fact. CO-16 said, "Moves are challenging, but they're exciting

too, especially if you're looking forward to a new adventure. There's a lot that happens, especially when you're moving kids. New schools, and all the stuff that you have to carry with kids. You don't have a lot of adjusting and new things. We've never had to move overseas, but if you're moving overseas, it's a whole other ballgame; passports, what can you take, what can you not take, electrical, whole baggage, partial baggage. You worry about your stuff getting there." She went on to describe instances where furniture was lost and other items had been stolen that had a lot of sentimental and monetary value.

One thing that was named as a challenge that occurs as a result of moving frequently is an inability for the non-military spouse to maintain a career. Many of the wives choose to become homemakers as a result of the financial position the military affords them and a desire to spend more time with their children, but this is also done out of necessity in many cases. Eight of the nineteen wives and four of the six International Officers interviewed mentioned an inability to maintain a career with a spouse in the military. NCO-3 shared her experiences, saying, "...when you're a military spouse and you're moving from place to place, I think it's very difficult to keep a career, start a career, and finish things. I've really found a lot of worth, self-worth I guess you could say in volunteering and doing positions and things like that." Other participants mentioned that many employers avoid hiring military spouses altogether as IO-8 described, "...a lot of times as a military spouse, people don't want to hire you because they know you're not around very long, despite your experiences or your education. Why would people invest in you career-wise or even as a friend? If people know you are there temporarily they usually do not want to invest in you. This is true for children as well. That is one of the biggest reasons why we try to avoid telling people that we are military until they have had a chance to get to know us." Some wives have gotten to the point where they know not only how

difficult it is to find a job, but also how quickly they are going to move so they are less likely to even try to find a job. IO-13 mentioned that she has grown discouraged for this reason:

For our career, for our work sometimes, our families too, because if I have a career and I want to work someplace, always in my country, they ask, 'and your husband is? Military, okay' It's a problem for us because in two more years maybe you will go somewhere. It's hard for us as a woman, you don't have the opportunity to develop your career or your life. It's difficult to develop everything if I want to do something by myself. It's hard because you always have to think, maybe in one more year, I will go again to a new place.

A similar situation exists for military wives in Brazil, but IO-11 offered some solutions as she shared, "For the military wife, it's better to get a public job, public work because in Brazil, when my husband transfers if I work in the federal work like a bank or congress I can transfer my job independent of the city. If I work in a private job, it's difficult to do this, or we could work in the army together. The husband and the wife can move together." CO-14 also discussed the difficulty of maintaining a career with a spouse in the military. She had a pharmaceutical sales job with a national company that allowed her to transfer to a position close to her husband's duty station, but with each move she went to the bottom of the totem pole. She went on to say, "It's 100% commission, and I was usually in the office waiting for a territory to open up. If a territory opened up, it's because someone messed up. So I was down building up the relationships again. After about two moves, I was like, 'I'm done with this.' One more perspective was offered by NCO-2, who has been able to maintain a career as a nurse after a determined effort to finish a degree in healthcare, but it is a constant juggling act of schedules. She described this challenge:

I'm an R.N. on a cardiovascular floor and my job has changed a lot. My schedule changes a lot based on my husband's job because I'm the primary care giver. Sometimes I'm full time, which is three, twelve hour shifts. Sometimes I'm part time-I work two days a week, and that's any two days a week, you know according to the schedule which is laid out six weeks in advance. Right now, I'm working weekends. I've worked every weekend for the last year, so twelve hour shifts every weekend, so the children are at home with my husband during the weekend. During the week, I do appointments,

doctor's appointments, the orthodontist, grocery shopping, going up to school for anything, fixing the meals. Even on the days I work, I fix the meals for two or three days in advance in case I get called in an extra day and they just have to get them out of the refrigerator and heat them up, and of course that's challenging.

Another challenge that arises as a result of moving frequently is the struggle to learn the new community and integrating into it. Many civilians take for granted the fact that they know which doctors are best, where to take their children for day care, the ideal location to live in order to have a safe environment while also getting your kids into the best schools in town, and the simple joys of knowing your neighbors. For military families, these things don't come as simply. They are challenges that families not only think about, but when they find out they're getting ready to make a move, the research begins immediately to get as much knowledge of the community as quickly as possible. In today's technology age, this process is much easier than it once was. Facebook pages, blogs and websites exist that allow new families to not only research the new community and services offered, but to ask questions of the families that are currently living in the community and others that have lived there in the past and may have moved on.

CO-15 mentioned that part of the challenge of learning the new community is that you don't have any family or friends in the area. Parents with multiple children often have a need for someone to serve as an emergency contact in the event that something comes up with their children that the parents can't take care of on their own because of military/job-related business, illness, or activity conflicts due to multiple children involved in sports and clubs. CO-15 went on to say, "I think military families adapt much more quickly. I think they make friends faster and possibly have stronger bonds because they have to. You immediately meet someone and you're like, 'Will you be my emergency contact? Will you pick up my kids if they're sick from school? I don't know anyone else, and I just met you in the commissary line.' You just have to do that

quickly and you just jump right in. I think military people can do that much more easily than civilians.”

When asked about a time that the family has had to adapt or adjust to new circumstances as a result of their connection to the military, CO-19 stated:

That’s normal, but at least now the internet has made it a lot easier. It’s way easier to research a place and a surrounding locations. Through Facebook, they are groups set up where you can write in and say, ‘I’m moving to this area. Help me out. They’ve offered me this housing area or that. Can you help me compare and contrast? What are the better schools? Which doctor should I try to get?’ The internet has helped a lot. You can do all your homework before you go and map it out. There’s nothing better, once you get there than feet on the ground, but you can get a much better picture. As you have figured out, I’m sure, the military is a small community where information travels quickly, good and bad, correct and incorrect. It’s nice though. It was a shock when we moved from a military community to a civilian community in Bloomington, Indiana because no one was waiting. Nobody cared whether we came or not. It took like a year to meet people there and you know that you have to, if you’re going to make friends, you do it quickly. Friendships do happen quickly because everyone has been there already. You know what it’s like those first days of moving in so you bring your new neighbors a meal or the lost box cutter, whatever. You help them out because everyone has been there and everyone is going to go back there too. Military kids definitely know how to make friends quickly.

As a result of frequent moves, children that are a part of military families struggle to leave friends that they have in the school they’re leaving while also facing the challenge of making friends in their new school. This was a very common theme mentioned at least once during the interviews of thirteen of the nineteen participants. Several participants referenced the need to get involved very quickly, as discussed above, related to knowing the city and services offered, but also in relation to making friends that can be used as a support for both the adults and the children in the family. NCO-3 stated, “I don’t know how else to say that, but to get involved very quickly in new things because you might start school in the middle of the school

year. You might only be here a few months. You might be here not even an entire school year.” NCO-5 discussed the idea that the military community is small and mobile enough to the point that some of her dearest friends, and those of her children that they met on a post early in their military career, have been assigned to the same post as them a second time, but often when that happens, the friends are coming to that post just as her family is getting orders to move on to another assignment. International Officers described a similar experience in which their children had a difficult time giving up friends at one school and move on to try to make friends at a new school. IO-11, who was a military dependent when she was a child, compared her military child experience with that of her children, “..for the kids, I think it’s difficult. My experience is different. My father stayed in the same city for a long time, but not my children. Two years, we stay in one city, then moving to another city for three years. I think it’s for friends, for contacts for the family, it’s difficult. It’s far. In Brazil, it’s a big country. It’s difficult....Nowadays, it’s more easy because we have the internet and Skyping, phoning, but with friends, it’s difficult.”

IO-9 described the difficult position that kids are in when not wanting to give up their old friends, “They [kids] need new friends. It’s a problem because they make a strong relationship with their friends and it is hard for them to separate with their friends and go to a new place and make friends. For me, it’s a challenge because they sometimes cry saying, ‘No, I don’t want to make new friends.’, but they are in the new place for one week and they have new friends.”

Many of the participants focused on the difficulty with leaving friends behind when they move, and making friends in the new school, but CO-16 focused on the need to remember that there are some families that do stay on one post for an extended period. These families have the same struggles because their friends continue to move away. She described the struggle this way:

The flip side of this, my seventeen year old, who has been here nine years, you'd think that he'd have a core group of friends. He doesn't because all of them have moved. So that's another (issue). People think, you've been there nine years. He's just to the point now, he's like, 'I'm tired of opening myself to everybody.' He's just waiting, not that he's not enjoying school. He has lots of people that he knows and gets along with but good core solid, 'He's my buddy.' he doesn't have that because they've gone. He's like, 'Eh, why bother?'

CO-20 described a similar experience with her son:

I know you've seen it here. Trevor said the other day, 'mom, I don't have a best friend.' Because they make these connections and then they're gone. It hurts too much, so they build up a thick skin. The other thing is my son. I call him the godfather because if someone wrongs him, he's like. 'You're dead to me.' He just sloughs them off because he knows he's leaving. He's never had to learn how to deal with confrontation, and those particular skills that some people have grown up with. If you're growing up in the same town, you've got to get along or find a way to get along or life's going to be hard. When you know you're going to be gone in a year, 'I'm just going to ignore it. We're not even going to hang out anymore.' because he knows he's leaving. I've had to work with him on how to create those. Jamie is just an introvert. She doesn't want to make those [connections] because it hurts too bad. I'm like, 'Do you want to invite anybody over?' She says, 'No. I'm okay.' She doesn't have those close relationships some other kids have.

When asked if technology like Facebook and Skype increases the interest in maintaining those friendships as friends have moved away, CO-16 followed up with:

He does yeah, he'll text them, but they're boys. Boys don't, not to knock boys, but my husband, he has good friends, he hasn't contacted in a year or better. When they get together, they act like they haven't had any time apart. Technology helps some, it helps with texting and keeping up and whatnot, but we talk about getting back together this summer with friends in California, some in Virginia.

Some children in military families have such a difficult time with adapting to the changes of the military and losing friends through moves that they opt to have their children participate in therapy in an effort to develop the skills necessary to face these changes. NCO-2 described a

time when she was seeing changes in her children, including dropping grades, fighting, night terrors, and a difficulty keeping her two boys in school. As they worked through therapy, her youngest son dealt with a regression in potty training and day terrors as well. She was happy that they went through it young while she was able to get the help for them that they needed and she is able to protect them. She also felt that the experience made them stronger and more resilient to get through other struggles.

There are many challenges that were brought up by the participants, but most of them were a natural consequence of frequent moves. A final challenge that was brought up in the interviews was the struggle of moving from state to state and country to country. Many of the participants expressed that they are placing a lot of hope in the Common Core curriculum because they felt that even though it wouldn't standardize how standards are taught and the resources that are available at each school, it would at least make what is being taught at each grade level more consistent as their children moved across the country and between international schools. CO-17 described her experiences with these changes. She said that her kids were advanced when they were in Germany, but when coming back to the United States, they were behind in some areas and had to play catchup with the kids in their grade. Even in the United States when moving from one state to another, there is so much variance in what is taught at each grade level that some kids can be left in a bad position including her daughter Christina when they moved from Texas, where they didn't teach cursive writing at that grade level, to Virginia. She describes the challenge in making sure her daughter had the skill of being able to write in cursive in elementary school, "When she got to Virginia, that's all they did. She couldn't read what was on the board, so we had to get cursive writing books, the dry erase board, and we had to teach her how to write. The thing is, the way I was taught, they weren't teaching that way.

So it's a totally different form of cursive." She went on to say, "Everything's totally different. I can't understand what they're doing. I wish we were all on the same page. It's frustrating."

Several parents (NCO-3, NCO-4, CO-17) had similar concerns as CO-17 discussing this variation between schools as their father moves from one post to another, and talked about the differences between the variety of schools that their children attended. The schools include international schools and domestic schools that were both run by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). They discussed some variation in these schools that were all run by the same administrative agency, but not all schools in the army are governed by this agency. Some schools, like Patton Junior High, are actually public schools located on an army post, and as such are governed by the Department of Education for that state, so funding sources are a little different. There are also some families that opt to live off post, and send their kids to the civilian public schools located off post like NCO-3, whose children have always gone to off-post schools. "When we came here (Fort Leavenworth), everyone said, 'No, they need to be on post of the schools, so that became apparent pretty quickly. The schools are excellent. Although, they've always attended good public schools, I feel like these are just bar none, they are great.'"

NCO-4 talked about the difference in policies as students travel from one school to another, particularly related to credits at the high school level. Her son is moving to another high school halfway across the country. In Kansas, he can count his ROTC class as a PE credit, but in the new school, he'll have to take another PE class because the ROTC won't count toward his PE requirements. This concern over policy differences was further developed by CO-20 regarding students with IEP's. She said, "Going from state to state military-wise, each district, each state, has different laws so you hear all the time like Trevor has a frontal lisp and a tongue thrust. So you have an IEP for speech. When we went to Georgia, he no longer qualified for services

period. I just thought that he was going to continue to get help, but he didn't. It stopped. With Jamie, I didn't even know to request a 504. In Georgia, it was more, you don't want an IEP. When I got here, it was another parent that said, 'You need to request an IEP meeting.'

CO-14 discussed her concerns with special services administration from state to state on the other end of the spectrum with Gifted (Academically Talented) students. She talked about her children's experiences with transitioning to other schools:

Both of my kids are gifted and a lot of people don't recognize gifted as special needs, but to me special needs is anything outside of the normal classroom. We had an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) here for my daughter when she was here. We took the IEP to Germany and they were like, 'So what is this?' We tried to explain and they pushed it aside. Of course, she was tested again when we got to Germany. Then we went to Texas, and of course, Texas likes to do things their own way. In fact, they looked at her IEP, and almost put her in a remedial reading course. At this time, she was in the fifth grade reading at almost a college level. I thought, 'Do you have any idea what would happen to a kid's self-esteem if you did that?' We'd get in trouble probably because you're definitely not challenging her. I think that's one of the issues our kids deal with is the inconsistency in academics from state to state. That's why I'm hoping the Common Core will help, but if you've got a straight A student who catches on well and is doing very well, then goes to a new area and doesn't test well, it's just because they haven't seen that concept yet. They can be labeled as a slow learner or behind, needing remedial work. That could make a huge difference, especially if it hits a critical developmental stage for those kids.

So we went to Texas and they retested her again. It was crazy. We came back to Fort Leavenworth and they didn't care about any other testing. They went back to her original IEP and she was fine. I think this school district actually does a good job of placing kids appropriately wherever their level is. It's not that my kids needed the Gifted Program, it's that I needed them to be challenged wherever they were.

International Officers had similar concerns over educational gaps being created as their children move from one school to another. IO-12 described the experiences of her son progressing through elementary school. He was never in any school for longer than one grade level. She expressed concern that these changes left them confused about what was taking place

in each school and that they have concerns for what that did to their son's learning. IO-13 had similar concerns about the moving, but went on to discuss the process of moving back to their home country at the end of their liaison assignment. She said that as they prepare to move back, her son will do some pretesting for the new school including a math placement testing and a writing test, which will determine whether he will be placed in the tenth or the eleventh grade (currently a ninth grader) in Chile when they return. She liked this process of determining the placement because it helped her to know that he was being placed appropriately.

### **Family life.**

Family Life is another theme that, like Mobility, came up multiple times and had the dual nature of being both a blessing and a curse. Every permanent post in the military has living quarters for single soldiers that reside on post without a spouse or children, but many of the housing quarters on military posts are family dwellings in which the soldier lives with their spouse, kids, or both. This means that for many soldiers the positive and negative aspects of military membership not only affect the soldier, but also the members of that soldier's family. This theme refers to the dynamics of the relationships between the soldier, their spouse, and their dependents as related to the soldier's connection to the military.

### ***Benefits of military membership related to family life.***

Fort Leavenworth, where the interviews were conducted, is a special place in the army in the sense that many of the active duty soldiers that are stationed there are assigned to the Command General Staff College (CGSC). This specialized school requires officers to study in preparation for future duty assignments and promotion through the ranks of the military. This creates more of a relaxed environment where the soldiers have a little more time for family

events rather than long duty hours and deployments that they experience at other duty stations. Another thing that was revealed is that the soldiers that attend CGSC are in either a one- or two-year program. After that time, they will usually receive orders to go to another post. Because the time at Fort Leavenworth is anticipated to be so short, many of the spouses opt to be homemakers during their assignment there rather than seek out other employment. Many of the participants described their typical day in a similar way to CO-18, “For me, because I’m a stay at home mom, I think it’s pretty average. A typical really good day that doesn’t go crazy, I would say, I get up. I get my kids up. We make breakfast. I send them off to school. I do my usual thing. I walk the dog. I clean house. I run errands. Certain days of the week, I volunteer different places, different days. Commissary. Whatever else needs to be done, pick people up for the orthodontist, pick people up for medical appointments, or whatever they need. After school, we do the whole, whatever the sport or lesson of the day, month, whatever it is typical taxi mom I think. That’s a typical normal day.” Other spouses talked specifically about volunteering at the Humane Society, the Chapel, schools, and other organizations on and off post, and volunteering as many as 900 hours a year. The participants seemed to find meaning in the service that they contribute.

International Officers who are assigned to Fort Leavenworth are either on orders as the Liaison Officer from their home country or assigned to a program at CGSC. Regardless of their assignment, this is frequently a relaxed atmosphere that allows the military parent to be home more frequently than in their home country. It’s a time for families to reconnect. IO-9 referenced that Fort Leavenworth has been her favorite duty station, “The reason is most of the time, he is here. In Japan, as I told you, most of the time, he was not at home. Although he was home, he came very, very late and he had almost no time to have conversations with his daughters. Here

he has so much time to spend with his daughters like he comes home at 5:00 at least and we can eat lunch together.....This is what many international officers say. Back in their country, they are very busy and not able to spend time with their family, but here we are able to be together.

*Challenges associated with family life.*

As mentioned in the previous section, there are benefits that come with being in the military, such as the ability to travel the world, the sense of pride in one's country and the job your spouse performs, time for the spouse to care for the family, and financial stability. As related to family life however, the military connection creates a greater array of challenges than benefits. The responses from the officers' spouses were focused on the fact that the officer (dad in the case of all study participants) is frequently absent from the family due to deployments, extended trainings, etc., resulting in the following challenges: creation of single-mom families, responsibility placed on children at an earlier age, the reintegration process when dad returns, marital stress, concern for the officer's safety, and separation from extended family. Perhaps the best synopsis of the challenges that military families face was given by CO-15:

The thing that jumps into my mind is I had to tell my husband that our son had autism over Skype. That was difficult. With so many questions and concerns and appointments, he was gone, so you do what you have to do. We've adjusted so many vacations and family trips because of things going on or when he's deploying. Before he deploys maybe we take a big trip that we weren't planning on.

You do different things when you know deployments are coming up. You schedule a lot more special things. I actually had my third daughter a little bit early. It was going to be a C-Section, but we went a little bit early because my husband was in Special Forces. It was a few months after 9/11 and we didn't know what was going to happen so we actually scheduled a birth a little earlier because he may have been gone. I had a baby in a German hospital where most of the nurses did not speak English. These are all things that would have never have happened if he wasn't military.

The examples given by this participant touch on many of the challenges that military families, particularly spouses face as they attempt to survive and thrive with life in the military.

One of the great challenges associated with military family life is that the military-connected family member, typically the father, is frequently not around. There are some instances in which the mother is the family member connected to the military, and still others in which both family members are active duty soldiers, but all of the families represented in this study had the common background of the father being the military-connected family member. In some cases, the mother also had previous experience with the army from their childhood, growing up in a military family or because they were previously active duty and got out of the army to have a family.

