

The Promotional Role of School and Community Contexts for Military Students

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Abstract This article examines how supportive public school environments can serve as a promotional context for the development of children and adolescents from military families. The authors integrate theory and research from multiple research strands (e.g., human development, studies of at-risk youth, educational reform, goodness of fit theory, and school climate) to outline how public schools can support the development of all children and adolescents. This article provides further support for the supposition that school climates and the social-ecological contexts surrounding a school (e.g., universities, communities, school districts) have the potential to protect at-risk children and adolescents from an array of negative social, emotional, and psychological outcomes. The authors draw linkages between these research domains and the development of military children and adolescents. Promotional civilian school environments embedded within supportive and inclusive contexts can create a social infrastructure that supports the development of military children and adolescents. The authors argue that this conceptual approach can create a

foundation for interventions and research that focuses on schools as normative supportive developmental settings for military children and youth during challenging times of war (e.g., deployments and multiple school transitions). This article concludes with a discussion of future directions in research on the development of military children and adolescents. Based on a heuristic conceptual model that outlines areas needing further research, the authors call for a deeper theoretical and empirical integration of school climate and external contextual factors surrounding the school. Investigating the social and organizational dynamics within these contexts can result in a more comprehensive picture of the development of military children and adolescents.

Keywords School climate · Military students · School transition · Deployment · Ecological models

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have exposed military children and adolescents to a wide array of stressors unlike those experienced in previous wars or during peacetime (e.g., multiple and prolonged deployments, reintegration, post-trauma). Numerous studies conducted during the current conflict have found that children and adolescents from military families often experience more negative psychological, social, and emotional outcomes than their civilian peers. This conceptual review article asserts that supportive primary and secondary school environments can also serve as promotional contexts for the development of military children and adolescents during times of stress. This review focuses on the developmental contexts and school settings of primary and secondary schools, or kindergarten through 12th grade (heretofore K-12). An overview of the theoretical and empirical work across academic disciplines illustrates the potentially supportive impact of a

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school's environment on the social, emotional, and psychological outcomes of at-risk youth. Moreover, research from school reform studies shows that a whole-school intervention approach holds the greatest promise for promoting positive outcomes among military students—defined in this study as a student with a parent, sibling, or other close relative serving in the military. Research and practice that focuses on improving multiple components of school climate, with an added emphasis on military culture, have specific implications for military-connected public schools. De Pedro et al. (2011) developed a heuristic conceptual model that can help guide future studies that explore how supportive school climates and the surrounding social-ecological contexts (e.g., universities, communities, and school districts) promote positive social and emotional development for military children and adolescents experiencing war-related stressors (e.g., deployment, school transitions, etc.). This review builds on the De Pedro et al. (2011) model and outlines how future research can explore the dynamics between and within these social-ecological contexts, life experiences, and development, in order to elucidate their potentially supportive transactional nature in relation to the development of military children and adolescents.

What We Know About Military Children and Adolescents in Civilian Public Schools

Maintaining positive primary and secondary school climates for large populations of military students can be a challenge, especially for civilian public school districts (De Pedro et al. 2011; Esqueda et al. 2012). Military students are rarely mentioned as a unique student population or cultural group within school reform research and/or federal, state, district, and school-level policies and procedures. Moreover, few studies, across academic disciplines, have examined the role of supportive and caring school environments on the social, emotional, and psychological development of military students. The majority of studies on military children and adolescents have instead focused heavily on children and families within clinical settings, while paying little attention to the potential supportive role of school settings (Gorman et al. 2010; Hubner et al. 2009; MacDermid et al. 2008).

