

# Building Capacity in Military-Connected Schools

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## Dr. Jill Biden's Visit to USC

Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, visited USC last month to learn more about the *Building Capacity* project. Find pictures of the

## PAL Program Brings Extra Academic Support to Military-Connected Students

The University of California San Diego's (UCSD) **Partners at Learning** (PAL) program matches undergraduates in education with K-12 students who need tutoring or some additional academic help.

This year, UCSD is piloting PAL with *Building Capacity* to bring those services to schools that have children from military families.

Twelve students are currently working in four schools--Santa Margarita and North Terrace elementary schools and Oceanside High School in Oceanside, and Altus Charter School in San Diego.

In the next term, PAL may grow to 30-40 students and eventually to 75 next year if the schools and families find the extra support, mentoring, and partnership helpful.

In addition to serving as "academic liaisons" in the schools, the UCSD students learn about the unique needs and circumstances of children who grow up in military homes.

At Santa Margarita Elementary, for example, the PAL students are working in kindergarten classes.

"They've been able to provide that extra one-to-one attention for students who need extra practice in academic skills or a helping hand for things like going to the health office," says Principal Pat Kurtz.

PAL tutor Doug Reid, who is working with 3rd graders at North Terrace Elementary, said his experience at the school is bringing to life what he is learning in the classroom. He described PAL as providing students with a "positive, engaged adult-to-student relationship."

### *Developing School Projects*

The PAL students are also preparing projects in their host schools that focus on making public schools more military-friendly and improving learning outcomes among military children.

Some of the ideas suggested include organizing a field

event [here](#).

## Quick Links...

[Our Website](#)



## Temecula Students Make Valentines for Veterans

Students in the Military Kids on Campus club at Great Oak High School in Temecula wanted to make sure military members felt love and appreciation this Valentine's Day.

They participated in Valentines for Veterans, sending hand-made greetings to Great Oak military parents currently serving out of the country or staying in a hospital facility.

The effort is part of the National Salute to Veteran Patients, an initiative of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

trip to a military base or training camp for students and staff that are not military-connected, providing resources on study skills or college access, installing clocks in classrooms that show military time, creating inspirational bulletin boards honoring those parents serving, and holding military appreciation events.

For example, Reid would like for students to work in groups to present either a poem or picture they have created.

And PAL tutor Elizabeth Villarreal (below), who is working at Oceanside High School is collaborating with classmates to organize a workshop that provides resources on preparing for college and tips from other successful college students.



Being in PAL "has allowed me to help military and non-military-connected students" think about their future, says Villarreal, who is working in the school's Academic Acceleration/Recovery Program, designed for students who want to graduate early or make up missing credits. While working with a military-connected student on geometry homework, she learned that the girl wants to become a paramedic. "She hadn't realized that she had the tools to make that dream a reality at her finger tips until I directed her to her program counselor," Villarreal says. "That was cool."

## Featured Resource: Military Child Education Coalition

One of the *Building Capacity* project's strongest partners, the [Military Child Education Coalition](#), is a world-wide organization focused on ensuring quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition.



The MCEC performs research, develops resources, conducts professional institutes and conferences, and publishes resources for all constituencies. The Coalition advocates for the educational needs of military children and works to resolve problems related to transitioning between schools.

MCEC also trains high school and middle school students for the Student 2 Student and the Junior Student 2 Student programs. Supervised by adults, these student leaders support peers who are transitioning in or out of their schools.

Another useful service is "Ask Aunt Peggie," in which an expert researcher--and former military-connected child--responds to questions on topics such as school



## Upcoming Events:

### Family Readiness Express (FRE):

The FRE is scheduled for visit more schools in the *Building Capacity* consortium.

Veterans Elementary School in the Chula Vista school district will host the FRE on Feb. 23-24. Visit our special newsletter issue from [October](#) to read more about this mobile service for military families.

### Military Education Expo:

Families in the Murrieta and Temecula areas are invited to attend a Military Education Expo on Wednesday, Feb. 29, from 6-8 p.m. at Murrieta Mesa High School's Gershwin Performing Arts Center. Topics covered will include cycles of deployment, community resources for

records, transferring credits, and a variety of other issues. She can be reached by email at [peggie.watson@militarychild.org](mailto:peggie.watson@militarychild.org).

## Spotlight On: Leigh Dick

A second-year MSW intern at USC, Leigh Dick understands exactly what it's like to be a military child because her father was a career officer in the Air Force. Between kindergarten and high school, she attended nine different schools, including some in Germany.

After spending time in the computer industry, she began volunteering and then working in public schools after earning her B.A. in human development. A mother of three, she held a variety of different jobs including registrar, attendance technician and a P.E./health teacher.

"Through these experiences I found that a lot of the students needed support from sources outside of their families to be successful," she says. "I feel very equipped to begin my career as a school social worker in one of the school districts near Camp Pendleton and to assist students who have a parent serving in the military."



## Building Capacity Guidebook Preview: Creating a Welcoming Committee

Principals should create a welcoming environment in their school, but that doesn't mean they have to do it alone.

In our forthcoming guidebook for school administrators, we feature one strategy called a "welcome steering committee." which comes from the Center for



military families and college financial aid through the post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Presenters include the Marines, Navy, Air Force, the Exceptional Family Member Program, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and the Veterans Administration. For more information, visit the Murrieta Valley Unified School District [website](#).

Questions, Comments or to Unsubscribe: e-mail us at [raastor@usc.edu](mailto:raastor@usc.edu)

Mental Health in Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles.

This committee can include an administrator, a counselor, a Title I coordinator, a school psychologist or social worker, one or two teachers, a clerical staff person, and even one or two parents. A military student could also be consulted as needed.

The committee can establish procedures for activities such as greeting new students, introducing them to key adults in the school, showing them around the building and providing them with information on resources within the community.

The steering committee or another similar task force can address ways to monitor how military students or other highly mobile students are faring in school.

## Headlines

We have featured the following stories on our [website](#) in recent weeks. Check back often for new stories, reports and resources related to military children.

This article in the [Observation Post](#) features the "Desert Kids" program developed by Military Families United. With volunteers from the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in 29 Palms, Calif., the program helps military children gain a better understanding of what the deployment experience is like for their parents. The children receive passports and attend a "mini-briefing" on Afghanistan.

The [Rapid City Journal](#) featured a new NASA Space Camp scholarship sponsored by the Military Child Education Coalition. The scholarship is named for Bernard Curtis Brown II. Bernard, the 11-year-old son of Chief Petty Officer Bernard Curtis Brown, died tragically Sept. 11, 2001, when the hijacked airliner on which he was a passenger crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.