Having a father figure frequently out of the home and for significant portions of time can create monumental challenges for the family unit. NCO-4 described this when she said, “I always laugh because the civilians, they always look and think that military life is super easy. ‘You guys have got it made. I don’t understand why you guys complain.’ Until you know that feeling of your husband being gone. You don’t know if he’s coming back. The sacrifices we really make, because [our] family is unstable.” CO-16 expressed her family’s challenges with deployment by saying, “Each deployment is at least twelve months at a minimum, if not fifteen months. That’s huge. We’ve done it when they were young, when they were infants. He left when David was three months old and we thought that was just horrible, missing out on all the firsts, this, that, and the other. You make it work. When he came home at ten months, we had our first haircut. We did our first birthday. We did everything, regardless if it was time for the first or not. He left again when Eric was three years old and every night for six months, Eric cried in the bathtub. ‘Where’s my daddy? I miss my daddy.’ So I think it impacts them, at every age they go.

Then you think it's going to be easier when they get older. It's not. They really need their dad then too. That's another down side with the military. I think that's the big thing, just being gone." She went on to describe the adjustments the family made for a fall deployment. "One of the deployments he went on in October, we celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas. When people would come Trick-or Treating at my house, you would see the Christmas tree up. They probably thought we were weirdos in there. So we celebrate everything prior to him leaving, birthdays, because you don't want to miss out on those. You take pictures and when those things come up on our calendar, we take out the pictures and we reminisce."

CO-15 also discussed the fact that there is frequently a lot of uncertainty in even getting orders for deployment. Her husband took eight months of Latvian language training, spent thousands of dollars to purchase snow gear and passports for the entire family, then found out a month before they were scheduled to leave that their orders were changed from Latvia to Fort Leavenworth because one of their children had special needs.

Several of the families (IO-9, IO-11, IO-12, IO-13, CO-16 and CO-20) talked about the fact that their spouse is around much more now that they are at Fort Leavenworth due to the nature of their assignment at the current post. These families expressed excitement by the fact that their husband is less likely to be deployed from Fort Leavenworth, but other participants talked about the fact that even with the reduced likelihood of their husband being deployed, it is still apparent that peace and consistency is at the mercy of the army as there are frequent calls in the middle of the night, or changes in dinner plans because something came up in the field or at the discipline barracks that their husband is needed to address.

As difficult as deployment and calls in the middle of the night can be, there are also members of the army that are on call for trainings and consistently have to travel across the

country and abroad to run trainings and participate in others. Active duty soldiers with this job are a part of Mission Command and Training Program (MCTP), formerly known as Battle Command and Training Program (BCTP). CO-18 described the challenges faced by a family whose father serves as a member of this unit:

When Amy was in the third grade, my husband was at BCTP at that time. That was for us, far worse than deployment. That was the worst job that he has ever had because he traveled nonstop. Sometimes he would travel for four weeks and it's much different now. The whole thing is revamped, there's not near the amount of traveling. Out of 365 days one year, he was gone 280. The worst is it's unpredictable. It's irregular. When there's a deployment, we always have a calendar. We have a big smiley face on the day he's supposed to come home and we work toward it. We know our goal. It's right in front of you before it starts. This, you have no clue. So you think, 'Well she's in third grade. She's older. She's got this.' She's always been a go with the flow kind of kid. She doesn't get excited. He stayed there for three years, and he had been doing that job for two years when this happened. I don't know if she was mature enough to finally get it. We haven't really figured it out between everybody that has talked to her, but she started, I didn't even know what was wrong with her. When he would come home, she started, she wouldn't act right. She said to me one day, 'My heart hurts.' It scared me to death. I took her to the emergency room. She was having anxiety attacks when he would come home in anticipation of he would be leaving through. It won't be long, and it could be a week he'd be home. It might be three. It could be three days. Sometimes he would come home for three or four days. You can work as hard as you want, but the poor little things, they know. I think it is harder and I've had a lot of other parents tell me the same thing. That old BCTP was so much harder on their kids than a deployment.

Regardless of the reason the father is absent, it takes a toll on the members of the family that remain in the home while dad is gone. Five themes came up as a result of the amount of time that dad is spent on deployments, trainings, or calls in the night even when he is home. These five themes are the creation of a single mom status to take care of the issues at home, responsibilities placed on children at an earlier age, reintegration when dad returns, marital stress, and concerns for the military member's safety.

Thirteen of the nineteen participants mentioned the first theme of the military creating a single mom status for families because dad can't be relied on even when he is home. Non-commissioned Officers frequently have to give up holidays with the family because of the need for staffing in kitchens and in the discipline barracks (NCO-5). Even when the military-connected family member is scheduled to be at home with the family, they frequently get called away to attend to needs of the military even in the middle of the night, as described by NCO-4, "Your husband isn't always there. He's on call 24/7. My husband had to leave home the other night at 11:00 because one of his soldiers was acting up. I kept looking at the clock-1:00, 2:00. He still wasn't back. I was like what happened? He said, 'We had to call the cops and I had to be there.' It's always something and no matter what you have going on in your life, the military supersedes that. You don't get to stop because [your] wife's sick. We need you, you have to come in. So that don't matter. It's like that's the first love and their family comes second. Just like Donovan's graduation tomorrow. My husband can't be there. I was like, 'You can't?' He said, 'I can't. They got me teaching this class. They're not going to let me out of it.' So that always comes first. We come second." NCO-5 had similar feelings when discussing how frequently her husband gets called in to work in his off days she said, "Seriously? Can he have one day off when he doesn't get a phone call? Can he have one day off where he doesn't have this thing to plan for the next day? Their mindset is military from the time they wake up until the time they go to bed."

Several participants talked about how their husband being gone affects the life of the rest of the family in terms of that single parent status, but NCO-7 described it well when she said that when her husband is deployed, at training, or frequently being called away, she has to mow the lawn, take out the trash, and do her best to keep the house in good working order when things

break. She also said that when her husband is gone is when the weird things tend to happen including burying the family pet, running an opossum out of the house, and dealing with a colony of bats that were nesting in her attic that her landlord and Animal Control didn't want do anything about. NCO-7 also echoed the concern of participants in three groups (Commissioned, Non-Commissioned, and International Officers) being the only parent in the house when family deaths take place, which causes the mom to not only have to communicate the bad news over the phone or on Skype from across the world to the husband deployed to a warzone, but also managing the grief that comes in the household as they try to deal with the loss. CO-15 shared a time when she had to break the news to her husband over Skype that one of their children had been diagnosed with Autism. After sharing this news with her husband, who was deployed, she then had to manage that news herself, and work through next steps with the doctors and their older children. IO-9 also described a time when she and her daughter went through an earthquake with the rest of the country, and her husband wasn't able to come home to help with the chaos for two weeks. Even when the father figure is home, in some cases, as in CO-14's experience, they have to study in the evening, so she was left trying to find a way to keep kids entertained and quiet while her husband studied Russian for eight hours after his normal military duties. One participant, CO-16, wanted to make sure to set the record straight regarding the military-connected family member's intent to help out at home. She said, "When spouses are gone, I hate to say you can't rely on the spouses, but a lot of times, the army comes first. If they can't help out with the kids, whether they're deployed or somewhere stateside, but not home, my husband is very big about trying to put the family first, but the army comes first in a lot of this. That's his job. That's his calling. That's what he has to do."

A second theme that came up as participants discussed concerns with their husbands frequently being absent from the home was a concern that military-connected children mature at a faster rate because responsibility is placed on them at an early age. This happens for a number of reasons: because of need, as was the case for CO-19's children who helped the younger kids with potty training, because they attend important military functions with generals and politicians and are always expected to be on their best behavior (IO-8), or because they have been exposed to things at a young age that civilian children aren't exposed to until much later, as mentioned by CO-14. She talked about kids that are responsible for providing care to a parent wounded in the line of duty, and because "They have a little wider view of the world. They get some opportunities a little sooner in life than their civilian peers have. They've been to memorial services [for family and friends]. We live right off the cemetery, and they see constantly the flags that come in. They understand that, so I think they have a better grip on life and death. So I think they bear a heavier burden emotionally."

One of these heavier emotional burdens is the fact that they have to be concerned about the health and safety of their father, which is a third theme that was brought up by the participants. CO-20 summed up this concern for her children well when she said, "They [civilian families] take for granted the stability that they have. I know some people are police officers and firefighters, so they do understand to an extent, but when Tim was deployed, I think that's where Jamie's anxiety stems from. When the social worker here when we first went to counseling asked, 'What was so traumatic in her life that caused this anxiety?' I said, 'Her dad's in the military.' She said, 'Okay. I understand that, but what's so traumatic?' I said, 'When he deployed, she was seven. Every single night she prayed, Lord please don't let my daddy be dead. Every single day she prayed until he came home.' That's why we didn't watch the news when he

was deployed because you don't want that. I was talking to somebody. We plan our lives when he leaves. Even for all of the TDY's, we set up where our children have guardianships so that they don't go into foster care if something happens to both of us. We've had the wills. We've had to talk about things that normal civilian families just don't even think to bring to the table. Our kids realize that too." For military families, it's not just warzone deployments that cause them concern. CO-14 said that she is concerned about her husband any time he's downrange during training exercises. NCO-6 talked about the shootings that have taken place at Fort Hood, and the fact that any time you put a live weapon in soldier's hands, you never know what might happen. She went on to say, you have to try not to think about it all the time, or it will drive you crazy. NCO-7 stated her and her children's ever-present concern about their husband's/father's safety even through her own guilt. Her husband deployed at the same time as the husband of one of her friends. "While they were deployed, her [the friend's] husband was killed in combat. That was hard and I think it was just a big reminder of what can happen. Then I felt horrible, just horrible. I was excited [that] my husband was coming home but I felt so guilty because hers should have been coming home at the same time, but he wasn't."

The third theme that developed through interviews was marital and general stress for the family. Some of the participants grew up in military families themselves and knew what to expect when they married into a military family, but some of the participants were new to military life and were greeted not only with the stress of a new marriage, but also the culture shock related to a life in the military. An additional challenge that greeted two of the participants (NCO-2 and CO-18) was the shock of starting this new life in a foreign country. CO-18 described this shock in this way:

That Germany transition was a whopper. I probably would say the biggest adjustment of all is when you're a brand new military wife, because I don't come from a military family so of course, I didn't even understand any acronyms. So, of course, I was thinking, 'Number one, what is the real time of day that that will be happening, thank you? No hundred anything, and where am I going?' My husband would say, 'Oh it's at the blah, blah, blah building.

Okay, that's four letters. What is it really called? How do I find it? Just the weirdness of it all. How your i.d. card is your pass to everything. When we got in your social security number was on your i.d. card. That was how I was identified pretty much. No more of that. When you go to the hospital and stuff, my dependent code is 30. No more social security number. They'll still ask me for the last four, but it was just everywhere. It was printed on everything, so we don't have that. I would say that's the biggest adjustment other than the whole culture shock of Germany.

When we took our company, there were three brand new young couples in the company. Every one of them was fighting constantly, they didn't have very much money. It's very expensive to live in Hawaii, and what do you want to do in Hawaii but go snorkeling and everything that costs money. They don't have a lot of extra money, plus they're fighting. They're away from home. They're newlyweds. They're not even used to each other, let alone this new place and being away from their family.

Even military families that are posted in the continental United States frequently can't call extended family to come support because they are usually so far away from other family members. This is the fourth theme that participants described related to the challenges of having the military-connected family member absent so frequently. NCO-6 described the stress by saying, "To know that I can call mom and dad and say, 'This baby is driving me crazy.', but they can't come over and get her. You're on your own. I think it made me and my husband's marriage stronger because we had to depend on each other. We had to lean on each other or kill each other, one of the two, but we chose to lean on each other and to grow together." She also said, "Some adapt better than others. Some wives and husbands say no. I don't know how many marriages I saw during that deployment in Germany dissolve because the spouse couldn't handle the adjustment." Several spouses including CO-16 echoed this challenge of being out there on

your own as a family, but they also described the feeling of being so far away when challenges arise back in their hometown, “Families don’t quite understand the moving and what entails with the moving and living far away. Right now we’re going through, my mom’s been sick. Even though I’m ten hours away, they understand that, but they expect you to just drop everything and go. When my father was sick, my husband was deployed. He was gone. I can’t just drop everything and go. I have to figure things out.”

CO-18 detailed an experience that was more traumatic because they were so far away from family. She and her husband’s extended family are all in the Northeast region of the United States. While they were stationed at Fort Irwin, California, she was in a vehicular accident with only her husband to support her.

When we were stationed at Fort Irwin, that’s where Amy was born, with me driving to the Wal-Mart, we got blindsided by someone who didn’t have a green card or a driver’s license or anything else. He totaled my car. Megan was in the back in a carseat. I was eight and a half months pregnant. This is quite a challenge isn’t it? We were stationed in such a remote area. We were in the town of Barstow when this accident happened, but we needed to come all the way back through the desert to get home. My husband was out in the field blowing everything up. I couldn’t reach him because then, we didn’t have cell phones. They had those huge hand-held radios. I pretty much had to have the policeman take me, my been-in-a-car-wreck car seat, and my four year old to the rental car, and I drove us all back because I needed to go the hospital and I wasn’t going to that one. In the end, this is quite a story, because of where we were stationed, out in the middle of the desert, and because of how he hit me, my airbag went off causing me to lose amniotic fluid, so they had to induce me. Amy was born. When they induced me, Amy was born in twenty minutes. Because of that, she was sick. She proceeded to get sicker. She almost died. We’re in the desert. She and I were life flighted to Loma Linda (Hospital), and my husband had to drive. It was just crazy. We had no family. We had no support. Because we were military, that was a lot more traumatic than it might have been.

CO-14 also talked about the challenge of being so far away from extended family members by saying that military families adjust by banding together as a group, creating a new

family. She described it this way, “Our family is our military family, so the kids don’t spend as much time with, and probably don’t know as much, grandma, grandpa, aunts, and uncles. Cousins don’t get together on the weekends to go play and things like that. Christmas and Thanksgiving we try to get back and see them, but sometimes logistically, it’s just not possible because they are so far away and our family becomes our military family. The families that are still in the area will get together and celebrate. We take care of the single soldiers who can’t get home to their families.”

The fourth and final theme that developed around the topic of challenges of family life in the military is the difficult task of reintegrating the father into the family when he returns from deployment, training exercises, and other duties that carry him away for extended time periods. When the military-connected family member is absent from the home, his schedule and responsibilities look so different than they do when he comes home, which requires an adjustment period. Likewise, the spouse and family that are still at home become accustomed to being self-reliant in taking care of the daily tasks and challenges that arise. When the military connected spouse comes home, they have to acclimate to having an extra body in the home. CO-19 said, “As far as him being gone, or having to adjust to him being gone, or being the one doing everything, and then when he came home, reintegrating him into our routine was really tough for everyone and it still kind of is. We were fortunate that we were able to still have contact with him. If the kids were being pests or whatever, he could say, ‘Remember, you’re supposed to help out and behave.’”

Reintegration into the home was described as a challenge for several different reasons. One of the reasons described by NCO-4, NCO-5, and NCO-6 is that dad comes back different than he was when he left. NCO-4 said, “You just never know. Especially with all the spouses

coming back from Afghanistan. You just never know what kind of emotional state they're in, and the kids have to deal with that too, and that becomes part of the kid's life. They don't know why their dad came back different than when he left." NCO- 5 also mentioned the fact that the military-connected parent is not used to the routine and responsibilities of home life because during their time away from the home, their duties were focused on completing a military mission. NCO-5 described her experience when she said, "By the time dad came home, I wanted to say 'You're home. It's your turn. You take over.' That's not always the case, but that's the pretty little picture you want to have in your head. That's just not the way it goes."

Another reason this transition is so difficult is because of the shift in responsibilities that takes place in the home among the spouse and kids that stay behind. They make adjustments to cover sports travel, household chores, doctor visits, getting homework done, and making dinner. The family living at home gets used to the adjustment that has to be made when that family member is gone, and when they come back, it's another adjustment that has to be made. NCO-4 goes on to say, " Not only him coming back, but him not being there and that's a whole adjustment because you run your house a certain way and the kids get used to that and now daddy comes back and the whole routine and everything switches because daddy's back. They go through that, and that's a lot. It's a lot for the wives and I know it's a lot for the kids. You've got to [be mom and dad], and no dad's back and you've just all of a sudden drop the ball like you don't know how to carry the ball, and let [him] do what he does. The kids are just like, 'What the..?'" CO-20 described an incident that took place in her home after her husband came home from Iraq. She and the kids were leaving the house for an errand, and her husband wasn't used to the routine of the home and this conversation took place, "He was like, 'Where 'ya going? Can I come?' I was like, 'Ooh, Yes you can come. We are going to swim practice.' It's almost like

you're a single parent in a marriage. That's just the way I've always lived our life especially with the kids, 'I'm going to plan my whole day out thinking that you're not going to be there. If you're there, it's like a bonus.'" CO-14 echoed the idea of feeling like a single parent when she said, "There is a shift in responsibility. I don't want to say power, but kind of control. You become the single parent. I know there are a lot of single parents with divorces or for whatever reason, they're the single parent. I think with the military it's different because you're temporarily a single parent. You still need to keep dad or mom in the loop, but you've got the ultimate deciding factor, the veto power as we say."

CO-14 used an excellent analogy to highlight the predicament that military families find themselves in when the military-connected spouse returns from a long absence:

Any time you have a deployment, or not even just a deployment, any time there is a separation-it could be a training exercise for a month-there is a cycle that they go through. It's what we call the reintegration cycle. There is a lot of turmoil before as everybody is adjusting to this. We give an example of a canoe. Think of going down a river in a canoe. They're paddling. Everyone has a job. Maybe dad is steering. Everybody is working and doing their part. Dad gets orders and jumps out of the canoe. Well, it's going to rock. Not only that, we're trying to keep the canoe from tipping over, but at the same time, everyone has to readjust what they can do. Somebody else has to steer. Somebody else has to pull dad's weight on paddling. At the same time, they're continuing downstream. They didn't just stop and wait for dad to come back. Now dad's done, and he's got to find them. He's got to swim out to them and now he's got to jump back in without tipping the canoe over, and everybody's got to readjust again.

### **Needs Specific to Each Group**

While there are many challenges, as described above, that are common to all three of the groups that were interviewed, there are some challenges that are specific to each group. It is critical to identify these issues separately because it determines how schools and military impacted communities proceed with providing support for the families of each group.

## **International Officers.**

The families of International Officers are an interesting group because in some ways these families are the most advantaged group because of the fact that other military families are in the course of their normal duties. By contrast, for International Officers, their time in the United States is seen almost like a reprieve from the normal demands they face with military life in their home country. IO-9, IO-11, and IO-13 described the experience of being at Fort Leavenworth as an opportunity for their husband to spend more time in the home and work more of a traditional nine-to-five job. IO-9 described the advantage of being at Fort Leavenworth when she described it as her favorite duty station, saying, “The reason is most of the time, he is here. In Japan, as I told you, most of the time, he was not at home. Although he was home, he came very, very late and he had almost no time to have [a] conversation with his daughters. Here he has so much time to spend with his daughters like he comes home a five o’clock at least, and we can eat lunch together.” IO-13 also mentioned some of the advantages that her family has enjoyed of being in the United States including opportunities to participate in a variety of sports, live in a bigger house, and travel throughout the country. In general, she said that their quality of life during the year and a half they have been in the United States has been very good.