The lack of research on the impact of the school environment on the social, emotional, and psychological outcomes of military children and adolescents is surprising, given the prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, prior wars, and the significant presence of military students in civilian public school districts throughout the United States. According to current Department of Defense Educational Activity (DoDEA) estimates, more than 2 million children

have experienced a parental deployment since 2002, and more than half—1.2 million—are school-aged. Only an estimated 86,000 military students attend (noncivilian) DoDEA schools. The majority of military children and adolescents attend civilian-operated public schools, as do the majority of National Guard and reservist children (625,000 and 705,000 children, respectively), many of whom have had a parent deployed within the past 10 years. Due to data limitations, little is known about the number and enrollment trends of veteran children or those with a sibling serving in the military (U.S. Department of Defense 2011). Informal estimates, however, suggest that 4–5 million students may have had a parent, sibling, or close family member serve in Iraq and/or Afghanistan. While military children are enrolled in civilian public schools throughout the United States, approximately 214 public school districts have been identified as serving a significant proportion of military students (about 400 military students or 4 % of total district enrollment) (Kitmitto et al. 2011).

There is a dearth of research on how school environments *and* the social contexts surrounding the school (i.e., communities, peers, military installations, and societal attitudes) can promote positive outcomes, or exacerbate negative outcomes, among military children, adolescents, and families when they experience stressful military-specific life situations (e.g., parental separation, school transition). For example, the average military adolescent will experience nine school transitions as part of his or her K-12 schooling, unlike their civilian peers who attend far fewer schools (Kitmitto et al. 2011). With each school transition, military-connected children and adolescents are subject to meaningful variations across school environments. This includes differences in state-level academic standards, the school's awareness of military culture, a staff's capacity to respond to military life issues, and school climates. While each school transition can be stressful in and of itself, it is important from an ecological perspective to remember that these school transitions often co-occur with a change in community (schools are nested within communities). As military children move from one geographic location to the next, they are thus expected to simultaneously adapt to a new school and community. They are also influenced by the ecological interactions that occur between schools, communities, and their surrounding social contexts (e.g., policy contexts, the military context). Yet, little research has explored the complex relationships that occur among these multiple social contexts and their collective impact on the development of military children.

Until 2008, the visibility and needs of military students in public school settings were not a robust topic of research, policy, or intervention (Esqueda et al. 2012). A series of recent studies suggest that military youth experience more negative outcomes than civilian peers. For example, on

school grounds, military adolescents in middle and high schools report significantly higher rates of substance use (Gilreath et al. 2013), violence and victimization (Atuel et al. 2013; Gilreath et al. 2012), bullying and victimization (Gilreath et al. 2012), mental health stress (Cederbaum et al. 2013; Reed et al. 2011a), and gang affiliation (Reed et al. 2011b) than their nonmilitary peers who attend the same schools. These differences in outcomes between military and nonmilitary students are of concern given their experiences during times of war and frequent transitions.

Recent qualitative studies conducted within public school environments provide some insight into the higher school violence and victimization rates of military students. In a study of military adolescents from different regions of the United States, Mmari et al. (2009) found that anti-war sentiments provided impetus for civilian students to commit acts of violence against military adolescents. Military adolescents also had difficulty making friends and developing caring and nurturing relationships at school due to teachers' and peers' lack of awareness of military life and culture. Studies also found that military adolescents had difficulty adjusting to new school environments, including school and classroom rules and procedures, and that military-connected schools and districts often lack appropriate supports and procedures to address transition. These gaps in school support coupled with adjustment-related issues may potentially contribute to some of the academic issues and social challenges (with peers) reported by military children and adolescents (Bradshaw et al. 2010; Chandra et al. 2010). Collectively, these studies suggest that lack of awareness and support by schools' staff and peers contributes to the vulnerability of military students as both victims and perpetrators in school violence.

Applying Goodness of Fit Theories to Military Students in Civilian Public School Settings

For many decades, the potentially positive contributions of the school setting have been theorized and empirically explored for at-risk youth. Some of these findings may be applicable to military students in public schools. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, psychological, educational, and sociological researchers have suggested that a goodness of fit—a match between the students' cultural background and life experiences and the school's mission and organization—may explain how at-risk students succeed despite stressful life challenges in their family and community contexts (Comer 1984; Dryfoos 1995; Eccles et al. 1993; Piaget 1951). This area of research on goodness of fit and at-risk youth can help frame how researchers examine the development of military children and adolescents in civilian school environments. For nearly a hundred years,