Many of the International Officers are serving in a capacity of liaison for their country to the United States and are stationed at Fort Leavenworth or other army posts as part of an alliance between the U.S. and their home country that allows International Officers to be trained in American battle tactics. This is allows the spouses of the officers to have them at home not only earlier but also for a guaranteed length of time, as described by IO-12, “It’s completely different because I never know how long we’re going to stay in one place. For our family, in this moment, it’s nice because my husband stays with us. In Mexico, he stays in another place.

Sometimes he eats with us, but for one week, two weeks, one month. Civilian life is different because my children accept the situation because it's nice when their father stays with us. They are very happy, but not always possible. Probably tomorrow, he says, 'See you next month.'"

Her husband sat in on the interview to serve as a translator. He went on to describe that in addition to the fact that the officer is consistently around at Fort Leavenworth, International Officers' families also don't have to worry about the safety of their military-connected family member. He described it this way:

[In] the Mexican Army, the way it's different than the U.S. is we don't go outside our country to do operations. We do them in our country. We don't know. We can stay today talking, but in the afternoon, we need to move to this place because we need to help the people in something. Sometimes she asks me, 'Where are you?', and I tell her, 'I can't tell you. Look at the news and you will know. I can't tell you, but look at the news.'

At the same time, International Officers had the longest list of challenges that were specific to their group. These challenges included the geographic relocation to an entirely new country, language barriers, cultural barriers, and a lack of support from their home country. These challenges create unique challenges for these families in what they otherwise describe as a very positive experience.

For even the most seasoned of International Officers, being stationed in an unfamiliar country is a hardship on the family. IO-8, whose home country is Canada, has accompanied her husband to various duty stations across Canada, England, Australia, and now the United States. She discussed the challenges of moving from one country to another so frequently, "While abroad in England and Australia, although we lived amongst the locals, our military obligations meant that we socialized with people from 41 different countries. Spending time with these people coming from such different backgrounds and beliefs was a real education for all of us."

She went on to talk about the differences in school years from one country to another. “The school year in Australia runs from February to December. Our move back to Canada meant that the boys jumped right back into school without a summer holiday and missed their first three months of school” This is typical for students of International Officers when they move from one country to another, as the school months for the country they’re departing don’t frequently align with the country they are coming to. The final challenge she discussed was the practical challenge of traveling between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, “After all, not everyone gets to experience the Northern and Southern Hemisphere first hand. We said goodbye to Alberta, Canada in -41 Celsius weather and arrived in Canberra, Australia one week later to be greeted by plus 40 Celsius weather.” Another issue that develops for International families is returning home. IO-13 described the process of that her family has to go through in order to prepare for their return to their home country. She said, “When we return from this opportunity, when Tonio returns from the U.S., he will take an exam and try to evaluate how Tonio is in evaluation with his classmates. In that way, we have to do a lot of papers and forms to return to our country. The certificate that you give us, we have to go to Topeka and then it is sent to Washington, who sends this paper on to our country to our school. With this paper, Tonio has the opportunity to take a test. That school says, you go to the eleventh grade or the tenth grade.” International families are relying on the U.S. school to have curriculum and instruction that prepares them for this high stakes testing that determines which grade they are placed in when they return to the schools in their home country.

The second challenge that International Officers and their families face when they transition to the United States is the language barrier. The International Officers have typically received instruction in English before coming to the United States, but their children have varied

levels of English language preparation. The non-military spouse is rarely fluent in English, which presents another obstacle to creating meaningful relationships and involving themselves in the community. All five of the International Officers' spouses interviewed talked about the obstacle that a lack of fluency in speaking the English language has presented for them, with IO-11 saying, "For me, it's [a] continuous problem." IO-8 joked, "You quickly learn that sense of humor and jokes do not necessarily translate." One participant even said that she was interested in participating in parent organizations at school, but was concerned that language would be an issue for her so has not become involved.

Another concern for the families of International Officers is cultural barriers that arise partially as a result of being in a country that is foreign to them, but these cultural differences also arise due to the nature of their duty as a foreign liaison. These duties include working in the company of other International Officers and attending events with officers and their families from around the world as IO-8 described above when she talked about spending time with people from forty-one different countries. She went on to talk about how her two boys, who have spent time in schools in four different countries, have not only had to learn in different languages and dialects, but there were also multiple religions incorporated into the education they received in those different schools. She went on to describe several examples of cultural differences that have required her and her sons to make adjustments to their lives and evaluate priorities in order to work around the differences:

Military moves sometimes force you to give up things that you loved. For example, I have one son that speed skates. I do not know about you, but I haven't found any speed skating arenas locally. Consequently, he has taken up soccer, but that is hard to do at 14. Both boys had to give up ice hockey when we lived in Australia despite the fact that as a Canadian, they had been playing since they were very young. We moved so often that there was no chance for the boys to advance in a sport like soccer growing up. We always

move during the soccer season and miss registration in the new location and so even if you have a child that really loves a sport, they will never really advance. They have also had to learn the rules of the sports in two languages.

My youngest son has managed to continue playing ice hockey. He missed a few years here and there, but he loves ice hockey so much that I drive an awful long way for him to play. Although we were not welcome when we first arrived in the hockey community, we have broken the ice so to speak and are now enjoying the experience.

IO-8 also described an experience while her husband was stationed in Australia that she related to a cultural difference between their expectations and values in Canada and the school that her students were attending at the time, “Some places we have lived, people were nice and used their words politely to work out conflict. Other places the school has told the parent to teach their child to defend themselves when they come home from school with a scar on their face in grade one.

Other participants also described cultural differences that exist between their families and experiences they have had in the United States including, IO-12, who discussed expressive differences between her own family and the families in the United States: “In my culture for example, it’s normal to do this activity. A simple example for us is it’s common to shake hands. Everywhere you go, we shake hands. Sometimes here we try to shake hands and people don’t respond to that, or us laughing. I don’t know if you noticed us laughing, we’re used to hug and kiss because it’s normal. That’s the way we express [ourselves]. That’s normal, very expressive. Sometimes we feel off. Don’t judge. I think that’s the way we seem. I know you do a good job of understanding international students, but sometimes I think you have to understand them. They have needs.”

The fourth and final challenge that is specific to International Officers and their families is the fact that they have commitments that create demands on their time that don't exist for other military or civilian children. This primarily takes the form of International Officers' events. Two of the five International participants described these events as difficult because of the fact that it creates another military-related commitment that involves not only the military-connected family member, but the entire family is expected to participate. IO-8 described these events this way:

International events are different from place to place. Our responsibilities are never the same. At the end of the day, each international represents their country. Sometimes a country will host an event, usually in order to educate the attending people about their culture. At times, a function might be held to celebrate a common bond they have with other countries. For example, the Commonwealth countries will get together; the Germans might host an evening to explain their connection with the United States. The international functions offer the opportunity for people to have a global interactions to better understand our world.

She further described these events as a commitment that causes children of International Officers to grow up a little quicker when she said:

They are [more mature] in many ways because of the moves and the functions they have to attend. A lot of times, for my children the television reports are present. They are speaking with Generals. They are speaking with our Governor General. They are speaking with politicians. They have to be on their best behavior all the time.

### **Non-commissioned Officers.**

The group of participants married to Non-Commissioned Officers mentioned just one challenge that wasn't mentioned previously as a common challenge for all groups. NCO-5 was the only participant that brought it up, but it was something that appeared to be a great concern

for her. She described the lack of a holidays and extended weekends for Non-commissioned officers that stems from the nature of their duties:

Everything you do revolves around, 'What does my husband have to do tomorrow? Does he have to deploy? Does he have to go to training? Is he going to get this four day off? Because for my husband and his MOS (Military Operational Specialist), that's not always the case. The [Commissioned] Officers here on post, every four day weekend, they're going to have off because they're not going to have school. It's just eh way it is. My husband's MOS, the MP's (Military Police) on post, the cooks on post-it'd be different if we had a hospital on post, but we don't. They don't get the four days that everyone else gets off. Our husbands or spouses don't get that. They don't care, because the prison doesn't run on a holiday schedule. At Christmas time, most soldiers get half days. My world isn't like that. They don't care if it's a holiday or not, guess who still has to eat. The soldiers, the prisoners, they still have to eat. So our world doesn't revolve around, even the typical military world, ours is even different from that. That does make a difference in our world. We've had many Christmases, my husband's had to work many Thanksgivings, many Easters. My kids didn't understand, how come so and so's dad is off. They've got this many days off. Their dad didn't work. We couldn't go home. Dad had to work because stuff still has to get taken care of whether it's a four day or not.

For NCO-5, not getting holidays and four day weekends are an even bigger deal than it would be for other Non-Commissioned Officer's families because this family lives just three hours from their hometown and extended family. As previously mentioned, this is rare for military families to be stationed so close to their hometown and families. Not having holidays and four day weekends means not getting to take advantage of this close proximity.

### **Commissioned Officers.**

For Commissioned Officers' spouses, the needs are more about volunteer opportunities. As previously mentioned, many of the spouses of Commissioned Officers have a hard time

continuing careers because of the mobility of their military-connected family member. The result is that many of the participants that were interviewed are stay at home parents that have time to give of themselves. This frequently takes the shape of volunteering in schools, the chapel, or some other charitable area on or near post. While International Officers' spouses are also typically stay at home parents, the language and cultural barriers often prevent them from reaching out and getting involved. The spouses of Non-Commissioned Officers are also in a similar position, but because of the difference in pay between Commissioned and Non-Commissioned Officers, sometimes the spouses of Non-Commissioned Officers have to work outside the home to supplement the household income.

## **Chapter 5- Needs and Expectations of Each Group**

While there are many experiences, as described in Chapter 4, that are common to all three of the groups that were interviewed, these experiences put the families in a position where they are in need of support . It is critical to the family, to the army, the community, and to the school where students attend that the family get the support they need during their time of need. Below is a discussion of how those needs are currently being met so that further discussion of further expectations can be outlined later in this chapter. Current support for military families can be classified into three areas: Needs met by the army, Needs met by the community, and Needs met by schools.

### **Needs Met by the Army**

Several of the participants said that today's army is much more sensitive to the needs of its Officers and their families than it was when they first started their careers. CO-14 talked about this when she described her experience twenty years ago, the first time they posted at Fort Leavenworth for her husband to attend the Command General Staff College (CGSC) and School for Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). After completing his schooling, he was deployed: "That was his first deployment. The children and I decided to stay back here in Kansas because we thought we had a good support system. I was very involved in the community. We had family about an hour away. This was our first deployment. We didn't know what to expect, and he was being assigned to a unit overseas and we knew he was going to be deployed the whole time. At that point, it was a little different than today. We didn't have a lot of the policies in place to support the military families that were geographically separated from their families. At the time, we were living off the installation. If we had been living on the installation, we would have had to move off. So that's been a great benefit lately." It's not just policies like allowing families to

stay on post while the military member is deployed that have changed in the army. The army now also provides a number of services that support the military members as well as their families.

One service that the army provides that came up the most is Family Readiness Groups (FRG's). The perception of value of these FRG's varied among the participants, but it was mentioned as a service currently being provided by nearly all of the participants. CO-14 described the history of FRG's, "I think they learned a lot from Vietnam believe it or not. There was no support, so a lot of the senior spouses when the Gulf War came around really implemented the Family Support Groups, and then they became Family Readiness Groups. They were really there to support them, arm them, and build them up. It's been phenomenal. They have resources in place if the families take advantage and they participate and attend the trainings, they're there. They're free. It's like leading a horse to water, you can't make them drink, but we've learned a lot over the last ten to twelve years. It really started with the Gulf War, so when 9/11 around, it was like okay, now we're playing the game. We've done the practice on the fields and we're no longer on the bench, we're in the game. They've got systems in place to help. Say I'm going to go on vacation and my husband's deployed, if something happens to him, who's going to know how to get in touch with me? All they've got is a home record. So you teach the families and train them that you've got a rear D command, or you need to let them know where you're going to be. It's not that it's big brother watching, we just would like to get in touch with you. It may just be to let you know that everything is okay, don't listen to the news, your soldier is fine."

CO-16 also described the function and purpose of the FRG's this way:

FRG's are good. They serve their purpose for getting you integrated into the military. As a new Second Lieutenant's wife, I'll never forget the Colonel inviting us and I not knowing what to expect, but she was very welcoming and warm. I called it Military 101 for the wife. This was in Georgia, and I'm a good old Southern girl so we learned how to wear white gloves and to serve them and what to do, and the tea. I'm a country girl. I never did such things. It was kind of neat, but also intimidating. It was good to learn how to handle yourself in receptions and ceremonies, those events, because the army has them. They have balls and meet and greets that are really formal. That was good with the FRG. They help you with deployments. When my husband was in Fort Hood, he was gone all the time to NTC, which is National Training Center out in California. That's where they go play war in the desert. They ramp up for it where you're at. This also happened in Colorado too. He was gone a lot. They ramp up for it, and then they're gone for a month or so or however long it was 4-6 weeks. During that time, the FRG was a big help for support to let you know where your husband's at, what's going on, just to prepare you. When you're new into all this, even when you're not new, it's good to have someone that you know is going through the same thing. If you're having a bad day, you can talk to those girls and gals. Then you have your children and you're going through it and you have those playgroups. You have instant friendships so to speak. You find the ones you connect with. Even the ones you don't connect with, it's still good to have them there. Everyone has similar situations, so we all bounce them off of one another. It's good to have those. It really is. So you're new to the area. You don't know what dentist to use or where to go for whatever it may be, to get your car fixed, or 'Oh my gosh, my washing machine broke, who do I call?' It's good to have those people in your life.

Many of the participants felt like the quality of the Family Readiness Group was based on the quality of the leadership of that group, including CO-19, who chronicled her experiences with FRGs, "The captains' wives are responsible for dispersing the information [about the activity of the military-connected spouses] to the company, their husband's company and the enlisted wives as well. It's a whole chain. Then within your own company, you guys can do your own little picnics. The way a company works and survives really pivots on how the company commander's wife is and the lieutenants' wives under her."

Several of the participants described some of the issues they've run into with FRG's. In fact, CO-19 described FRG's as being "like a bunch of cats in water." She went on to describe

her first experience with an FRG this way, “I was baptized by fire. I was right out of college and I thought, ‘I was in a sorority, I did these things.’ When we were just starting these enlisted wives were so mean to me and I couldn’t understand why. Then I found out that the company commander’s wife told them, ‘I’ll never have an FRG meeting at my house because you’ll see what I have, and know you’ll never have it and you’ll be jealous.’ That’s what I walked into and it sort of went downhill from there.” Other examples of FRG dysfunction include feeling intimidated by some of the members with higher ranking spouses (CO-16, CO-20) i.e. the wife of a colonel may intimidate a second lieutenant’s wife. Another issue that causes problems in an FRG is when there is a lack of communication. NCO-3’s experience with her FRG in Fort Polk, Louisiana was so poor that she moved off post and back to live with her family while her husband was deployed. She said this was because of a lack of communication within the FRG and a lack of support from the group, the two things that FRG exists to provide. She went from that experience in Fort Polk to a much better experience at Fort Leavenworth where she describes the FRG she joined there as “more active.” NCO-6 also echoed these comments, saying, “Sometimes we leave spouses hanging to fend for ourselves.”

When the company-provided FRG doesn’t provide the necessary support that spouses need, they reach out to other groups for support. Sometimes spouses looking for alternative forms of support can find it in other formalized groups designed for other purposes, like Army Community Service (NCO-3) or Spouses Club (CO-14). Other participants described experiences with creating their own support groups based on commonalities. One such commonality that was described by CO-20, “Back when I was younger, I was completely involved [with FRG’s]. As I got older, I think as all people kind of do, you realize what’s important in life, so my support system became my friends, mostly those came from my

children's friends' parents. The baseball team, that's where my support was wherever I was at. The school actually became more of a support than military organizations did. Some people are all in on that (FRGs), but your friends are usually your kids' friends because you have the same interests. You always see each other at school. You always see each other at the ballpark. It kind of morphed from when we were just married and didn't have children, the FRG being my sole support to it just kind of widened out that way." CO-15, CO-16, CO-18, and CO-19 made comments about how their use of FRGs has changed as their experience in the military has grown. CO-15 had this to add:

I think it's your option if you need to use them (FRG's), but I think people make the mistake of thinking, 'We're in Kansas. This is the heartland. What's going to go wrong here? This is not a highly deployed place. My husband is a student.', but you know what everybody's husband isn't a student, and everybody doesn't have a support group. Like a lot of the students get together, and their wives do have support that way, but I live over by the clinic. It's that one little cul-de-sac on a little drive at the end of the cemetery. It's secluded, sometimes forgotten about, maybe good, maybe not. That's a really small cul-de-sac. We've had two neighbors in the eight years we've lived here in this non-deployable community where everybody's a student, and everybody's just kind of relaxing for their ten months until they get their next big whopper of a station. We've had two neighbors killed; one in Iraq and one in Afghanistan on that tiny little street from this little post where nobody goes anywhere. It's a misconception, but thank goodness they lived in that little neighborhood where we made our own support group kind of because had they been living amongst the temporary people that move every ten months to a year, they wouldn't have that kind of bond. So I often think, 'What if we were all moving?' You would be so alone. They were not families that had family nearby and one lady had elderly ailing parents of her own. There's just circumstances, but I think people like to [say], 'I'm independent. I don't need anybody.' Yes, you might.

Another support being offered by the army is counseling services. The stressors of a life in the military are clearly documented. Six of the thirteen participants connected to the United States Army mentioned counseling services as something that they had either participated in for

themselves, their spouse, their children, or someone they knew. NCO-2 described her husband's first deployment like this, "My boys had a hard time, so my oldest, my fourteen year old, his grades started dropping, his attitude changed and he was fighting. Then the little one had anxiety and had to be medicated. We had to do counseling every week, and it was really hard to keep them in school." She went on later in the interview to talk specifically about the struggles that her children were dealing with through this counseling by saying, "My youngest, it was harder for him to adapt to change. It was harder for him to adapt to a new school, or when we would move to a new place and he was dealing with things like night terrors, and he would have them in the daytime too. We would deal with regression in behaviors and regression in potty training, and that was always hard for him, but at the same time I think that although he had to go through it young, I appreciated him going through it young while I could care for him and give him that protection as opposed to him going through it at an older age, so I think this will make him stronger because he's becoming more resilient." With all that military families go through, it's important that all family members have access to counseling services, but not all military members feel comfortable accessing these services. Some participants were like CO-17, who mentioned the perception that some soldiers feel that accessing counseling services will reflect poorly on their family or on their company because they aren't mentally or emotionally strong enough to handle the things that come with military life. CO-17 stated that she feels this is just a perception of soldiers, and is not reality. She said, "No one takes names down and says, 'Sergeant or PFC did this, or husband did that.' It's just like, 'Come on in. We'll get you where you need to go.' It's totally anonymous."

A third service that the army is providing for its families is free childcare through its Child Development Center (CDC). This allows families to know that their children are

supervised and provided with age-appropriate activities designed to prepare them for school. The CDC is for children, pre-school age and younger. CO-17 outlined the benefits of the CDC, “My kids have used the CDC to learn on whatever post we’ve been on. They’ve had teachers there, and they were taught. They had a leg up when they got into kindergarten. That was the best thing we could have done. It’s a preschool program and it’s on post at the CDC. They evaluate your kids, and what they need to work on, if they can see developmental issues and that kind of thing. It give you a heads up so you know what to look out for. It makes them like kids and going to school and socialization, sharing, taking your turn, being polite, raising your hand, all of that. That was a wonderful foundation.”

In addition to the childcare that is provided through the CDC, the army provides other activities aimed at supporting families with children as well through organizations like the Deployed Spouses Club, which CO-16 had fond memories about:

When he [her husband] deployed, they did have the Deployed Spouses Club. They’d have the Valentine’s meal, so instead of being all alone on Valentine’s, they’d have childcare, and you’d get to eat a nice meal with other women whose husbands are deployed or spouses are deployed. That was nice so that you felt like you’re not alone, and have someone else to talk to. I think it offers a lot of support emotionally and also gives you something to do. They’re always putting out different events if you’re interested in doing this. They also give you, I call it respite care, especially when your husband is deployed, you’re allotted so many hours to take your young children to daycare for free and you can go out for the day or whatever you need to do. The military does a lot of good things I think to help you out.

NCO-7 had similar things to say about the opportunities for her children when she said, “Last deployment, I think we probably had a lot of things at Fort Bragg. I just didn’t know because it’s such a bigger base, and there’s not the one-on-one contact like there is here. I had no idea that there were SKYS programs that the kids can participate in at no cost, so that was awesome. They

all did gymnastics and swimming lessons, and kept us busy, which sometimes did not feel good. It kept us very busy, but it definitely helped to pass the time. I'm not sure what SKYS stands for. It's an MWR (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation) program. During deployments, kids get \$300 per kid to spend on classes. They have dance and gymnastics, and they have health classes with exercise and that type of thing. They also do respite care. You get free child care, I think sixteen hours a month so mom can keep her sanity. I only had the one little one at the time and my teenage daughter was still at home, so I didn't have to use it that much, but I know there were people who were very grateful to be able to go get groceries without screaming kids." One International Officer's spouse, IO-9, also noticed the activities that exist for military families in the United States and drew a comparison to the events in her home country of Japan:

Here I've noticed that you have a special gathering for kids whose fathers are deployed like at Thanksgiving and Christmas, they get to be together. That's a very good thing I think. In Japan, usually the parents get to go to school before Mother's Day and Father's Day. There are many different children like there are kids who don't have a father and kids that don't have a mother. For those kids, it's very stressful because they see other moms and dads coming to school and watch their classes. Here I don't see any of those especially for Mother's, especially for Father's Day. For military kids, most of them, fathers are not home and it's very difficult for them to participate in school activities, but if you have those get together things, they feel that they are not alone and I think that helps them a lot.

Another service that the army provides is communication during deployments. This service has improved over time as the technology has advanced into email, social media, and video calling abilities like Skype. Several spouses addressed the value that being able to hear from your spouse provides during a war time deployment. C0-14, whose husband had been deployed for nearly a year at the time of the interview, said, "Thankfully, we've had great communications, probably better this deployment than we've had on the three prior. The first thing I would do is check email, because that was communication for him because my day is his

night and vice versa. That was a way for him to keep in touch with our daily lives. It was all the little things so he knew: Layla is doing this, Avery is doing this, here's how they've scored on tests, they've got a big homework assignment, say a little prayer because they've got a big test. So it was really a concerted effort to keep him connected to the family while he was gone, but it wasn't a chore. It was just something I wanted to do, or needed to do." CO-15 used Skype to tell her deployed husband that their son had been diagnosed with Autism. Other spouses used it to help keep their children connected to their father and concomitantly, the father could remind the kids of his expectations while he is away, as in the situation with CO-19: "We were fortunate that we were able to still have contact with him. If the kids were being pests, he could say, 'Remember you're supposed to help out and behave.'" Communicating with your husband in this way isn't ideal, but the technology tools for improved communication reduces the feeling of disconnection when the father was away, and also allowed the husband to be a part of the family life as videos of life events can be posted to the internet, on social media, and even sometimes can be streamed live.

The army also provides seminars as a service to officers and their families in new situations. They provide a course for International Officers and their families arriving in the U.S. for the first time to prepare them for what they can expect in the region of the country they've entered in terms of weather, expectations, wildlife, food, etc. There are also courses for new moms, newly married couples, and first deployments. One of the International Officers, IO-11, described her experience with the International Spouse's Course she participated in:

A group of ladies provided us with an English course. When I arrived, normally the biggest one is in the July, the International Spouse's Course provides an alliance between Leavenworth and Lansing. Normally, it's done by retired military spouses. This course tries to explain a lot of things in the United States, especially in the Midwest in Leavenworth about the weather,

about appliances, about the house. It's about two weeks. It's a good course. After that, we start English lessons two times a week. When I started, I started here on post, but now this course can be done at the community college, KCCC (Kansas City Community College). It's free. The teachers volunteer. It's good for the International spouse. In my case, once a month, I have lunch with a Senior spouse. It's an International spouse and an American spouse. It's interesting too.

CO-14 talked about a similar course that she teaches for Field Grade Officer's Spouses. Field Grade officers include the ranks of Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel. She relayed:

There's a class that we give here called the Field Grade Spouse's Seminar, and we teach a lot of the military spouses that come here for the CGSC (Command General Staff College) what they can expect when their soldier moves on for his next duty assignment so they're not blindsided. Realistic expectations they can have is probably a good thing. We teach ways they can impact the unit whether they have full time careers or whether they want to be that super volunteer, there are ways they can be connected and support their soldier. They do a pre-command course here where they bring in incoming Battalion and Brigade Commanders as well as the Command Sergeant Majors and their spouse for a week, and I go and sit on panels to answer their questions of what to expect-kind of that crystal ball effect-what I wish I had known. I do touch on kids usually during that time; things they can do to help their children.

NCO-6 also outlined how much more progressive the army has become in trying to identify areas where they can be more supportive of families:

The army is trying. There are support agencies out there. I'm not one to just go to a group to show me where things are. I can negotiate and find things on my own. They do now have support groups, especially for the new mothers groups. That has gotten a lot better over the years because I see a lot out there about new parents support groups. They've got several different fast classes where you can learn about finances and that sort of stuff. They are really trying to move toward giving the young ones information they need to survive, and not get in debt and try to support them so that they don't sink.

Another service the army provides, which was discussed by several participants is the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). This program is for adults and children who have

disabilities. CO-20 mentioned that she is enrolled in the EFMP herself as a result of an accident that took place when she was in the army. She said, “That’s what kept us from going overseas. All of our duty stations have been here in the United States.” This is seen by some as beneficial because it allows them to stay in the United States, but it can also be detrimental to the career of the military-connected family member. This was the case for CO-15, whose husband had taken months learning the Latvian language and thousands of dollars in snow gear, but the orders were denied at the last minute because they had a son enrolled in the EFMP. Overall, however, EFMP membership is a positive thing. CO-15 later said, “When we got here [Fort Leavenworth] the EFMP officer has been phenomenal. So we’ve done a lot of activities with them. My girls volunteer when we do Special Olympics activities. They’re volunteering at the special needs camp next week that my son is going to. So EFMP here has been a good family activity.” NCO-4 was the only other participant that had experience with EFMP. She was very pleased with the activity and support they provided for her son with a disability, “They have chimed in and really helped him at every station we have been at. That has really helped him to keep his confidence up and know that he can learn just like everybody else. So that’s been amazing.”

The next service that came up as part of the interview process was a policy practice. That is the practice of stabilization. While soldiers typically get new orders for a change of duty station (PCS) every 1-2 years, the army allows soldiers and their families to stabilize, or delay orders for moving when one of their children enters high school. CO-19 restated how important it is for families to be able to do this: “The military seems to be trying to make it easier and help high school kids out. I think that’s my concern right now, although, I think we’re going to stay here until Victoria graduates so we don’t have to deal with that so much with the scholarships or with class ranking or with even sports activities or with fine arts. Anything with where it matters

in those types of avenues for scholarships. Even losing classes that they've taken here, but they don't transfer there. I think that is really where it matters, helping out kids." CO-14 brought up another possibility for stabilization saying, "He deployed this last time, his fourth deployment, really to stabilize the family because the kids were getting older and we realized the challenge of moving high school students from state to state." The option she was referencing is that some soldiers if soldiers take the option of deploying, their family can continue to live at their current post, allowing the children to stay in the same school for continuity.

NCO-4 talked about two other services the army provides to make military life easier on families. The army provides an Education Liaison at each post that serves to bridge the gap between parents and the schools. She described her experience this way: "When we were overseas, those groups [army-provided family supports] came in really handy. Our educational liaison was really great with going into the school and making sure that everything was in place for him. Even when we got here, you guys [Patton Junior High Staff and Education Liaison] were really amazing with helping to get things put into place for him even though they [IEP paperwork] were expired, you guys still were there to help put things in place for him, which was great." She went on to talk in more detail about another service than any other participant. That service was Military One Stop, which she described this way, "When we were getting ready to relocate, we always used one source, Military One Stop, because you can call there and set up appointments with anybody. They normally can tell you about your relocation, the area, and daycares. You can really use that for anything, financial needs. They'll set you up with a financial counselor to help you do your budget, tell you if there are any classes or anything like that. It's a really good source."

The tenth and final service that the military provides is less of a formal service, and relates back to the “Sense of Community” that was discussed early in this chapter. Two of the Non-commissioned Officer participants and two of the Commissioned Officer participants described the opportunity they have to be around other military families while living on post as one of the greatest supports that the military offers, but this theme can really be seen in the responses that nearly all of the participants gave throughout their interviews. It became apparent that military families support each other. NCO-3 described her children’s experiences in schools located on an army post by saying, “I think just having other children that are similar to you or in the same place in life that you are is helpful. I think in the schools they attended in Texas, there may have been a few military kids, but it was not like here. It was a really big deal if your dad was deployed in schools that were not on post because they just don’t understand that. Here, it’s more like, ‘Oh, that’s just part of life.’ I’ve enjoyed things like that. It’s helpful to them.” CO-18 described a colonel and his wife who were excellent mentors and supports for her and her husband when they were new to the military saying, “His wife was like a mom to us, which is huge when it’s your first duty station. She would always pick up the wives when they were brand new. She would pick you up, take you to the [Wives Support Group] Coffee, make sure you were involved. She would bring this big packet of information, which for me was huge because it taught me, after the next duty station when she wasn’t there, I thought, ‘That’s how I want to be. So when it’s my turn, I know exactly how I want this to work out.’” NCO-6 described support she received from another military wife while they were deployed overseas and her daughter was ill in a German hospital, “Our unit was really good. They came and brought us stuff that we needed from the hospital. My neighbor upstairs, and God Bless us military wives when we’re deployed, we bond, and I called her. She had two little kids herself and put them in her van and

brought me toothbrushes, jammies, and stuffed animals. She drove from 45 minutes away to make sure that I had what I needed.” CO-19 talked about another way that members of the military were supportive of each other, “In the high schools, when there were problem kids, the schools would call the parent’s unit, the commander would say, ‘Your duty day is at the school.’ I think that’s important too, not only for the kid, but for the parent because you have a lot of parents who are, ‘Not my kid.’”

### **Needs Met by the Community**

Four of the participants including two of the International Officers’ wives described encouragement from the community as something that they appreciate and hope for. IO-8 mentioned her time in Nova Scotia where she felt tremendous support by the non-military community, “We felt very at home here. The community welcomed us like no other and made us feel as if we had always been part of it. It was while we were posted here that my husband was deployed to Afghanistan for nine months. That is not including the time he was away on training prior to being deployed. The community showed us amazing support during this time.” When asked if this was a church or formal community organization that provided this support, she said, “No, just good people. For example, a family celebrated Father’s Day the day before so that they could invite us over on Father’s Day. They did this because they knew that we would be missing my husband even more this day. They did not want us to be sad. They were just so caring, so considerate.” IO-10 talked about feeling supported in the United States as an International Officer’s family because everywhere she goes shopping, they offer a discount for military members. She said, “It’s really amazing and important for us.” CO-20 talked about her two years (2008-09) in the state of Washington where she felt a strong lack of support from the community and how important it is to her family to have that feeling:

It was a very liberal part of the country. The education system was like I said, not the best. We would have people stand at the gates. It was kind of like the Westboro [Baptist Church] people, but it wasn't them. It was just people would just stand there with signs. My son would say, 'Why do those people hate my daddy so much?' It was almost like Vietnam, how they were so angry. They poured concrete on the railroad track so the equipment leaving for the soldiers couldn't get to port. So we had soldiers downrange that couldn't get their equipment. That was dangerous to them. We couldn't go to downtown Olympia. I was going to try to go and get my Master's but the school that was nearby, if you had a military sticker, they would flip cars. They just hated you because you were military.

Everywhere else has been great. They've been very supportive, very welcoming. I was in Arkansas of all places, and I was buying yellow ribbon because we were visiting my family. All the ribbon was on sale. I was buying all this yellow ribbon and a lady stopped me and said, 'Ma'am, what is all this yellow ribbon for?' I said, 'My husband's deployed and we're going to do something with it.' She started crying, and she just came up and wrapped her arms around me and said, 'God Bless you. God Bless your family.' You get a lot of that, especially here in Leavenworth. People pay for our lunches just because they see him in uniform. A lot of the people here are retired, but you still have people doing things like that. So Washington state was the most unique in that regard. Everywhere else, we're very supported, or have been.

Another way the community supports its military families is through faith-based opportunities. Three participants discussed their involvement with faith-based organizations including NCO-3 who said, "Our chapel was always a lot of support. The women's ministry there, I've been a big part of and they're a great support. So I always recommend women recommend women go there when they're not feeling supported because it's a big help."

The third and final way that participants felt supported by the community was through language training support offered by local community colleges. IO-10 reported that her husband and children had come to the United States with some English language preparation, but she had almost no training at all. A local community College, Barton Community College, offers an English Language class that she participates in. She described this by saying, "Recently, I enrolled in Barton College. I have an International English class with another International

woman off post in Leavenworth, but only two days each week, and one hour [each]. At Barton, it's two hours." These are two opportunities that she has reached out to pursue in an effort to become more English proficient and better appreciate American culture.

### **Needs Met by Schools**

Schools that are located on military posts are often sensitive to the fact that they are serving a clientele with special needs. Frequently at least some of the staff that teach in these schools have some connection to the military through marriage, children, or their own personal past experience.

All of the participants interviewed were pleased with many of the things that are currently being offered by military-connected schools. CO-19 described her satisfaction with schools this way, "How many schools do you walk in like Eisenhower [Elementary School] and it feels like a day spa? They have a science lab for all K-6 [classes], and iPads, and SMARTboards I'm not saying that technology is the answer to all of education. I don't think that at all, but you have all the resources available. You have the laser lab in the tech department. To have that opportunity, that's great. I just think the benefits are wonderful here."

One thing that schools are currently providing according to all nineteen participants is communication between the home and school. Every participant said that they prefer open, two way communication, which they felt they were getting in many ways. One of the things that parents were very appreciative of was the availability of grades and academic progress through the online grading system, Skyward. NCO-4 said, "I love the fact that I can go on Skyward and check their grades and be like, 'Why are you missing this assignment? What's going on? Tell me what's happening.' I can email the teachers and see what's going on. I think my son's teacher at

Eisenhower has me on speed dial. I love it. I love the open communication. I love to be involved in my kids' education. I think that's the only way that kids can be successful is if you know what's going on with them and you're involved with the teacher. I feel like if the teachers know they have your support, they push the kids even harder versus the parents that are just there. I'm not going to say, don't care, I'll just say, aren't involved." In addition to the grades being accessible to parents at all times, Patton Junior High takes another step of reaching out to parents with weekly updates containing a list of missing assignments and what to expect in class for that week. IO-13 talked about the advantages of this when she said, "I don't know how many times in a week, we received the grades and missing assignments through email, [which] was really good for us. In our country, you have three months with the teacher and the teacher says that's the problem. For us, it's better to have the week by week report in everything. I think it's the best way to have control over your kids." NCO-5 who describes herself as "hyper-involved" said she loves to see what the class as a whole is doing, but also likes to see how her child "has done and not just a score on a piece of paper. How is his behavior this week?" NCO-6 followed with this, "I love the email with the report every week, especially the history teacher. Every day, I knew exactly what they were doing and I loved it, especially with me going back to work. I could check my email on my lunch break at work and say, 'Hey look here.' I would forward it to my daughter's email and say, 'Did you see this? Have you done it?' It's wonderful, and it kept us in the loop of what's going on. I like all kinds of communication from the school. I want to know what's going on. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to volunteer as much as I used to since I went back to school, but I like to be in the loop. I like to be able to just walk in and the teachers and the front desk to know me and say, 'Hey, you're Kara's mom because I think communication is a key to success for our children. If we don't know what our kids are doing in

school, we can't help them." CO-15 like the fact that the technology made the communication (newsletters, grades, weekly email updates, etc.) available to her to use as she sees fit and if she has the time to make use of it saying this:

If I get that, then I can choose to be on it and ask them, 'Did you do this today?' or years like this when my husband's gone, I can just sort of choose to ignore it and hope that all is the best. The more information you can get, the better. I think that I am just a firm believer and I've had teachers appreciate it. Some teachers may not appreciate it, but I like the teachers to know what's going on. I've typically told the teachers, 'Hey, dad leaves in a month. Dad leaves in two weeks. Oh, by the way, Dad's coming home for Christmas break. We have an opportunity to go somewhere because we know that dad's leaving. We're going to take the kids out of school.' I let them know about the family situation. I let them know if one of the other kids is sick. I've had a kid in and out of the E.R. all week, because I think what happens at home is so important to gauge what's going on with kid at school. Sometimes maybe to much information, but again, they can take the information they get and decide what they want to deal with. A lot of the times, if something like that happens a teacher will come back and be like, 'I'm so glad you told me. So and so has been acting up and I didn't know what was going on with him, but now I realize that he was up late because you were at the E.R. with the other one. I think it helps out as a two way street because I want to know if something happens with Sally at school, or if Johnny is being nasty to my kid. I think the more information the better. It just gives you a better gauge of what your kid is going through. I think that teachers need to tailor that to the parents. I have a friend who told their teacher they wanted to know if their child fell below and A, which to me is a little much. I'm happy when my kid gets a B. That teacher didn't necessarily do that, and I know it disturbed them (the parent). I think teachers need to take into account and I'm sure that they do, that you have a bunch of Type A Colonels out there who expect their kids, just high expectations. I don't know that you get that at civilian schools. I'm sure you get it to an extent, but when you put a community of people together that are by the book and rule oriented and all of that, I think it's a little different dynamic. I think the teachers really need to be flexible, so if Johnny's mom wants a call when Johnny gets below an A, give an email or a call. I really like Skyward and I have a friend who is working on a Master's. I sent her the link so she could get on the USD 207 (Fort Leavenworth) sight and she said it was one of the best school websites she's ever seen. So I do think that they do a good job and I think Skyward's a great thing. Like I said, the more information the better. Months go by, I don't check their grades, then there are times when I have the time and I do want to get on it and I can if I want.

CO-18 also talked about tailoring the communication specifically to individual parents' needs. This can be difficult for teachers to do with larger class sizes, but the dividends can be tremendous as she reported about the year her daughter skipped a grade while she and the daughter were on an accompanied deployment with her husband in Germany, "It (the decision to move to the higher grade) was a huge blessing, but it was really scary. They (the school) contacted me all the time. The teacher would email me on an at least weekly basis to say what it was like. 'What I have seen awesome that your child did this week', just to keep me in touch because I'm clear up on the mountain (the school was down in the valley). I did volunteer once a week, so if it didn't happen on Tuesday, when I was in the building [I didn't know]. I think they really did a good job and they covered all the bases, and they kept me totally posted all year just knowing my anxiety level going into it. Then I thought, 'What if it's bad later?', but [it's been] all good."