theoreticians in urban educational reform and child development have studied the promotional role of school staff, peer relationships, school mission, effective leadership and organization, and social supports on the social, emotional, and academic development of students. For example, Comer (1984) conceptualized and implemented a model of schooling that addressed the psychological and financial stressors of children and adolescents attending K-12 schools in the New Haven Public School District. More recently, studies have found that schools with good organization, high academic standards, consensus on procedural and relational goals, and a common school mission can promote the social, emotional, and academic development of children and adolescents. For instance, research on students attending Israeli public schools has shown that a caring school environment—comprised of trained, supportive, and responsive staff—can minimize academic failure and risk behavior among students despite community violence and poverty. These conditions can also promote well-being and success among students (Astor et al. 2010; Benbenishty and Astor 2005; Berkowitz 2013). Further, in a 1993 study of Norwegian public school students (grades 5–8), Olweus found that middle and high school students at-risk for school violence perpetration and victimization experienced positive social and emotional outcomes after participating in a whole school, comprehensive anti-bullying program. These studies suggest that school environments, if structured properly, can potentially promote positive social, emotional, and psychological development among military children and adolescents experiencing a variety of military life stressors.

Theoretical work in developmental psychology also suggests that a cultural and social match must exist between a public school environment and the cultural background and daily life experiences of at-risk youth (e.g., military children and adolescents). For example, Eccles et al. (1993) found that the positive psychological changes associated with adolescent development result from a match between the needs of developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded to them by their social environments. Eccles and other researchers have further identified contextual school factors that influence the motivational orientation of early adolescents during a middle school or junior high transition. These factors include school size, teacher efficacy, caring teacher–student relationships, and a school's academic culture (Astor et al. 2010; Benbenishty and Astor 2005; Eccles et al. 1993). Across schools, these environmental qualities vary greatly. Eccles et al. (1993) thus argue that researchers must examine the extent to which school environments address or do not address the developmental needs of adolescent students. Culture-centric charter schools,

private schools, or public schools that align their school missions and school culture with the unique cultural backgrounds and life experiences of students may serve as positive examples (Henig et al. 2005; Wells et al. 1999). Overall, goodness of fit research underscores a need to better understand the extent to which civilian school environments match the cultural background and life experiences of military children and adolescents and how a goodness of fit impacts their social, emotional, and psychological development.

The ways in which theorists and researchers have conceptualized the school environment have informed the types of interventions they propose for at-risk populations. Educational reform theories about the protective role of school climate on students' social and emotional outcomes are based on a whole-school philosophical approach to school change. A whole-school approach targets not only the outcomes of at-risk youth, but all students, and reflects the theoretical assumptions of school climate researchers summarized in the following sections (CASEL 2003; Comer 1984; Espelage and Swearer 2007). Whole-school change requires that multiple components of a school's climate and context (i.e., principal, teacher, and peer awareness of military culture and issues, data-driven decision-making, professional development, school mission, and vision) are transformed to promote positive social, emotional, and psychological outcomes and prevent negative outcomes among all students. In a military-connected school, for instance, the extent to which the school (i.e., peers, teachers, principals) acknowledges and supports military families (e.g., caring relationships, awareness of students' family issues) could influence an array of social, emotional, and academic outcomes for *both* military and nonmilitary students.

The whole-school approach also provides impetus for researchers and practitioners to expand their conceptual thinking on school change, and in public schools serving military students, for researchers and practitioners to include the ecological systems surrounding the school (i.e., school districts, educational policy, school reform movements, military installations, and civilian communities). Yet, the whole-school prevention approach to school climate change stands in stark contrast to the dominant school-based intervention strategy employed within schools, wherein school-based programs are utilized to address only a small number of at-risk students. In addition, much of the current intervention and developmental research literatures focus almost exclusively on individual students' and/or families' risk factors, while ignoring the multiple social contexts where risk and omissions of support occur (Espelage and Swearer 2007). The presence of these supports in multiple social contexts may reduce

negative outcomes among students, while their absence may exacerbate negative outcomes.