CO-17 said she likes the school to home communication to be like "a partnership", which CO-16 described this way, "The teachers are so wonderful, 'Hey, give me a call.' They respond to emails or notes. I think it's hugely important, if you don't have that open communication and feel like there's an open door. Anybody can say they have an open door and feel like there's an open door, and please come, but do they really? Can you feel that it's an open door? Can you bring stuff to the teacher, that sort of thing? I think that's important. If you don't know what's going on, and you guys have done a great job of letting us know. Your letters and stuff like that, I make sure, 'Okay, where's that letter at?' For everything like what's going on in the school down to the athletics. There's times, I know there's a ballgame, but I can't remember where it is. Where's those directions to it. You all really do a good job of trying to cover it all. I think that's important." CO-19 also discussed how much she appreciates the open two way communication

she's experienced at Fort Leavenworth when she discussed the way the district implemented Common Core. It was a controversial curriculum, but they opened up the lines of communication through town hall style meetings. She portrayed it this way, "At least the school, I didn't go to them, but they had six different options to go and learn about the curriculum, which is good. Now it's on me. It's my fault. I wasn't able to go. It's not that the school didn't offer. It wasn't just a onetime thing. Here are six options at four different locations. I like the fact that parents aren't told to stay away."

NCO-2 and CO-18 both talked about how it touched them that the teachers their children had noticed when their children are acting out of the ordinary and made contact with the parent in an effort for early intervention. NCO-2 described her experience this way:

What I like about military schools is that when changes come up with your child, I would receive calls at home so that I would know exactly what was going on at the school or the calendar that they would send home that shows exactly what color your child had for that day with elementary children and it would explain why, you would have a note there and you were able to respond and actually see what was going on with your child. If the behaviors changed, I would receive a call about that. That's the same thing with the after school programs, 'Jaden has said this. Do you know what's going on? Jaden said he's moving to Virginia, is there something going on?', or 'He seems to be upset. He's not talking as much.' I would get calls like that and that was very helpful. That was helpful in understanding that something was going on with my child because you don't see it at home every day and sometimes a child acts different at home than he does at school.

Parents are very appreciative when teachers and schools go above and beyond to notice these changes and communicate them back to the home.

Another service being offered by schools that participants talked about was Hearts Apart. This program was described by NCO-3 as, "a program they do once a month at the elementary schools (and Junior High). They do some sort of activity like they might take all of the kids [with deployed or PCS'ed parents] to see a movie at the movie theater here on post, or they do a craft

in the lunchroom after school. Something like that, and it's just an opportunity for the kids to get together because they have a common bond that they have a parent gone. They might make cards for their company or something like that. Just to acknowledge that those kids are going through something that's not easy on the family." CO-14 acknowledged that her perception of Hearts Apart has changed with time saying, "They did have a Hearts Apart program back then. My daughter chose not to participate. I was very nervous about it. She was doing great with the deployment, was very positive, had a great attitude about this, was thriving, and I was very afraid at the time that Hearts Apart was a 'woe is me' and sit around and sing Kumbaya because everyone else was not doing well. I didn't want her to know that not doing well was an option so we didn't participate. I have learned now that they are great programs and they can act as good role models. You're not alone. There are other kids like you out there, especially at this installation."

Many others had a similar feeling to that which CO-14 described above, which is that military schools provide that feeling of comradery, and "I'm not alone in this." A theme throughout the study is that military families like to be around military families that know exactly what they're going through and understand what it's like. Parents like their children to have that familiarity in their schools as well as stated by NCO-6 when she talked about her daughter's first day at Patton Junior High School, "At first she came into the school like, 'I'm not making any friends. I don't want to be here. Nobody talked to me on the first day of school.' I said, 'You know what? You realize this is everybody's first day of school there.' Especially here, we have such a high turnover because of the command college. Everybody's first day is today. Nobody knows each other. It's not like back in Alabama where everybody's been going to school with one another since kindergarten. There, she had to break into the cliques of everybody

has been going to school together since they were in diapers. Here it was everybody's first day. I think the teachers did very well at icebreakers and trying to bring the kids together and opening up so that they weren't wall flowers and all sulking and sucked up next to the wall." CO-20 said it this way:

You have a better understanding on post. That's one reason, I wanted them on post because all of the teachers have a class full of military children. The peer groups actually help each other out, 'I know what you're going through. I understand what you're going through.' They get that on a daily basis. 'You're dad's deployed. Man, I know what that's like. My dad's deployed too.' So they have that peer support here. So, USD 207's very unique in that these are just phenomenal schools and they have that, but going out to Lansing (neighboring school district), you're going to have a couple of people whose dads might be deployed, and the teachers may not be tracking like that. Sometimes even, families will go back home and you might have one military child and no one's going to understand. They don't understand what it's like to have a parent deployed, or no one's there to go to your ballgames, or no one is there to come to your National Honor Society thing because they're not there.

NCO-5 also mentioned that there tended to be that increased understanding from teachers because they have been in the boots of the military family before as well describing it this way, "The best teachers that I have found are actually military spouses because they know. They know what it's like to have that. You will see once a child knows that the teacher is also military, it makes a difference in how they communicate because they know, 'Hey, my world is your world too.' It makes a difference with the parents as well. The parents or mothers look at that teacher differently. You know this world as well as I don, where as a civilian teacher comes into the school district, unless you've been a part of this life, you can't say you know anything about it. You have no clue what my child goes through. You have no clue what my child goes through unless you've lived it."

Another service that isn't quite as consistent across all schools, but some schools do provide to families is a sense of flexibility in attendance policies and curriculum requirements. This stems from the understanding of the situation that military families are in. NCO-5 talked about the importance of allowing students to take a block of days off to be with their deployed family member: "At regular duty stations when parents are deployed out for a year or more, they don't schedule deployments around the school year. If dad comes home for leave for two weeks, that's two weeks you get with them out of that year, so typically the family wants to go and get away from that installation. So that is one thing that they have to be ready for and say that's fine, whether to prepare to have that student's work already done or be ready to excuse those absences. Whatever it needs to be, they need to be able to excuse it and say, 'Go be with your family.' and be understanding of that." CO-14 also addressed the fact that there are "extenuating circumstances". "It's hard, especially in a military community to have very fine and set rules. I know that you need to in some case, but I think there needs to be some exceptions to policy. A perfect example of this is block leave and number of days absent. It would be really nice if during a block leave, if it falls in the middle of a school year, that kids be given extra time to make up assignments, or maybe if they're going to be away, they do an oral presentation on that area. Research it, go to museums, and then present it back to the class. You're still getting the research, the writing, your oral skills, and you're also still sharing with the class. So thinking outside the box is helpful." International Officers also notice when schools step outside of the normal policy to assist when students don't fit into the mold that policies are written for, and it's not always big school-wide policies like attendance as described by IO-11, "I had one case in Junior High about the one teacher. I think my son in Brazil, used cursive letters. The teacher told him, 'Write in printed letters.' I told her that for him, it's okay, but in Brazil, he needs to write in

cursive. She said, ‘Okay, he can write in cursive letters.’ She understood my problem. The teacher said it’s no problem for her.” For this parent, understanding the special need and making the necessary adjustment meant a great deal.

The final thing that the participants mentioned as a service being provided by schools is the consistency. CO-19 mentioned that no matter what else was going on in her family’s life at home, they could count on the fact that school was going to be the same. It was something they could consistently count on to be unfailingly rational when the rest of their life didn’t seem to make sense. CO-14 also talked about the need for consistency for her children by saying, “Ideally the parents are first line of support, but if the parents aren’t doing well, dad might be out of the picture, mom’s not coping well. It really becomes the community that needs to step in and offer that continuity, and we talk about the schools all the time because you are that continuity. Mom might be falling apart, but that student knows that at 8:30, that bell is going to ring. My cubby is the third one from the left. At 10:00, I’m going to go to recess. At 11:00, I’m going to have lunch. It’s the routine they need.”

### **Gaps Still Exist Between Services and the Expectations of Military Families**

The United States Army, military communities, and schools are making efforts to address these challenges, but there are still areas of need that aren’t being addressed or still need more attention. In the chapter that follows, these areas that still need attention will be expressed as they were identified by the participants of the study. The recommendations can be broken down into four categories: Opportunities for schools to partner with military communities, philosophical

and procedural changes that can be made within each school, a call for consistency among schools, and a notice to non-military schools.

### **Opportunities for Schools to Partner with Military Communities.**

One of the concerns expressed throughout the study is the lack of knowledge of services that are offered either through the school, the post or the community. A number of parents made the recommendation that some of these services should be offered at the school which is a common gathering point for most military families.

#### *School-based services.*

NCO-2 described an assignment at Fort Carson, Colorado where she experienced health care services in the schools like a school nurse, psychologist, dental screenings, mental health services, and providing financial support for families in need. NCO-7 recognized that when teachers have experiences with learning difficulties, they can assist in recognizing those obstacles in other students. She recalled her experience with her first grade son this way:

We walked into the class and there was a SMARTboard, which we'd never seen before, but the first thing he had to do was pick what he wanted for lunch that day, and he didn't know how to read at all in the first grade. Very quickly, we realized something's going on here. It was a struggle to get him to read and we couldn't figure out exactly what was going on, but one of his teachers recognized some signs that he was having vision problems. We had had him tested with dyslexia screening and that wasn't the issue. She recognized something that she had seen with her own child. She was right. He had vision learning problems. His eyes weren't working together so we had to do some special therapy. He was in Special Ed. for two years, but he went literally from not being able to read a word to, he's on grade level now. We still have some things that we can't quite pinpoint, but academically, he reads. We get through homework without tears. He's hard on himself, but he's also proud of himself. He knows that other kids have it easier than he does and that was something that was completely overlooked in North Carolina. Everybody else was reading and he wasn't, and they just green lighted him and pushed him through.

NCO-7 and IO-8 both described a need for more counseling in schools. They felt that because of the fact that military children go through so much more trauma and change, that there was a need to have greater access to someone to, “help them learn to cope with change and teaching students to deal with the inevitable, because they are going to move. It is inevitable. They are going to have to say goodbye or get used to something new. It would be great if you had someone who could relate to a child and explain it is not bad.”

NCO-5 went on to say that the resources that her family needs have always been there, but for her and many other families, knowing about them and knowing how to access them is the issue. She described her frustration by saying:

That is one thing, army-wide, I will say the resources are there. They don't tell you about them though. Typically, you find out about them through other avenues. I have two family members who are exceptional family members, EFMP, for the military. There are tons of resources for those children, but they're not spoken about unless you inquire. I didn't even realize there was an EFMP program, now I knew the EFMP program existed and my children went into it, but I didn't know what the EFMP program offered until I moved to another duty station, which was Fort Carson, but I didn't find out until it was too late because we were getting ready to leave. One of the services they offered was respite care for the children who meet certain criteria. When my children were younger, it's one of those things that would have been amazing because they offer extra care and extra help especially when the spouse is deployed. That would have been very beneficial to me, but I didn't even know about it. It was never even talked about. That's one of the biggest things I think the military fails in is making sure the parents are aware of every single resource that is available to them. Schools can get with MWR (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation), CYS (Child and Youth Services), Army One Source, and not just be able to hand out a brochure, but the counselors within the school, the administration within the school, be aware, know what the services have to offer. That brochure is going to go on their refrigerator and nothing is going to be done with it. That mom or that dad has fifteen other things that they've got going on, but if they have a number and a name to go with that they're more apt to call them. I've been that parent that is so bogged down and so emotionally drained that one more phone call is just way too much. So being able to give them a direct line, or being able to sit down in an office with you and say, 'Let's make this phone call.' Being able to communicate with each other, because for me, that's a big thing. Making sure that all of the services are able to communicate with each other, not only the school system, but

all of them and making sure that everybody is on one page. That is one huge thing that I think needs to be improved on nation-wide, army-wide, whether it's army life or not army life, I think it should be that way, but more so with these children because they do move from installation to installation.

While NCO-5 described the importance of the military and schools taking the next step of bringing services to the families, IO-8 described a time when her husband took this step with the 1,300 officers serving in his battalion. "We chose to have the family services come to our open house day for the battalion, which we hosted both years of his command. We made passport books where part of the fun of the day was to get your passport stamped at all of the stations. At the end of the day, you could win a prize. By doing this, people had to go and get the information from the family services. This way people were able to get the information and help line phone numbers without being singled out as having a problem. We chose to do activities that were both for officers and non-commissioned soldiers and their families. We had their whole families come in for a day, and for those who did not have children, they could bring their dog, cat, and in one case, their bird, after all they are family too. We just had a hot dog and a barbeque with a chance for people to meet on a civilian level- no uniforms." This activity was organized by the battalion commander, but could just as easily have been organized by the school or another organization on post.

While schools should make an attempt to incorporate as many services into the school environment as possible, there will be student needs that they can't support within the walls of the school. In these cases, schools have to be the resource to ensure that families connect to the necessary services in the community. CO-15 described a time when this happened with her daughter, "The first time he deployed in 2010, my then fourth grader basically had a nervous breakdown. The school was very helpful in navigating where to go, what to do. Then once we

got into therapy and what she needed from teachers, they were pretty accommodating. With the 504 (Educational Plan), it was really a work in progress and we didn't get it done until sixth grade because the teachers sort of just automatically knew her and did what she needed." Other parents' experiences in connecting with the services is not as favorable. CO-20 said, "They say there is a liaison here in the school systems. Like a military liaison. I don't even know who that is. You never see them. They're never putting themselves out there. Maybe they have and I've just missed them and I apologize if I did." Schools working more closely with services being provided by the military on post, allows the services to meet the families where they are, the school.

One barrier that schools and military services must be cognizant of as they work to connect military families with necessary services is that some military families are resistant to admitting that they need help. CO-17 described it by saying, "Some spouses and even husbands feel like they shouldn't go because it's going to look bad on the command. It's going to make the soldier or my spouse look bad if I go, but if you do go and use the services, it's wonderful. It's just a perception because no one takes names down and says Sergeant or PFC did this, or husband did that. It's just like, 'Come on in. We'll get you where you need to go.' It's totally anonymous, but they may feel like this isn't a good thing. We have the Resiliency Center. It teaches you how to be stronger, how to depend on yourself, and how to have confidence. You just have to go use it because we would have spouses who would be afraid to talk to their spouses or to reach out. I don't understand the mindset though. If you need help, go get help."

***Awareness of changes taking place on post.***

Schools need to build partnerships with the military leadership on the post so that they can gain advanced notice of events that affect students, parents, and the overall military

community. CO-14 described her experiences in Fort Hood compared to the smaller Fort Leavenworth saying, “You don’t have the whole unit going, so you might be that one or two or three children in the school has a parent deploying and teachers don’t necessarily know about it unless the parent tells them, whereas a larger installation like Fort Hood, it’s pretty well publicized that, ‘Hey, the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav is deploying.’ Teachers have a pretty good idea that a high percentage of their students will be without a parent for a year.”

International Officers’ families go through a similar process of receiving orders (posting). Schools need to be aware of this process, when it happens, and how it impacts kids and families so that they can be sensitive to their needs. IO-8 said, “I think these kids, the biggest thing is during posting seasons, which is at the beginning of the school year, the end of the school year, sometimes halfway through, but most of the time, it is on the two ends. I feel that the school system, because they do not live it, they do not understand the paperwork and the medical screenings and the things like that the families have to do on top of their schoolwork or the packers have come and moved most of your stuff away. When you get to the end of the school year and all the big projects come through, you no longer have your home together. At the beginning of the year, when we moved back from Australia, it took three months for our stuff to come. You are sleeping on the floor still. I do not think most civilian children have to deal with that. The stress levels of home because of a posting are high. It’s inevitable.” Schools and their staff have to be both knowledgeable of these changes as well as sensitive to the turmoil involved with them.

Schools connected to military installations must improve their partnership to battle the challenges that military families face. An improved partnership could bring more services for families into the schools, increase access to healthcare and other services, bring about a higher

level of awareness of services that already exist, increase awareness of major events taking place on post that may affect students within the school.

**Philosophical and procedural changes that can be made within schools.**

Many of the changes that participants recommend involve philosophy changes, procedural changes or training that needs to be done for the staff within the school. If implemented these changes could lead to a greater level of support for military families and engagement of the families with the school. These recommendations are dramatically different than the other changes addressed previously in this section because they can be done within the context of the school as it currently exists, and don't rely on the cooperation of other organizations. These changes could be accomplished in a short time period if the faculty and staff members committed to making them happen.

***Notice changes in students.***

Participants told a number of stories related to events that the school being supportive of their children, but one area that demonstrated a need for some more growth is in noticing when students start to struggle emotionally, socially, or academically. NCO-5 talked about how much parents rely on schools to notice changes in students, "It took me a long time to realize that you know more about my child than me, because we want to be supermoms and do it all when we can't. When it boils down to it, at the end of the day, you guys have our children more than we do, and you can give us better insight than we can. We know them as a person because we raised them, but you see them with their friends more than we do." This knowledge and close experience with students gives schools and teachers a great responsibility to pay attention to changes taking place among students. When a student begins to struggle teachers and other

school staff connected with the child should be sensitive to those changes and communicate them to the parent. NCO-5 also said this about communicating perceived changes, “They [parents] need to know what’s going on in their [children’s] life because we’re grasping for straws trying to figure out what is going on. We need insight into our children’s lives that you guys have that we don’t because you’re with them eight hours a day. Whether it be calling a meeting, not necessarily with a parent, but calling a meeting about, ‘Let’s sit down and talk about this one student. This mom called and said so and so and she is really concerned. What do you see as the concern?’, whether it be the teacher or, ‘What do we see so that we can get something back to her. This is what we’re seeing. These are behaviors we’re seeing or not seeing.’ For me that’s huge. The problem is most parents don’t know to ask for that.” In reality, a parent shouldn’t have to ask for it. If school staff is are looking for possible changes in a student, it is the responsibility of the team of educators in direct contact with the student to communicate the change to the parent so that early interventions can be attempted.

CO-14 also pointed out that it is particularly important to pay close attention to students that are new to school as they say to themselves, “I don’t know anyone. I don’t know any of the teachers. I don’t have any friends.” These students are particularly vulnerable to anxiety and depression causing them to act out, struggle academically, and withdraw from others.

If administrators, counselors, teachers, and other school staff are aware of the challenges that the students walking the halls of their school face, they can be more in tune with observing the results of these challenges and be ready to respond with supports when they see students struggling. One of the ways that school staff can become aware of the challenges and changes taking place in students’ lives is for the parents to communicate with an appropriate representative of the school. Some military parents, like NCO-7, go out of their way to

communicate changes in the lives of their children. She talked about her experience meeting with her son's kindergarten teacher, "This year I had to go to the school and explain my husband is probably moving in a couple of months to a six year old's kindergarten teacher. She needs to know that. She needs to know why he's freaking out- dad's moving. I have to make sure she knows there's not a divorce or anything, but this impending change is huge."

As important as it is for schools and teachers to have information about what a student has been through in the past, some parents aren't as forthcoming with that information for a variety of reasons including not understanding how the school will use the information, the school doesn't ask for information, and poor experiences in previous schools. Of these reasons, poor experiences in previous schools is the reason that came up most in the interviews for this study. CO-20 described her previous experiences this way:

I struggled in Georgia because Jamie had been diagnosed with her anxiety disorder. I was requesting additional help, and they told me, 'No, you don't want a 504 because that's just going to be hanging around her neck when she goes to high school. Colleges won't look at her because they will consider her a special needs child. You don't want that. It will be a stigma.' So I came here. I walked into his [Principal at Fort Leavenworth Elementary School] office. He immediately came in, shut the door and said, 'Tell me what's going on.' So I did. He said, 'You know what, we're going to take care of her. We've got her. We're going to help you do this.' This is before the 504 had even come into play. He alone without even having any doctor's documents saying that he had to do it, found her the teacher that she needed, helped her start small group testing, Mrs. Culkin (Academic Coach) was there at the time too. Between Mrs. Culkin, Mr. Ernst, and Mrs. Henderson (Jamie's teacher that year), she went from doing C's and D's to making straight A's and B's. She was happy because people were listening. People listened here. I don't know if it's because they're used to military children and having different levels of skill sets. They listened instead of saying no, we don't want to deal with it. They didn't care. They didn't mind taking the time, which was a blessing. I kept telling them they were such a blessing to us because I finally had help when I had been struggling since Washington state to get her help. Finally, someone listened.

CO-20's story is not uncommon for many families that come to Fort Leavenworth. The focus is on connecting students to good teaching practices and individualizing education for what

the student needs as determined by both the educational team and parents. If Mr. Ernst, Mrs. Culkin, and Mrs. Henderson had listened to the parents, but weren't ready to respond to the Jamie's needs, the parent would have left the meeting thinking she had found yet another school that wasn't willing to do what her student needed to be successful.

Some great advice for teachers and school staff relating to all children regardless of whether major changes or challenging circumstances have been communicated was given by CO-18. She recommended this for schools, "If you look at kids, there are so many things going on inside their minds. I just think that as a teacher, the best thing you can do is probably just look and listen and try to get to know every one of them. What does he look like on a normal day? How does he act on a normal day so that maybe you are equipped to say, 'Are you okay today?'" She acknowledged that this could be a challenge particularly for secondary schools where it's like "being a parent for 25 different students every hour", but she went on to acknowledge how important and meaningful it is to parents and the student when she told this story, "Amy has had some teachers that will just email and say, 'Amy wasn't herself today. Is everything okay?' The next day, she'll get a cold. I think, 'I love that teacher'. You are so busy with lunacy going on in the back corner and whatever else, but the fact that you just watched her and knew something wasn't quite right. That's awesome." For this student and parent, taking the time to notice a change from what is normal and communicate that difference to the parent meant the world.

### ***Streamline communication.***

Communication with military parents can be an essential part of the process for ensuring that the teacher and the school keeps parents engaged with their child's learning. With advances in technology, schools have a plethora of tools to communicate with parents. This can be a blessing and a curse in that the technology allows schools to connect with their parents in ways

that wouldn't be possible just a few years ago, but it also creates a situation in which parents can get confused about where or even if they should be looking for that communication as described by NCO-3 when she said, "As far as communication goes, it was a little difficult on me personally these past couple of years because some of the teachers use the online system as far as communicating and updating gradebooks and things, and some don't touch it at all. Especially with keeping track of four children that are in school. Who does it online and who doesn't, especially at the Junior High, because of the same thing, some of them update it all the time, and some of them haven't updated it since October [interview conducted in May]. So you don't know, who was I supposed to check again to see if she updated the gradebook or what have you? On the elementary level, communication is a little different because they still use their daily folders that go home and you can write to the teacher or call or whatever, and that's a little different. It's always worked out. I have always found out what I need to find out." If schools could pick one communication tool that works best for them and their parents, update it regularly, and push that tool out to parents, it would aid their families to know what to expect.

***Supporting families on early release days.***

A trend that has been in many schools for several years and is continuing to become more popular, is dismissing school early or starting late for teachers to collaborate with one another around curriculum, assessment, and interventions. Fort Leavenworth has had this practice in place for over a decade, but because of the transiency related to the army post, it is a new experience for some. It also creates a hardship on some parents to find childcare during the one day per week when their kids' school day ends nearly two hours early. Some families have difficulty understanding why it's important for schools to have the time to do that collaboration,

but even parents who do understand the importance like, NCO-3 struggle to make the schedule work.

*Understanding and celebrating diversity.*

Students in military schools can come from a vast array of backgrounds. This is a result of military posts that often house International officers from countries that are allies with the U.S. Another reason for a wide amount of diversity on military posts is that American families stationed all over the world are frequently transferred to posts on American soil. Even students that may on the surface look, talk, and act like they may have the same background, often have grown up in much different situations. The resulting amount of diversity can create some challenges such as language barriers and other unmet expectations. This can be a challenge for staff and students, but should be celebrated and viewed as a strength for the school. A couple of participants talked about a special event that takes place in one of the elementary schools on Fort Leavenworth in which International students are invited to participate in a World Culture day. They present the food, dress, atmosphere, and special traditions of their home country. CO-19 expressed, “I think it’s really neat that they celebrate all of the different countries that are present in the schools because where else do you have that opportunity to meet a kid from Malawi and Uzbekistan or wherever? They just give them that opportunity to meet those kids. Those opportunities are priceless I think.”

IO-12 shared the experience she and her son have had with the language barrier:

I know there are classes of English as a Second Language, when they’re learning English. Sometimes they need to talk to another guy that they speak the same language to ask them to understand. This is my problem. Every time, I need to translate for another Latino American woman. She says that I speak English really [well]. No, not really. It’s

the same for my kid. Sometimes, he needs help from other kids. It's good. It's nice and the teacher [doesn't] like it. He translates, and the teacher says, 'You don't speak Spanish. Sorry.'

I understand. It's English class (ESOL), but he needs to speak Spanish to help others. You don't speak Spanish in this school. Why?

Her husband stepped in to help with translation at this point, sharing:

What she's saying is the teacher talked to him and said, you will not speak Spanish in this school because you are in the United States. Okay, we understand that part, you will always look for the guy that speaks the same language as you because it is easier to communicate. It's like my class at CGSC, America and we speak Spanish, and we say, hey. This guy is saying this, but what do you think. We're speaking Spanish. Even the instructors understand this. We're not talking about you. We're talking about this (content) and just exchanging information.

In this situation, the teacher was uncomfortable with the students, even in an ESOL class, using their native language. The parents felt that it was acceptable to assist the students in making connections to information they know in their native language as a path to make new connections in English.

IO-13 talked about the cultural and school differences for her son when he started in an American school. Things as natural as how students move (or don't) and when lunch is served didn't come as naturally to him. She put it this way, "They (International students) have to learn different things. They try to meet new people, different people. The teachers are different. For us, the language. For me the school here was great because it gave us the opportunity to develop our skills, my children's skills because of the support. I just want the school to understand the different culture, the different everything because it's totally different in our country. It's different for everything, for hours, for lunch, for the school. In our country, the students stay in the same classroom, but the teacher moves. The student always in the same classroom. For us, this was different. The hours, lunch in my country is served at 1 pm. Here it is 11, 11:30, very

early in the morning. It's almost breakfast for us. It's different, and Tonio adjusted to everything very, very well. At the beginning, it was complicated."

Another participant that has moved all over the world on deployments with her husband and family, IO-8 expressed an example that she saw in Australia celebrating the diversity in the school, "The design of that school is very different because it is such a hot country. They have individual classrooms, an outdoor common and a big gym. Every Monday morning, and every Friday afternoon, the parents were invited to a school assembly. Each week a teacher was selected, and their class had to come up and do a presentation on a specific subject (usually a life lesson on values). For example, to illustrate how we are stronger as a group the students each represented a link in a chain. Each link was strong but together they were stronger. The children had to get up in front of 700 students and their families to explain and demonstrate this through the use of a microphone and dance."

When asked how schools can do a better job of supporting the needs of her child or military children in general, CO-15 answered this way, "I think again, being aware that they are military, showing interest in the military. Maybe use those kids when you're discussing Germany in class. Use the experience of our military kids to expand the knowledge of the other kid. Be creative in lesson plans, 'Has someone lived in Italy? Tell us about your experiences.' Use their connections. I think now with so much social media and everything else, when I was an army brat, or friends moved and you might have an address, but if you lost that address, that was it, or they moved and you didn't get the new address. Now their friends are all over the world. Use that to explore other cultures, other states just like if we want to go somewhere, we find someone who lives there so we can stay with them. If you're going to study something, talk to the kids

about someone who knows something about it. I think just treasure that opportunity that those kids are a wealth of experience and knowledge of other things.”

*Ask about, listen and respond to the challenges specific to each family.*

One of the many focus areas of schools should be to pay attention to the circumstances of each family. As outlined previously there are a myriad of challenges that are common among military families, but each family has their own story of which challenges they’ve faced, how they’ve been affected, and other elements that are specific to that family’s story. By asking, listening, and being ready to respond to the specific needs of each family, schools can meet those needs in a better way rather than a one size fits all solution.

In some cases, schools can skip over the asking step because some families recognize the importance of school staff knowing their children’s backgrounds such as NCO-7, who said, “When we get somewhere, the first thing I do is go to the school and give them background information on my kids. This is where we’ve been. This is what they’ve been through, these are their special situations. I can’t think of schools ever asking things. Sometimes with the younger kids at the beginning of the year, there will be a survey to fill out. It will have a couple little lines about ‘Anything special that we need to know?’. They need to know this year I had to go to the school and explain my husband is probably moving in a couple of months to a six year old’s kindergarten teacher. She needs to know that. She needs to know why he’s freaking out. Or if dad’s moving, I have to make sure she knows there’s not a divorce or anything, but this impending huge change is coming up and you can’t necessarily convey all that on two little lines at the bottom of the paper. I definitely talk to my kids’ teachers much more than I did my oldest daughter, before we were a military family. I knew who they were, and met them on parents’ night and all of that stuff, but there weren’t big amounts of information that they necessarily

needed. I feel like now [they do]. Sometimes I feel like I overthink it, because everybody is a military kid and I know all of these kids have all of their concerns, but I don't know if regular public schools are prepared for that."

CO-20 discussed the need for understanding from schools and teachers:

You've seen all those reunion videos where the kids collapse when they finally see their dads and their moms. That just kind of sums it up. The emotional support and the fact that they move all over the place, and when they come in only knowing their times table to five, be understanding. Don't just think, 'How stupid is this kid?' Be understanding to that because they have huge gaps. Trevor had good grades. They weren't doing a's at the time, but he went to Georgia and he had this paper. He brought it home just in tears. It looked like it had been slaughtered. She had used a red pen and marked every single thing wrong. To me, that's a red flag saying, 'Oh he doesn't know this.' It didn't even dawn on her that he was doing great in everything else, but when it came to this one particular thing, he had not been taught that yet, so he didn't have any background on it so he just guessed. It devastated him because he's a straight-A student and here he had this F. I had to call a conference and say, 'If you see this, this is an indication that he doesn't know what you're talking about.'

I wish there was someone in the school that could support those gaps of missing information, 'Oh you didn't learn fractions. Come on, we're going to fill in that missing information.' The teacher doesn't have time to teach their curriculum, plus catch these kids up. That's when they start to fall through the cracks. Some kids are so smart, they can catch up and they're good, but then there's people like my daughter who don't understand and they get all jumbled up. Then they stop listening. I wish there was someone out there just to do that, but that's a perfect world.

I've touched on it, but just the missing gaps of education. They are so huge. Trevor struggles. For instance, when he came here in fourth grade, he had to take spelling tests in cursive. Well they don't teach cursive handwriting in Georgia. They don't. You print everything. He was failing all of his spelling tests. So then, I realized what was going on. Mrs. Brock was phenomenal. She said, 'Okay Trevor, you have to write in cursive, and then you need to print it next to it.' He was making up the cursive letters. He would look around the room, and you know the letters that are at the top of the room? He would try to make the letter look like that, but he wasn't doing a very good job, so I wish the missing gaps of information, and the need for support. When I was in Georgia, I was like, 'I need a tutor.' I wish the military would pay for professional tutoring. That would be humongous, but they say, 'No we have tutors through CYS.' They're volunteers. You don't always have the volunteers. No one was ever available to help my daughter, other than us, but you know. You borrowed and carried when I was growing up. In Georgia, they were regrouping. I didn't even know what she was saying. Education-wise, especially with the Common Core coming up, having seminars or something for the parents to go in and almost teach them quickly. This is the new lingo. This is the new

language. This is what were' doing. So we can help our children instead of looking at them like they've grown three heads. I keep saying, 'I don't know. Baby, I don't know.' Now I have to say, 'Go ask your sister.' She speaks the same language. From state to state, it's so different.

CO-20's story is a great reminder to schools to ask and listen to parents as well as students to see where they are and be ready to respond with the supports to meet them at the level they're at so they can be successful at their new schools. A success story in meeting those needs was relayed by IO-8 when she said, "We are happy at Patton. We like the way you listened to our request to not have our child on an IEP. Meeting with the staff and yourself, we were able to explain our past moves and all of the different resource options that we have already tried. We love that you get to choose electives at this school and that if you do have a weakness in a subject you can have an extra lab in that subject without it being a big deal. This is fantastic!"

### ***Multiple avenues for involvement.***

As discussed in the Review of Literature, it is important for parents to have the opportunity to be a part of their children's education. Participants of this study verified the importance of allowing parents to have multiple avenues for involvement from direct connections to minimal involvement, but allowing them to choose as their schedule and resources (financial, time, human capital, etc.) allows. Every participant preferred open communication from classroom teachers and the school so that they can support from home as possible. Participants' interest in involvement ranged from highly involved to much more of a flexible involvement as time allowed. CO-14 was one of the more involved parents. She described her interest in involvement with the educational process by saying, "I'm a firm believer in not just communicating with school, but in being involved. One, we know our children best. We've been with them and know how they learn. We're not the experts in

curriculum, but I can tell you emotionally how they react to what works well and what doesn't. I don't think we're a deciding factor. I think we're a part of the team, and I think it works well when everyone is enforcing consistency. How can I do that if I'm not engaged and I don't know what the school is trying to teach? If I'm doing Math with them, I'm trying to reiterate how it's being taught. Not necessarily what's being taught, but the same method, and again, I can't do that if I don't have a relationship with the teacher. I need to be able to call, email, I need to have a dialogue back and forth. Because I have one in high school, I also understand that I need to pull back a little bit because she needs to take ownership of her own education. I'm not going to be there to talk with her academic advisor in college. She's got to [do that]. I'm still very much engaged, but I've become more of the advisor where I've directed her. She'll come to me with a problem, and I'll ask her questions. 'What have you done? Have you tried this? You might want to approach the teacher with this. If that doesn't work, you have a counselor.' At the same time, I have no problem emailing, and I have. There was an incident that happened last year, and I didn't know what to do as a parent. I emailed my daughter's counselor, and I said, 'I don't need you to do anything. I need your advice as a parent. This is what I've done. Do you have any more advice for me? I needed my daughter to fight her own battles. I needed her to problem solve to do that. That's part of the growing.'

Other parents were also interested in being a part of the school and supporting their child's education, but in a way that didn't require as much of a time commitment. Some wanted to bring in snacks like NCO-2, "it's easier to do some things where I don't have to come [to school] copying papers and filing things. Bringing snacks is easier." NCO-7 said that she wanted to be aware of what's going on and opportunities for involvement where she could support, "I don't need everything, but I do want to know what's going on. I don't want to feel pressured to

bring cupcakes for every school party, but I do want to know they're happening and know that I can or if I have time to volunteer. I definitely like to know about things happening.”

### **Consistency between schools.**

As military families move from school to school in various states and countries, they are exposed to a variety of curricula, policies, practices that are determined by local school board and administration, sometimes based on personal beliefs or preferences. Local entities like to retain that control, but in the military that local control puts families at a disadvantage. Two areas where this was mentioned by families were in the case of curriculum (Common Core Standards) and Special Education Services (Individualized Education Plan policy and procedures).

### ***Common core.***

At the time of the study, Common Core Standards was a new initiative being implemented by states as part of the Race to the Top Grant. Kansas had just announced a few months prior that they were going to be transitioning to Common Core Standards and joining the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

As CO-20 mentioned, there are both positive and negative attitudes surrounding the Common Core Standards. For her, she said that she is looking forward to the change because she views it as a possibility to ensure that kids will be more able to pick up from one school and join another school without gaps in their education. She said it this way, “So when we went from Washington state to Georgia, they were already on long division, so Jamie had to catch up very quickly. We were just very blessed that they had a student teacher in the class that year that was able to take Jamie to the side and help her catch up, but to this day math is where she struggles. Again, it was because she was just crammed full of information so quickly. It was like a fire hose

instead of a trickle and being able to learn to drink it.” NCO-6 echoed the excitement over Common Core standards saying that currently, when students move from one school to another, “they’re either playing catch up or being a little further ahead. I know that there were some things where Kara was like, ‘We already did this last year, mom.’ So adjusting so they don’t get bored, or they don’t struggle too much.”

Recognizing the difficulty with changing schools, some military parents will request, “stabilization”, because the military allows families to stay at a post longer than usual so that children can complete their schooling in one high school. Another option is for the military member to deploy abroad, which allows the family to stay in their most recent domestic post if they choose not to accompany the military member to the deployment as mentioned by CO-14. She said, “He deployed this last time, his fourth deployment, really to stabilize the family because the kids were getting older and we realized the challenge of moving high school students from state to state. She went on to describe some of the things that are in theoretically in place to support the military families, but the reality is that they aren’t always fully implemented, “Even though the Interstate Compact Act (an agreement between the Department of Defense and State Governments to address educational transition issues of children of military families) has been phenomenal, and Common Core is helping, although that is still not established everywhere it helps, but there are still challenges with going into school districts that don’t have a large percentage of military. We found that it’s the parents that are educating the school districts on the Interstate Compact. So trying to take a senior which is when we would have moved if he hadn’t deployed, the graduation requirements, transferring credits, little things like that, [would be difficult]. It’s the little things like the senior awards, but when the school is nominating them for awards, it’s hard to do that when you don’t know the child. When they just moved here their

senior year, you don't have the background or if they're a junior leaving, it's not their time yet. Those all, obviously play into scholarship opportunities and admissions, and acceptance hopefully." NCO-5 and CO-19 mentioned similar issues with transferring credits to other schools, hoping that common ground in curriculum through Common Core would aid in making it easier to switch from one school to another particularly at the high-school level.

***Special education and individualized education plans (IEPs).***

Another issue that arose as part of the concerns with consistency among schools is Special Education services. Special Education is for students identified as exceptional as a result of their Intelligence Quotient (IQ) as identified by testing. This can either be students with low IQ's needing special supports and accommodations to be successful or students with exceptionally high IQ's requiring a more challenging or deeper curriculum to keep them engaged with the material.

Participants with children that have qualified for Special Education Services in multiple places talked about the challenges of moving a Special Education student from school to school and ensuring that they continue to receive the services they need. NCO-5 described her experiences this way:

From the very start, our children's education took on a whole new meaning because Tom had an IEP from the very beginning. So that took on new challenges. That is a big thing that I think needs to be addressed especially in the military community. Because our children do switch schools so often and we go from state to state, there are different rules upon IEPs and how they are done and how they are formatted between each school and each state. That makes a dramatic difference when you're formatting a child's IEP. So it does create a difficulty for parents and for administrators, especially incoming and outgoing. If you know that child's outgoing, you have to set up an IEP not knowing if that next school is going to accept the way you've formatted it. The IEP coming in, typically the IEP is not brought to them until the beginning of the school season so that child's education is delayed. That's a big thing for children with IEPs and for us. Their education is delayed because their IEP's aren't addressed until later on in the school year

typically within the first few months if you're really, really lucky to get it formatted to that next state.