What We Know from the School Reform Literature About Supportive School Climates

The school reform literature has focused on supportive and caring school climates. This body of research suggests that caring and supportive K-12 school climates can promote positive academic, social, emotional, and psychological outcomes among student populations (Brand et al. 2003; Cohen et al. 2009; Eccles et al. 1993; Zullig et al. 2010). More specifically, these studies have found that supportive school climates promote wellbeing and curb negative social and emotional outcomes (i.e., depression and suicidal ideation) among elementary, middle, and high school-aged students across geographic and cultural contexts. Studies have also found that positive school climates can even protect students exposed to a variety of stressors in their community, neighborhood, and/or household (Hoy and Hannum 1997; Jia et al. 2009; Modin and Ostberg 2009). Recent reviews of school climate research have generated theoretically driven models that incorporate multiple components of school climate (Cohen et al. 2009; Zullig et al. 2010) and social and emotional wellbeing (CASEL 2003; Flanagan and Stout 2010; Greenberg et al. 2003; Wang 2009; Wilson 2004). Collectively, these works suggest that a positive school climate is one where students experience caring relationships with peers and adults, participate meaningfully in school activities, report a strong sense of belonging and feelings of personal safety, and have limited exposure to risky peer behavior. In addition, positive school climates are those in which peers and staff demonstrate an awareness of students' unique family issues and cultural practices (Brand et al. 2003; Cohen 2006; Cohen et al. 2009; Jia et al. 2009; McGuire et al. 2010; Zullig et al. 2010). Overall, positive school climates are critical to the social, emotional, and academic success of students, including military-connected youth.

Understanding Multiple Components of School Climate

Having a detailed understanding of the multiple components of school climate can help the development of effective school-based interventions. Recent research reviews on school climate have asserted the need to conceptualize school climate as a multidimensional construct that encompasses caring relationships, sense of safety, risky peer behavior, and sense of belonging (Cohen et al. 2009; Zullig et al. 2010). These dimensions, and their

impact on the social, emotional, psychological, and academic outcomes of students, are summarized below.

Caring Relationships

Students benefit socially, emotionally, and academically from nurturing and caring social relationships (Brand et al. 2003; Modin and Ostberg 2009; Zullig et al. 2010). Supportive relationships with teachers have been shown to enhance students' ability to adjust behaviorally and emotionally to changing school and classroom contexts (i.e., changing rules and procedures and academic standards) (Brand et al. 2003; Jia et al. 2009). Supportive teacher and peer relationships are also associated with lower rates of school violence among adolescents (Elliot et al. 2010; Flanagan and Stout 2010; Hoy et al. 2002; Marachi et al. 2006; Wilson 2004). In a study of high schools in suburban Virginia, Elliot et al. (2010) social and emotional support from peers and teachers promotes students' positive attitudes toward seeking help for bullying and threats of violence. Other empirical investigations have found that supportive peer and teacher relationships facilitate trust in authority among adolescent students in middle and high school, thereby preventing school violence (Flanagan and Stout 2010; Hoy et al. 2002).

Safety

The safety and order of a school environment include individual and collective perceptions of safety, respect for peers and authority, acknowledgement of disciplinary policies as fair, and a minimal presence of gangs (Astor et al. 2002; Zullig et al. 2010). Research has found that in K-12 schools where violence and discipline policies are perceived by students as fair and consistently implemented, students are more likely to experience positive academic, mental health, and behavioral outcomes (Brand et al. 2003; Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2005; Zullig et al. 2010). School environments that promote active student participation in school violence prevention and safety also have lower rates of violence (Brand et al. 2003; Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2005). Alternatively, in schools with highly punitive discipline policies, students are more likely to be fearful of school and/or victims or perpetrators of bullying (Fenning and Rose 2007; Zullig et al. 2010). African-American and Latino males who attend these schools are also more likely to be placed in a lower track or special education, drop out of school, and engage in risky behaviors that in the long term leads to imprisonment (Opportunity Suspended 2000).