The struggle with transferring an IEP from one school to another was also discussed by CO-15, who said,

I do think that having a special needs child in the military just adds one more obstacle, because now we'll be moving and not only do I have to contact the school district and schools and everything else, but now I've got to get involved with a whole new special education team. They take the IEP, but we meet a few months later to discuss. Again, it's the continuity that is so great when you have kids in school and especially with special needs kids. My son said, 'I don't want to move.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'They don't know what I don't like there.' It's been very good. The teachers and the other kids have been very accommodating to him. Don't sing because so and so doesn't like that. You can't be too loud, so and so doesn't like it. They'll tell that to people too when they come into the classroom. Now he's got to move, a kid with autism, who continuity is key, is losing the only house he's known, the only friends he's known, the only school he's known. That's huge. That is why my husband is going to be stationed in D.C. while we are moving to Pennsylvania. We know that is where we're going to retire. We're doing it so that we can cut out another move for the kids.

### **Military families in civilian schools.**

Some military families transfer to civilian communities, which necessitates their children to attend schools in those communities. A couple of participants expressed concerns for the schools and students that end up in these scenarios. NCO-7 described a story of an acquaintance who lost her husband and the father of her son during battle. That friend and her son then returned to a non-military school. She said, "...I wonder how prepared schools are when something like that happens. My friend, her son is the same age as our youngest and he was not in school yet, but even now, he is in school. He goes to a public school not near a military base and he does feel left out sometimes because he doesn't have a dad. Other kids ask and he has to explain it. I just don't know that schools are prepared for the things that come along with that."

The second participant to mention her concern for military families in non-military communities is CO-14. She described her concern when she said, “My biggest concern for the military is the folks that are getting out of the military because they are downsizing and they’re going into communities, or they’re National Guardsmen in service and the community doesn’t know who they are. They haven’t identified them, and the family may not want to be identified because they don’t want to stand out as being different, but they are going to be carrying an awful lot of baggage from the last twelve years. A physical wound is easy to see. An emotional or mental one is not so much. If they don’t know the questions to ask or if they’re not even mindful, it can make a difference for our kids.”

Supporting the needs of military families that may not even be directly connected to the military any more, and may not want to be identified is a huge undertaking that will need to be collaboratively addressed by the military, schools affected, and communities in an effort to provide necessary aid to families that fall into this situation through National Guard service, staffing recruiting offices, or because of retirement/discharge from the army. These families may not be able to get the help or support they need from the community supports already in place.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations**

In November of 2016, the Obama Administration, led by Michelle Obama and Jill Biden, renewed the conversation for supporting military families under an initiative called Joining Forces. This initiative is focused on spotlighting the needs and strengths of military-connected kids, build better support in schools and policy arenas, and to spur more research into their social-emotional challenges. Through Joining Forces, Obama and Biden suggest supporting military families in the following ways: get to know each family individually (no one size fits all approaches), provide consistency and social support for children, make sure newly arrived kids can join sports teams and other extracurricular activities, create a welcoming team that provides resource packets and supplies, host events for new families and clubs for kids with deployed parents, take advantage of military kids' leadership capabilities, and find ways to recognize the experiences of military families. (Walsh et al 2016) The leadership of Michelle Obama and Jill Biden underscores the continued relevance and critical nature of supporting military-connected children and their families.

### **Overview**

After interviewing spouses of Commissioned, Non-Commissioned, and International Officers, there were five themes that were common among the three groups of participants including a sense of community, resilience, financial, and job stability (spouses are less likely to worry that their husband will lose their job and in many cases are confident in the family finances), patriotism (pride in the country and the fact that dad protects others), mobility (frequent moves result in benefits and challenges), and family life (depending on the duty station, military life impacts the family's ability to stay connected).

Participants described the sense of community in a similar way to that of attitudes that may be encountered in a small, close-knit community similar to Bowen's (2003) research in which he defined "sense of community" as reflecting the degree to which members feel positively attached to the military as an organization and view the base community as a source of support and connection to others. Military families look out for one another. They trust strangers from within the community to watch their kids, and pitch in to help people they hardly know when the need arises. Some participants told of times they were new to a military community and had to connect with a stranger in line at the commissary (grocery store on post) in order to have someone's name to put on emergency contact forms at school.

Resilience describes their ability to focus on the most positive aspects of their current duty station and frequently refer to their current duty station as their favorite regardless of their circumstances. Nearly all of the participants described times when the circumstances were troubling, but their focus on making the best out of the situation allowed the family to persevere through the trouble. Many participants mentioned factors aligned with Lester and Bursch's (2011) research to support resiliency including modeling healthy coping behaviors, use of transitional images (calendar to represent a timeline of when Dad is coming home), regular communication with the deployed parent, and participation in activities the children enjoy as a method of increasing self-sufficiency.

Financial and job stability is another theme that was common among all three groups. All of the participants felt more comfortable in their financial status than many of their friends in the private sector. Even the Non-commissioned Officer's wives, the group with the lowest income, felt financially stable and confident in their husband's position. While some wives had a job of

their own to support the family, they still believed in their husband's ability to bring home a solid paycheck and have a reliable, long-term job.

Another theme that was common was the idea of patriotism solidly ingrained in the family as a result of the responsibilities and sacrifices the family has made in the name of protecting freedoms for the country they represent. A number of participants were delighted that their children have a higher level of respect for their country and traditional shows of patriotism such as the Pledge of Allegiance, the National Anthem, and respecting the sacrifice that soldiers have made on their behalf.

Mobility is another theme that was apparent across all three groups. They talked about the benefits of being mobile in the army such as traveling the world, and experiencing things that people only get to hear about in textbooks. The frequent mobility also causes the members of the military to rely on one another more creating an "in this together" type of attitude in which they're willing to help one another through tough situations. Alternatively, that mobility also causes practical challenges with the logistics of moving from place to place, learning the services offered and locations of community necessities, keeps the spouse from being able to pursue her own career with longevity unless she works for a national organization that allows for frequent movement, struggling to make and keep friends for the kids, and the less obvious challenge of learning and working within the varied policies that exist in schools from state to state or in some cases state to a new country. Bowen (2003) suggests that the level of support that the family receives from their unit and from other informal connections they make plays a great role in their ability to adapt to the new community each time they move.

When it comes to family life in the military, there are ups and downs depending on the duty station and responsibilities while there. Fort Leavenworth, for example, is known

throughout the army for hosting the Command General Staff College (CGSC), which is used to train officers. While assigned to that post, many officers have a more traditional 9-5 job that allows them to spend more time with family including nights and weekends. There are still officers at that post that have different duties requiring them to be gone frequently from home even though they are on the same post. An example of two duties on the post that require them to be gone frequently are Mission Command Training Program (MCTP) and prison guards. These two positions require Commissioned Officers and Non-commissioned Officers respectively to be away from family on nights, weekends, and holidays frequently. These and other duties that require frequent and sometimes extended stays away from family cause the following challenges to family life: creation of a single-mom family because the father figure is so frequently away, responsibility being placed on children at an earlier age, struggles with reintegration when the father figure returns, stress on the marriage, and a constant concern for the safety of the active duty military member. All of this occurs typically while being separated from extended family that could provide support as is the case for many civilian families.

While there were some commonalities between the three groups, there were also some themes that were specific to each group. International Officers had the greatest number of experiences that were not in common with other groups. These included the challenges of entering a new country with a different climate, geography, and resources. They also had to face the challenge of a language barrier. While most officers spoke English, their families had a variety of experiences with the language. Some had taken English classes for years while most had just a rudimentary background in speaking the language. Something that many native speakers take for granted, but presents a challenge for non-native speakers is something as simple as figures of speech. These can be a source of common confusion and frustration for these

families. International Officers are also asked to assimilate into the culture of the United States, which means changing from a passion for cricket, hockey, or speed skating to football or soccer. This can be toughest on the kids who have devoted years of their lives practicing one sport only to find that it's not offered where they are stationed. Simple traditions such as greeting one another can be different. Kissing one another on the cheek as a sign of greeting in Brazil had to be replaced with a formal handshake. Finally, the demands on the children of International Officers can be exhausting. International Officers are expected to attend balls and formal events throughout the week in which the children are expected to be in attendance, taking them away from homework and extracurricular opportunities. Children are also expected to be dressed formally and follow adult social conventions including table etiquette. Behavior outside of the accepted norm could be a negative reflection on the officer.

A challenge that was specific to the Non-commissioned Officer group of participants was the idea that they lack the ability to regularly celebrate holidays with family. Due to the nature of their jobs, many of them work nights, weekends, and holidays, causing them to miss out on some family time that Commissioned and International Officers are able to count on. This issue arises as a result of the nature of their jobs. They serve in roles such as prison guard, medical personnel, and food service, which are necessary even when other portions of the post shut down.

For Commissioned Officers' families, the theme that was specific to them was a desire for volunteer opportunities. Many spouses of Commissioned Officers choose to be homemakers due to the level of financial stability provided to the family by the military. When their children are old enough to be in school, the homemaker is afforded time to work outside the home. They frequently look for ways they can make a difference on post through Army Community Service

(ACS), Spouses Club, volunteering in schools, the Humane Society on post, the chapel, or any number of other organizations that have a need for someone to volunteer their time.

Military families are self-sufficient in many ways, but there are also a myriad of ways that they are in need of support from the army, the communities they live in, and the schools that their children attend (Classen 2014). The army is currently supporting their families by providing Family Readiness Groups, Spouses Clubs, Army Community Service, counseling services, and free childcare. The army is also providing activities on post to meet the needs of families such as the Deployed Spouses Club and the Division of Youth Services (DYS), which provides after school activities for kids including homework help, competitive sports, and supervised recreational time. Communication available to spouse of deployed servicemen has improved greatly, now allowing Skype, phone calls and email to be available so that families can stay connected when they aren't able to be present. Seminars are available to spouses who are new to the army to make sure they have some idea of what to expect in their new environment. An education liaison is employed to bridge the gap between families and schools particularly as students go through special circumstances such as special education testing and placement. The army also provides a special program for children with special needs called the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), which was designed to support the families through groups and camps for these exceptional children. Military One Source is a telephone and online resource that helps military families with the transition to their new community, providing information about doctors, schools, moving companies, mechanics, and other information that will help them before, during, and after the big move. As mentioned previously, one of the things the army provides in terms of support, is not a program or a service, but instead just the ability to be around other members of the army provides a system of

support that is unrivaled by any other organization (Bowen 2003). Each family knows that the family across the street and next door is either going through the same struggle, has done so previously, or will have the same problem down the road. That allows families to rely on one another for support when they have challenges arise, either internally or externally. Finally, the army is pushing toward more family friendly policies that will allow families to have more support. Two examples of this are the housing policy that allows families to stay on post after the death of the army servicemen whereas in the past, they were required to move; and the option of stabilization, which allows families to stay at their current post when one of their children enters high school to allow them to stay at the same school through graduation. Both of these policies have been huge supports to families.

There are also a number of needs that can be met by communities to support military families. These include simple encouragement by individuals as well as businesses with discounts for military families and messages of support on their marquee signs. Communities can also be a support by providing opportunities for involvement in faith-based organizations such as chapels and churches. Some communities also provide support to International Officers by providing English as a Second Language classes to allow family members to learn the English language in a non-threatening way. Hoshmand and Hoshmand (2007) call for a move to multilevel strategies of prevention and intervention that extends the focus to the military community and larger civilian community to support military families.

Schools are supporting military families in a number of ways as well. They are using multiple avenues to communicate with families including email, phone calls, texting, and websites that allow parents to access grades and school information at their convenience (Classen 2014). Schools are also providing a program called “Hearts Apart” for children in

grades K-9 whose parents have been deployed as an avenue to be involved with other children that are in a similar situation. Parents said that this program helps kids to know that they aren't alone in missing their deployed parent. Other kids are going through the same situation. Hearts Apart groups from the various schools frequently get together with other schools as well so that they can collaborate on projects and activities. Schools have also become more understanding and flexible in their policies to be more supportive of military families. This understanding and flexibility is most necessary with attendance and late work policies when there is an opportunity for the family to reconnect after a long deployment or training. They frequently want to go for a vacation together or just stay at home with one another to aid in the reintegration process. Schools that allow families to take the time with one another are a tremendous encouragement to the family. A final support that schools provide to military families is the consistency of knowing that school will be a place they go for routine. Kids know what to expect in terms of a schedule and what will happen when they arrive each day. This is a great reassurance of dependability in what, at times, is a world of turmoil and upheaval.

There are still some needs that are not being met. Based on recommendations from the participants, schools will have the biggest responsibility for filling that void. Opportunities for fulfilling the unmet need include partnerships between schools and the army allowing for more school-based services to exist including counseling, medical, and dental services to be screened for and administered within the school. An increased partnership would also facilitate increased communication between military leaders on post and school district leaders so that school staff can be aware of and prepared for changes taking place on post including deployments and training drills. If teachers know about these changes, they can be more understanding and ready to respond to changes in affected children.

Philosophical and policy changes can also be made in schools to allow for improved service to military-connected families and children. Participants discussed examples of teachers that are already doing a great job of noticing changes in kids and responding, but there is also a need for more teachers, counselors, and administrators to be trained in identifying and responding to trauma in their students. Other opportunities discussed include streamlining communication to families, supporting families with childcare options when the school has early dismissal, understanding and celebrating diversity within the school, being prepared to identify and meet the specific needs of individual families, and having multiple avenues for families to be involved in their child's learning depending on the amount of time families have to volunteer.

Consistency among schools was another major area in which schools need to grow to meet the needs of military families. As families move from state to state, they should be able to anticipate grade level expectations in New York will be the same as the expectations in Virginia, Texas, California, or a DOD's (U.S. Military) School in Korea. There are many examples similar to CO-20's experience of her elementary student moving from one part of the country to another and either repeating something that was learned in a previous grade or not having been taught the prerequisite skills to be successful in the new school. In many cases, both circumstances are true, they are too advanced in some areas, and way behind in others because priorities are different from state to state. Special Education laws and procedures should also be more consistent from school to school. Procedures for determining whether or not a student qualifies for Special Education services vary from state to state causing students who qualify in one state to be relegated to regular education in another state. Even something as simple as the forms that are used, which also vary from state to state and district to district, can cause confusion for families.

Using consistent forms so that parents know where to find information and what information to expect, would be helpful to parents.

Finally, while many military families are in military schools or military-connected schools, there are some families that are connected to the military or have a former connection that are in public schools attended by mostly civilians. Schools in this situation may not have the experience necessary to know what to expect with military-connected parents and children. These schools should be a focus for providing outreach and support in the form of professional development and other resources from the army as well as schools that have more experience with military families.

### **Implications for Educators**

Teachers are on the frontlines of education. School personnel that comes into contact with students at school each day, typically develop the strongest connection with students and get to know them on a level that few others at the school have the opportunity to reach. This level of familiarity with students makes teachers the best school personnel to implement many student-level changes.

### **Partnerships with families.**

Many of the participants discussed the need for a two-way flow of communication between the school and home, an idea not uncommon in education, but even more crucial in schools connected to the military. While some families will be understanding to the idea of sharing their life circumstances with the school, other families will see it as an invasion of privacy. Teachers play the role of developing trust with the families so that they understand that the school shares their goal of doing what is best for their children. Participants in this study

shared that trust was developed between the parent and the teacher when the teacher was able to identify strengths, weaknesses, and concerns related to the child that the parent believed to be accurate, but had not yet identified. This relationship building is possible when the teacher cares enough to notice the social and emotional well-being of the student in addition to the typical academic focus, then takes the step to contact the parent with observations that are made. (Bryan, 2005; Epstein, 1995)

### **Meet families where they are.**

One of the things that was communicated throughout the study was the need to meet parents and students where they are. Teachers have to understand that many military parents are identified as Type A personalities. They are go getters that want the best for their children and will tell whoever they need to tell if they think their child is not getting the best education they can receive. They want to be as involved in their child's education as possible, but that is not always to the level expected by educators. Teachers of military children should seek out parent involvement and identify opportunities for parents to engage in the learning taking place in the classroom while also understanding that the mom in a two-parent family may be acting as a single mom while the father is deployed to Afghanistan for six months. Because of deployments, trainings, care of a disabled veteran that has returned home, and other possible issues with reintegration even when the father figure is home, the absence of parents from a child's school should not signify complacency on the part of the parent. The initial response of the teacher in these circumstances should be to identify avenues for allowing the parent to be involved from whatever distance they need at that time. These avenues for involvement can take on a variety of forms including parent-teacher conferences via email or Skype instead of the traditional in-person conference, sending snacks or supplies for a class party rather than volunteering to help

supervise the party, or giving parents a weekly topic of discussion to review with their children about what they are learning in school rather than a memo about the curriculum and homework assignments each evening.

Another aspect to meeting families where they are is identifying the student's strengths and weaknesses, then identifying a path to success at their grade level. So much of the military experience revolves around mobility as parents are required to move frequently around the country and internationally. This movement presents some great experiences for the children that many civilian families don't have the opportunity to experience, but it also creates some gaps in the learning of many kids particularly in the areas of reading and math, which is the focus in elementary grades. Teachers of military-connected children must be prepared to identify the learning gaps for the children in their classroom quickly and develop a plan for getting them to proficiency as soon as possible. This means they must have a vast toolbox for intervention strategies. It's not enough, though, to bring struggling and resistant learners to proficiency, teachers have to be prepared to stretch proficient and advanced students in their classrooms too because there are also many students who have overcome the transiency of military life to become excellent students looking to continue to grow. Teachers in military-connected schools must be prepared to meet a diverse group of learners where they are and give them the tools necessary to keep growing.

### **Good of the cause approach.**

Just over fifty percent of a cohort group of students in one grade level will still be on the same post to start the next grade the following year. This is a tremendous amount of transiency for most schools, but in the military, it's a normal year. Because of this high amount of transiency, teachers in military-connected schools must be prepared for a high number of

students in their class each year that are new to the school and new to the post. These students will take a higher level of orientation and training to the expectations of the school and the classroom. It is up to teacher to identify these kids, figure out where they are academically, and build a system of interventions that will help them to be successful, all while building relationships with the student and the family. Again, this is not so different from what teachers in public schools do every day, but the extra piece of the equation is that teachers of military-connected students do all this with the understanding that those students may not be in their class or their school long enough to reap the benefits of the extra efforts that the teacher has put forth. Teachers in these circumstances have to do all they can to build efficacy within the students with the mindset that they are doing it “For the Good of the Cause.” Even though the teacher or the school may not reap the long-term benefits of the work they do with each child, they must be confident in the fact that just as they are working to provide the best for students in their own class, teachers in other schools are doing their best work as well in order to prepare the students that will come to that school in the future.