School environments, where students are active participants in school violence prevention and safety and where violence and discipline procedures are consistently implemented and commonly understood by students and teachers,

have lower rates of violence and risk behavior (Brand et al. 2003; Khoury-Kassabri et al. 2005). In a national study of Israeli secondary school students, Khoury-Kassabri et al. (2005) found that in both Jewish and Arab schools, a student's understanding of school violence policies and procedures and positive relationships with teachers was negatively associated with serious physical victimization. In a study of American secondary school students in urban schools, Brand et al. (2003) found that consistently implemented school discipline policies and procedures, and students' perceptions of a clarity of rules and expectations facilitated students' behavioral adjustment. In a study of students in a large ethnically and socioeconomically diverse middle school, Kuperminc et al. (2001) found that favorable perceptions of fairness, order, and discipline, and a school culture that disapproves of drug use moderated the negative effects of a lack of self-efficacy on internalizing and externalizing problems.

In addition, research has suggested schools that have a shared perception of fairness and clarity of rules can curb the risk for students engaging in risky behaviors and delinquency in schools even within highly violent communities. In a nationally representative sample of high schools, Gottfredson et al. (2005) found that students' perceptions of fairness of rules, clarity of rules, organizational focus, morale, planning, and administrative leadership explained a substantial percentage of the variance in all the measures of school disorder (i.e., student drug use and violent behavior), controlling for the effects of community characteristics. Overall, it is expected that a school community that has clear and consistent discipline procedures promotes positive mental health outcomes and reduces victimization rates of students in military-connected schools.

Belonging

School climate research has found that a strong sense of belonging promotes positive wellbeing and reduces school violence victimization outcomes. Research also suggests that students with a strong sense of belonging are less likely to present with psychological issues, are less victimized in school, and are more motivated to attain academic success when compared to disengaged and alienated students (Bond et al. 2007; Bonny et al. 2000; Wilson 2004). For example, secondary school students who reported high levels of social connectedness also reported fewer anxiety and depressive symptoms and conduct problems during early adulthood (Bond et al. 2007; Loukas et al. 2006). A strong sense of belonging further appears to be inversely related to student involvement in risky peer behavior, including lower rates of substance use and bullying (Wilson 2004).

In addition, research has suggested that strategies and interventions that strengthen belonging may need to be

culturally relevant. Studies have found that the vast majority of disconnected and disaffected students are male, belong to a racial and ethnic minority group, attend an urban school, and report low parental educational attainment (Bonny et al. 2000; Skiba et al. 2002). Culturally, relevant pedagogy theorists say that racial minority students feel more connected to a classroom and school community when their cultures and histories are represented in the curriculum, their languages are utilized in daily instruction, and they are included in deciding classroom rules and procedures (Hernandez-Sheets 2003, 2009; Ladson-Billings 1994). Brand et al. (2003) also found that schools that were rated by minority students as having higher levels of cultural pluralism and student participation in decision-making were ones in which minority students exhibited significantly higher levels of behavioral adjustment. Overall, knowledge of how multiple components of school climate impact various student outcomes can inform school-based interventions for military-connected students.

Emerging Findings on Supportive School Climates and Military-Connected Students

Recent studies have compared the degree to which school climate impacts victimization and mental health outcomes among three groups of middle and high school students: nonmilitary students, students with a military parent, and students with a military sibling. For all three groups of students, sense of belonging, safety, and respect for a student's family background played major roles in reducing school victimization. Caring relationships also played a significant role in the victimization outcomes of all the three groups of students. The impact of caring relationships, however, was larger among middle and high school students with a military parent. Findings further showed that school climate was associated with lower victimization rates even when students experience the stress of a family member's deployment (De Pedro et al. 2013a). In a related study, De Pedro et al. (2013b) also found that supportive and nurturing school climates are associated with positive mental health outcomes for middle and high school students attending military-connected schools. For example, caring relationships and a strong sense of belonging played a significant role in promoting wellbeing and curbing rates of depression and suicidal ideation among students in military-connected schools. These findings were similar across student groups, even when students reported a recent deployment. Moreover, these findings provide additional evidence for the importance of school climate on the outcomes of at-risk groups (Cohen et al. 2009; Zullig et al. 2010) and those experiencing trauma (Astor et al. 2011).