Educating a military-connected student is like a marathon relay. It’s a team effort involving a plethora of different educational professionals by the time the student graduates high school. Because of the number of times dependents of military children move, educators need to do a better job of passing the baton when a student moves from one school to the next as NCO-5 suggested. Teachers, particularly in the elementary grades where students spend a majority of their time with one teacher, should aid in the transition by sending parents with a message to the student’s teacher in the new school. This transition document can be sent either informally or formally as part of the student’s educational record, and would be used to outline the child’s strengths and weaknesses, areas of the content they have mastered, and recommendations for the

next teacher (works best in groups, needs a quiet place to take tests, gets distracted when sitting in the back of the room). These are all things that teachers figure out over time, but if they could have a jump on this information, it would help the student hit the ground running in their new school. That transition should be in place for students with a Section 504 plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP), but even those documents are typically not comprehensive enough to include some of the information that teachers find beneficial when receiving a new student. A transition note would get right at the heart of the information the receiving teacher would need to support the incoming student.

### **Implications for School Leaders**

While the teachers serve on the frontlines for many schools and have the most direct opportunities to build relationships with students and their families, building and district leaders have the opportunity to shape policy and building practices. School leaders also serve as the gatekeepers for how resources are used, thus making them influential roles in the discussion for supporting military students and families.

#### **Understanding military families.**

It is essential that school leaders make sincere efforts to understand the challenges facing military families because in most schools the building principal makes decisions on exemptions to policies like attendance. They make the call on whether or not the absences from school to spend time with Dad, who just came home from a deployment, are excused or unexcused absences. The principal has to make that decision knowing how important it is for the child to be in school every day and supporting the attendance policy, but also keeping in mind that those days spent with one another can be critical to the reintegration of the returning parent to the

family. Building and district leaders have to walk that fine line of consistency for the integrity of school policies, but also have to be flexible to the needs of families.

Being proactive with notifying parents of policies in advance so that they can be involved in making decision with the number of days their child can miss from school is helpful. Another factor that will be helpful to building leaders is understanding the nature of the duties performed by each parents and asking, “Why is it critical that this student be absent from school?” Based on the duties of Non-commissioned Officers, members of Mission Command Training Program (MCTP), and deployed officers, their children may need to miss school to travel to family or simply spend time together based on when the military-connected family member can get a reprieve from the military. This rarely coincides with the school calendar. In fact, it often falls at inopportune times such as the first few days returning from a holiday when teachers are trying to set the tone with their classes or leading up to the end of a semester when students are expected to take semester finals. If principals take the time to find out why the need exists to leave school during these inopportune times, they will typically find that there is little choice involved on the part of the family.

### **Connecting with resources.**

Building leaders must be one of the most knowledgeable resources for families. There are a number of occasions when the principal is working with a family looking for a way to help a child. If the building principal is not only aware of the existence of resources on post to help the family, but also able to provide information for how to connect the parent to that resource, they can get in-time care for their needs that increases the likelihood of the child and/or family getting the help they need. Principals need to be in the role of connecting families to those

resources themselves, but they also need to set up avenues for families to reach that information themselves. One way to do that is through the enrollment process at the beginning of the year.

Enrolling their child in school is frequently one of the first things that families make an effort to do when they arrive on a new post. De Pedro (2014) recommended that schools document military-connected students during the enrollment process and collect other relevant family information such as the parents' concerns. Building leaders can use this opportunity to help families connect with resources on post. Typically enrollment consists of a using the school building to set up tables where the parents can put money on the child's lunch account, sign up for transportation, visit with the school nurse, choose what classes the student will take, and visit with school staff about any specific needs that may be specific to their child. Since all families have to go to school to enroll prior to starting school, building leaders should be using this space to invite military resources into the school including healthcare, counseling, childcare providers, the educational liaison, and any other resource providers that exist on that post and may otherwise be difficult for families to know about or find on their own. Having the opportunity to do one-stop shopping for resource providers during the enrollment process would be tremendously helpful to parents who are trying to manage a hectic life.

### **Support for professional development.**

The role of teacher in a military-connected school is a demanding one. Military spouses are frequently hired by schools because they come in knowing exactly what the children in their classes are going through. Teachers hired into military-connected schools without the benefit of a background with the military, must be taught about the challenges associated with military life through professional development and on-the-job experience. Understanding what kids and families go through is only part of the battle. An essential next step for educators is to stay in the

know of best practices in education and best practices for educating military-connected children. The building principal serves a critical role of ensuring that teachers are exposed to research and new information that helps them understand military families, challenges them to improve their teaching practices, and gives them the opportunity to share successes that are taking place within their work. The principal, however, should also consider delegating the responsibility of training teachers to counselors, the social worker, and experts on human development so that proactive responses to trauma can be planned and executed in the appropriate moment. (Mmari et al, 2009; Sapienza & Masten 2011)

### **Understanding the law.**

There are a variety of schools that military-connected children attend from DOD's Schools that are funded by the Department of Defense, public schools like Fort Leavenworth that are located on post but funded by public money, and other schools located off post and attended by children from the military and civilians alike. Each of these schools has different guidelines that they have to face in terms of curriculum, assessment standards, and funding resources. One of the challenges to maintaining the consistency so badly craved by military families as they move from state to state is that building and district administrators have to walk a fine line of having one foot in the public world with the expectations that go with that world and one foot in the Department of Defense world and the expectations that go along with that.

The rules associated with the public world are determined by federal, state and local governing bodies. These organizations set the policies determining expectations for students related to End-of-Course exams. At the state and federal levels, the recent battles over the implementation of Common Core have placed great emphasis on who determines the curriculum for students. States have fought for their own control over learning standards, while

a “National Curriculum” would be consistent with the requests military families have made for consistency in what is expected from grade to grade and state to state.

The rules associated with the Department of Defense involve the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, adopted by all fifty states as part of their state statutes. The Compact ensures that schools work to support the children of active duty servicemen and women as they transition from school to school, affecting all children under this protected category regardless of whether they are in a military-connected school or not. The Compact focuses on policies affecting attendance, enrollment, transfer of records, graduation requirements, end-of-course testing, and course sequencing. (Jackson 2010)

Building and district administrators must understand the multiple levels of the laws that are in place around them and work to ensure that they are in compliance with them while also working with teachers to ensure that their students are prepared for the expectations they will face in their current state while also preparing them for their future regardless of where they may be next year or as they approach high school graduation.

### **Relationships with post leadership.**

District leaders are responsible for opening lines of communication with post leadership placed by the army if those lines aren't already open. As mentioned by several participants, it is important for the schools to know about events and changes taking place on post. Possible things that should be communicated from the army to district leadership include day-to-day activities such as drills on post that could affect the operation of schools like the escaped prisoner drill in which a volunteer plays the role of a prisoner who has escaped the discipline barracks on post and makes an attempt to get away from Military Police. Periodically, some of the gates to the

post will be shut down causing major delays for teachers and parents living off post to gain access to the post. Advance notice of these events is important so that everyone can get an early start to arriving at school. Another, more far reaching example of the benefits of communication with military leadership is notification when a platoon receives orders that they will be leaving for training or deployment. This news falls hard on the ears of parents and children. If school staff can be informed along with the families, they can prepare for the changes they may see in kids at school, and be understanding to what parents are going through at home.

Likewise, it can be equally important for district leaders to communicate possible changes to the leadership of the post. Any changes to policy that could create turmoil or major impacts on families, can be screened by post leadership to ensure that it is reasonable to expect of families. It can also be an opportunity to get their advance support in an effort to ease the implementation of the change.

### **Importance of school routines.**

When everything else is changing in the world of a student, the one thing they can usually count on is school. (Sapienza & Masten 2011) They know what time the tardy bell is going to ring. They know when they will have science, reading time, their first snack, recess and lunch. These routines and expectations are so critical for kids who are going through the unexpected at home. They rely on these routines. School leaders have to keep this in mind as they plan for changes to the normal, keeping disruptions and surprises to a minimum. The school day should be planned out and consistent as often as possible, but when changes are necessary such as assemblies, early dismissals, a change to the school day, or other events that are out of the ordinary, students should be notified as far in advance as possible and given the opportunity to adjust to the idea.

### **Programming with intention.**

Programs are so important for students and families particularly when they are in crisis. Hearts Apart, a program implemented at every school at Fort Leavenworth, allows students who have deployed parents to gather once a month to participate in events to distract the children from the fact that their parent isn't home and give them an opportunity to connect with other kids who are going through similar struggles. This helps kids to feel that they aren't in this boat alone. De Pedro et al (2014) supported this notion with research drawing the conclusion that "emotionally supportive contexts (household, military installation, community/neighborhood, [school]) help alleviate the emotional and psychological burdens of war on military children and families."

Building leaders need to take a deep look at the programs that their school offers during and after the school day to ensure that families are getting the most from them. Other examples that schools could consider are a school carnival, an international fair for the international students to exhibit their cultures, exhibitions of student art/science/literary creations, family tech nights, Math/Science family nights, and information sessions prior to rolling out new initiatives (Common Core). Events can be planned in conjunction with Parent-Teacher Conferences to encourage engagement in conferences as well. Events that are currently taking place or are added must be looked at and planned so that the events meet a specific purpose or ideally multiple purposes of helping students and families feel connected to the school they may not be at for very long, providing chances for families and students to build relationships with one another, make learning fun or extraordinary, provide an opportunity to open doors for inclusiveness and diversity, or provide a service to families. The more of those boxes an event can check, the more advantageous it is for the school and the families it serves. Schools should

use multiple events of this nature throughout the year to provide avenues for families to receive their benefits.

A word of caution for building leaders planning events with intention is to make sure that the audience is taken into account. Events such as Grandparent Days or Father-Daughter dances can be particularly difficult for military children. These children are typically living long distances from their grandparents or any extended relatives, and events for fathers when he is absent from the home can be a particularly painful for children in these situations. School leaders should ask parents for their input before rolling out activities that could cause more pain than benefit.

#### **Support of families on early dismissal days.**

Professional Learning Communities continue to be a strong element for professional growth and efficacy building among teachers. Early Dismissal is the major avenue for finding the time for teachers in the school day necessary for collaboration. Unfortunately, some families struggle to get supervision for their students on these early dismissal days. School leaders need to look for avenues to support families by supervising students until their normal dismissal time. Parents who want to have their child bused home or picked up at early dismissal time can take those options, but any parents who have to work until the normal dismissal time would have the option of picking their student up at that time.

Schools have been hesitant to keep students after early dismissal time because all certified staff is required to be collaborating with the rest of their Professional Learning Community. Other schools have gotten over this obstacle by rotating the team of teachers that is on supervision duty. This plan would result in a team of teachers missing out on their

collaborative time every fifth to ninth week depending on the number of collaborative teams that a school could rotate through the supervision duty. Another option that has been successful in some schools is using the classified staff to supervise the remaining students. This results in an extra cost to the district, but it would also serve as a good morale booster to keep the classified staff from losing out on hours of work due to the early dismissal. The cost of keeping these staff members on duty for supervision is minimal compared to the benefit to the district of offering consistent work for all staff and the positive public relationship from providing such a positive service to the families.

### **Military families off-post.**

There are many military families that live off-post, or outside of the walls of an army post or other military base: to shorten the commute of a spouse, to allow their child to attend a non-military-connected school they feel is of better quality, for financial reasons, or even in some cases because there isn't a post near their duty station. Parents who live off post, frequently send their children to non-military-connected schools. In some cases, schools that are located off-post, but in close proximity to a military facility have as much familiarity with military-connected children as schools that are located on-post. There are other scenarios in which the military family is placed far from a post. Some examples include military recruiters, military retirees, and veterans discharged for medical reasons, and families that move back to live near family while the military-connected spouse is deployed. The schools that receive the children in this scenario, may have very little experience with children from military families.

This is consistent with the research (De Pedro 2014) which states that DoDEA (Department of Defense Education Activity) schools foster a social and emotional school climate that is welcoming and supportive of the unique circumstances surrounding military-connected students and their families. Not only are civilian schools not often aware of the presence of military-connected students and families, but they lack the systematic procedures and community resources to support these students. The result is students who have a greater sense of alienation, lower rates of belonging, and less supportive relationships with their peers and adults than their non-military peers.

It is up to school leaders in this situation to ensure that they use their military post counterparts to access resources. Leaders of military-connected schools should be prepared to lend guidance and advice to any school leader that may call looking for support in the form of what to be prepared for immediately as well as future support to ensure that the newly enrolled students are receiving the highest level of care possible. In some cases, care for the parent or parents may be necessary as well depending on the scenario. School social workers can also play a significant role in coordinating professional development training and increasing staff awareness of the needs. (De Pedro 2014)

Military children in non-military communities was a grave concern for one participant of the study, who recognized that many of these families may not be advertising their situation, and the schools likely don't even know to be looking for them, much less know how to respond once they are identified.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study found that while there are a number of challenges that are specific to military families and their children, there is also a system of supports in place to ensure that they have opportunities to overcome these physical, social, and emotional barriers to their success. Even with the myriad of supports that are in place, there are still many opportunities to fill gaps in the supports to ensure that every child can be successful.

The focus for this study was on the wives of military-connected husbands, all of whom had a child in grades seven through nine at Patton Junior High School in Fort Leavenworth. My connection as the principal at the school afforded the access to the interview participants. This connection was advantageous, but could have also provided an environment in which participants felt the need to give what they thought was the expected answer rather than their true thoughts. A major mitigating detail of this study is that at the time of interviews, my resignation from the position had already been announced so participants knew that I would not be the principal of their children the following year. Future studies should be conducted in which the interviewer is an unknown third party.

There was also a great advantage to interviewing participants whose children were at the junior high level as it provided the opportunity for active duty spouses whose children had at least eight years of experience in a variety of schools. Older children's parents sometimes are reaching a point in their career where they may be retired. Younger children's parents may not have as many experiences in schools to be able to share their perspective on what is needed. While the junior high age level was intentionally chosen, a greater array of perspectives should also be included for future study, including parents with children in elementary and high school grades.

This study was completed with great compassion and empathy for the sacrifice that members of the military give each day as well as the spouses and children that make it possible for them to do what they do. This topic is one that deserves future study and greater attention by the research and education communities to ensure that every effort is made to help military families be successful in raising their children to be successful adults.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

### **Supporting Military Dependent Students and Their Families: What are the Experiences, Needs, and Expectations of Active Duty Military Families Relative to Their Child's School?**

The purpose of this study is to identify the experiences needs, and expectations of active duty military families related to their child's school. I am interested in determining strategies that can be used by schools that serve the children of active duty military personnel.

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, a study number or a pseudonym rather than your name will be used. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview so it can be transcribed by the principal investigator for later analysis. If at any time you wish the recorder to be turned off, we will do so. All data collected during this study will be kept on a secure, password protected computer, and locked files indefinitely. The transcription of the interview will be sent to you for your approval on the content of the interview.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this study. While there is no direct individual benefit for your participation such as payment, I believe this research will have local benefit and plan to share findings with individuals in the Fort Leavenworth School District USD #207. I also believe this study will be of interest to educators of military connected schools across the country, so the findings may be made available to educators outside the Fort Leavenworth School District.

This interview will last between 30 minutes and 1 hour. This is the only interview that you are scheduled to complete, but if there are any follow up questions after this interview, you may be contacted There are no right or wrong answers, and I greatly appreciate any insight into the life of a military family that you are able to provide.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about your family and its connection to the military.
2. Outline your spouse's career in the military including duty stations and assignments.
3. What has been your favorite duty station and why?
4. What has been your least favorite duty station and why?
5. How has your spouse's career in the military impacted you and your family both positively and negatively?
6. What does the typical day in your life look like?
7. How does the life of military families compare to the lives of civilian families you know?
8. Give me some examples of times when your connection to the military resulted in a need to adjust and adapt to a new circumstances?

9. Have there been any challenging circumstances that your family has faced unique that duty station?
10. Describe your experiences with family supports that the military has in place. (If these services haven't been used, what is the perception of the services?)
11. How could these family support services be more beneficial to military families?
12. Describe an assignment where the school has done an outstanding job of meeting the special needs of your children and what it is that they did to support your child or children.
13. What do you expect of your child's school related to an open or closed relationship? i.e. Would you like to be involved at the school, invited to participate in other ways, receive communication about curriculum, grades, etc.?
14. What do you want schools do know about or understand related to experiences that your children have had?
15. What needs do military children have that may not be true of the needs of civilian children?
16. How can schools do a better job of supporting the needs of your child and/or military children in general?

## Appendix B: Description of Participants

Participant	Spouse has Military Experience	Rank	Years of Military Experience	Number of Duty Stations	Number of Deployments	Number of children (ages)
NCO-2	Yes	1SG	22 years	10	2	2 (8 and 14)
NCO-3	No	SFC	15 years	4	3	6 (13,11,9,6,4, and 4 months)
NCO-4	Yes	SFC	14+ years	5	2	4 (15,12,12, and 2)
NCO-5	No	SGT	12 years	3	4	3 (15, 13, and 12)
NCO-6	No	SFC	16 years	5	2	4 (28, 25, 13, and 8)
NCO-7	No	SGT	9 +	7	4	6 (19, 15, 13, 10, 10 and 6)
IO-8 (Canada)	Yes	LTC	26 years	10	5	2 (13 and 12)
IO-9 (Japan)	Yes	LTC	20 years	7	1	2 (14 and 8)
IO-10 (Spain)	No	LTC	16+	4	4	3 (16, 13, and 3)
IO-11 (Brazil)	Yes	COL	30	14	1	2 (18 and 12)
IO-12 (Mexico)	No	MAJ	18	12	Many deployments in country	2 (14 and 10)
IO-13 (Chile)	No	LTC	Unknown	5	3	3 (20, 18, and 14)
CO-14	No	COL	24	13	4	2 (17 and 13)
CO-15	No	LTC	22	8	2 (Second occurring at time of interview)	5 (15, 14, 12, 9 and 7)
CO-16	No	LTC	26	7	4	2 (17 and 13)
CO-17	No	Mr	Unknown (Retired from Army 2 years ago)	9	0	3 (18, 15, and 13)
CO-18	No	LTC	26	10	1	2 (18 and 14)
CO-19	No	LTC	22	9	1	5 (15, 14, 9, 6 and 4)
CO-20	Yes	LTC	18	10	0	2 (14 and 12)

## **Appendix C: HSCL Signed Consent Form**

Supporting Military Dependent Students and Their Families: What are the Experiences, Needs, and Expectations of Active Duty Military Families Relative to Their Child's School?

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to identify the experiences needs, and expectations of active duty military families related to their child's school. We are interested in determining strategies that can be used by schools that serve the children of active duty military personnel.

### **PROCEDURES**

You will be asked to participate in an interview lasting 30 minutes to 1 hour. There are no right or wrong answers, and we would greatly appreciate your insight into the life of a military family.

With your permission, we would like to audio record the interview so it can be transcribed by the principal investigator for later analysis. If at any time you wish the recorder to be turned off, we will do so. All data collected during this study will be kept on a secure, password protected computer, and locked files indefinitely.

### **BENEFITS AND RISKS**

Thank you in advance for your participation in this study. We believe this research will have local benefit and plan to share findings with individuals in the Fort Leavenworth School District USD #207. There is no

direct individual benefit for your participation such as payment. We also believe this study will be of interest to educators of military connected schools across the country, so the findings may be made available to educators outside the Fort Leavenworth School District.

There are no anticipated risks involved with this study.

#### PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher(s) will use a study number or a pseudonym rather than your name. Your identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study at any time in the future."

#### REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study. Your involvement is strictly voluntary, and whether you choose to participate or not will in no way affect your relationship with your school, district, or the University of Kansas. Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

#### CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: *Chris Kase One Patton Circle, Fort Leavenworth, KS 66048*

If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

**PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:**

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385, write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email [irb@ku.edu](mailto:irb@ku.edu).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

_____	_____
Type/Print Participant's Name	Date
_____	
Participant's Signature	

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