In light of these findings, De Pedro et al. (2013a) argue that multiple components of school climate, especially caring relationships, sense of belonging, and respect for a student's family background, may result in less violent schools, even when students are psychologically impacted by deployment. De Pedro et al. (2013b) also argue that school climate interventions tailored to the unique challenges of military life (e.g., school-based transition rooms and centers) may also promote wellbeing among nonmilitary students.

The Conceptual Integration of External School Contexts and School Climate Research in Military-Connected Schools

De Pedro et al. (2011) reviewed peer-reviewed studies on military children and families from multiple academic disciplines (e.g., public health, psychology) conducted since the Vietnam War. Based on their review, De Pedro et al. (2011) utilize a social-ecological framework to outline major gaps in research on military children and adolescents. The heuristic model provides a context for future research on military children and adolescents within a broader educational research agenda (see Fig. 1). As seen in Fig. 1, military contexts (e.g., war, military branch), societal contexts (e.g., attitudes toward the military), supportive school climates (e.g., teacher awareness of and support for military-connected students), and supports outside of the school environment (i.e., higher education, community, and military supports), collectively influence the social, emotional, and academic outcomes of military-connected students. Prior studies, however, have largely focused on military-specific external risk issues (e.g., deployment), family and community supports, and the social, emotional, and psychological development of military children and adolescents (see left-hand side of the model). To date, few studies have focused on the impact of the military context and social contexts on the social, psychological, and emotional development of military children and adolescents. Moreover, fewer studies have examined the role of supportive school environments in promoting positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes among military students or the role of external supports (see right-hand side of Fig. 1) (Chandra et al. 2010; De Pedro et al. 2011; Mmari et al. 2009) on the social, emotional, and academic outcomes of military children and adolescents. Within the school environment, De Pedro et al. (2011) posit that studies need to focus specifically on the role of school-level factors such as principal leadership, teacher, and peer awareness and support, and school climate on the social, emotional, and academic outcomes of military students. De Pedro et al. (2011) also emphasize a need for future research on contextual

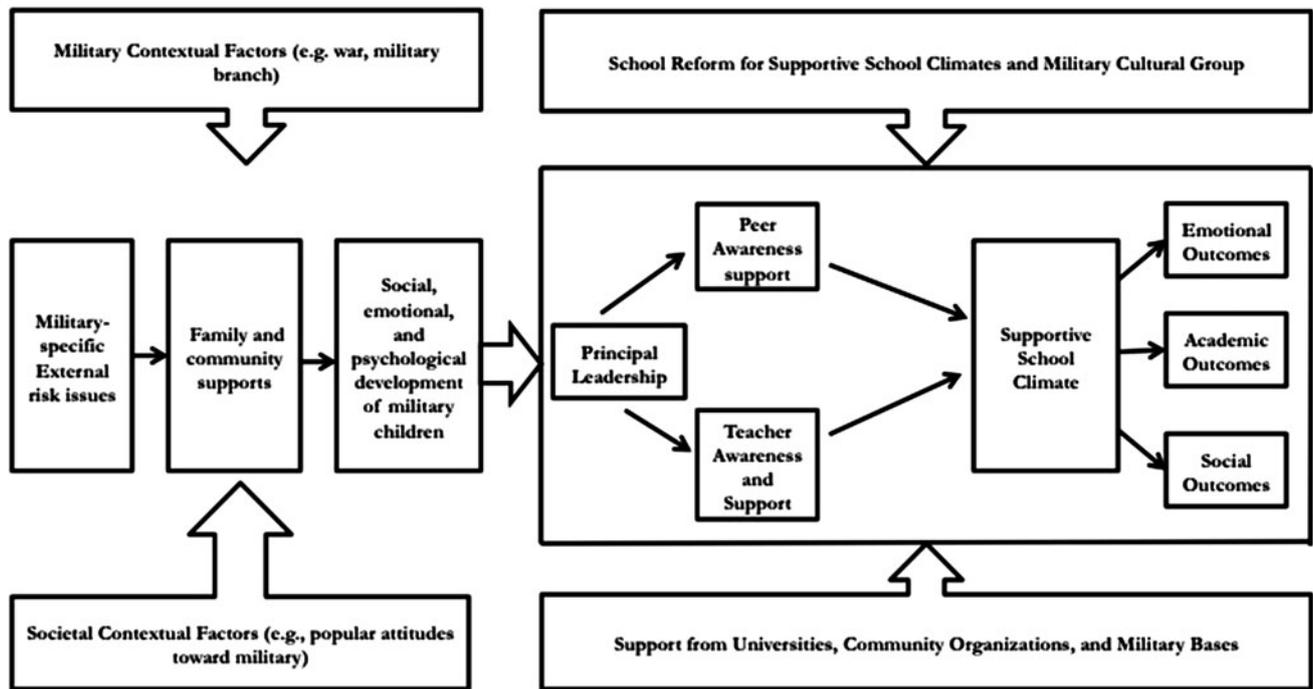


Fig. 1 Current and future directions in research on military children and adolescents

factors that influence a civilian school's capacity to respond effectively to the needs of military students, including school reform efforts and support from universities, military installations, and community organizations (see the right-hand side of the model). Research that examines the influence of structural factors *within* the school environment such as school size, school type (elementary, middle, and high school), and school mission on school climate and the social, emotional, and psychological development of military children is also needed. Moreover, researchers must address the dearth of research on the influence of ecological contexts *outside* of the school (e.g., communities, military bases).

As seen in Fig. 1, school environments are embedded within distal ecological contexts (see Fig. 1). Yet, to date, the vast majority of studies surrounding military children have focused on the three central boxes on the left side of Fig. 1—military-specific external risk issues, family and community supports, and social, emotional, and the psychological development of military children. In general, these studies have found that military children experience significant psychological strain and stress from military-related life events, including multiple school transitions, parental separation during deployment, shifting roles and household responsibilities during a deployment, the visible stress of a left-behind parent, and secondary war trauma (De Pedro et al. 2011). Within the Iraq and Afghanistan war context, studies have found that when compared to their civilian peers, military students experience significantly

more adverse mental health and child maltreatment outcomes (De Pedro et al. 2011; Huebner et al. 2009; Mmari et al. 2009). Studies, however, have also highlighted the resiliency of military children, specifically resiliency gained from the experience of multiple school transitions and repeated and prolonged deployments. Military children and adolescents develop healthy coping skills despite repeated parental separation and school transitions when left-behind parents are financially stable and families have access to military-specific physical and mental health services (Bradshaw et al. 2010; Hoshmand and Hoshmand 2007; MacDermid et al. 2008; Morris and Age 2009).

Given the paucity of research on the factors identified on the left-hand side of Fig. 1, De Pedro et al. (2011) posit that new studies focus on factors *within* the school environment. More specifically, studies need to examine how contextual school factors, like how principal, teacher, and peer awareness and support and school climate impact the social, academic, and emotional outcomes of military students. Preliminary studies suggest that principals who report a family connection to the military or were former military children lead the most supportive and responsive military-connected schools (De Pedro et al. 2011). These principals appear to be more attuned to how military culture and life events can influence the school experiences of military children, resulting in educational philosophies inclusive of military families, school climate interventions tailored to military students, and knowledge of community social supports and resources for military children and

families. Other structural factors *within* the school environment such as school size, school type (elementary, middle, and high school), and school mission, however, may also influence school climate and the social, emotional, and psychological development of military children. For example, research and theory on school size and the social and academic outcomes of students in elementary, middle, and high schools has found that small classroom communities provide students with caring and nurturing relationships with adults. Very large comprehensive high school settings, however, have been found to provide students a greater sense of autonomy and anonymity as well as diverse choices for academics and extracurricular activities (Phillips 1997). Research must also examine the influence of ecological contexts *outside* of the school (e.g., communities, military bases) on the social, academic, and emotional outcomes of military students.

As seen in the right-hand side of Fig. 1, De Pedro et al. (2011) posit that contexts *outside* the school can and do influence the school environments of military-connected students. This perspective maintains that military-connected students and schools are embedded within multiple social contexts. For example, as seen on the right-hand side of Fig. 1 (top box), school reform efforts can promote supportive school climates for military students. These school reform initiatives, however, must include the identification of military students as few states and/or districts are able to identify military-connected students using existing statewide or district databases. Since 2011, the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS)—a statewide survey of risk and resiliency that is completed by elementary, middle, and high school students—has included a military identifier that districts have used to direct resources to military students attending public schools. Further, as seen on the right-hand side of Fig. 1 (bottom box), supports located within community organizations, universities, and military bases could play a significant role in enhancing the capacity of school environments to promote positive outcomes among military students. Community organizations and universities attuned to the needs and life experiences of military families could provide services (e.g., mental health support, connections to federal grants) for military-connected schools. Military bases also have school liaison officers who support military families and children with academic tutoring, after-school activities, and other community resources.

As seen on the left-hand side of Fig. 1, military contextual factors (e.g., attitudes toward military) and societal contextual factors (e.g., war, military branch) also need to be examined in future research on military children and adolescents. For instance, military contextual factors such as military branch and rank could influence the socioeconomic status of military families. Low-ranked military families may concentrate in low SES civilian communities, while high-

ranked families may have access to high-performing schools in affluent communities. Further, societal contextual factors could include negative attitudes toward the military or a lack of civilian awareness of a military family's sacrifice. These attitudes could be reflected in a lack of awareness among principals, teachers, and peers, and hence, it negatively affects a school's willingness to provide supports specifically for military students. In all, future research can help us better understand how multiple ecological spheres, inside and outside the school, affect the social, emotional, academic, and psychological development of military students. Moreover, such research could document the effects of different social-ecological contexts on military-connected school environments. For example, this potential area of research could explore the multiple roles of school reform initiatives, university support, community organizations, and military bases in promoting more social and emotional climate of military-connected schools (see right-hand side of Fig. 1). Currently, there are multiple cross-cutting themes and existing emerging data on school climate and military students that could be used to build the model presented in Fig. 1.

Research on military students needs to examine how multiple ecological contexts (i.e., school reform, support from universities, community organizations, and military bases as seen on the right-hand side of Fig. 1) interact to promote the positive social, emotional, academic, and psychological development and military students across developmental stages, or within the contexts of schools, by grade. For example, how elementary school contexts interact with and support the unique experiences of military students within a war context (e.g., of school transitions, deployment, reintegration, and new school-based relationships) may be different from middle and high school contexts. Elementary schools are typically smaller and structured to facilitate nurturing and caring peer and teacher relationships for students who may not yet possess the skill sets needed to do this on their own (Brookover et al. 1978; Cohen et al. 2009). Middle and high school contexts, on the other hand, are typically much larger communities and structured to facilitate school experiences aimed at increasing social and academic autonomy. Such variations in school contexts, and their interaction across developmental stages, could result in a wide variation of social, emotional, academic, and psychological development and outcomes of military children and adolescents.

Current Military and Societal Contexts: Deployments, Transitions, and the Civilian-Military Cultural Divide

As seen on the left-hand side of Fig. 1, understanding societal contextual factors would be necessary for future

empirical investigations. It is not clear how the civilian public's attitudes, including indifference and/or detachment from a decade-long war effort and war-related strife, affect the development of military children and families. In addition, investigations of military contextual factors (e.g., military rank, military branch) are needed. It is not clear if military branch or rank affects the social, emotional, and psychological development of military children and adolescents. Furthermore, systematic research on the role of societal contextual factors and military contextual factors on the development of military children and adolescents and their risk issues (see the left-hand side of Fig. 1) is needed to specify how social-ecological contexts such as school reform, community organizations, and military installations (see right-hand side of Fig. 1) can effectively support military-connected schools. For instance, school reformers, community organizations, and universities can use their knowledge of societal and military contextual factors to develop evidence-based practices for military-connected schools and students.

The context of the Iraq and Afghanistan war is different from other war contexts in recent history. For example, the number and duration of deployments and school transitions that military families in the current war context have experienced is unprecedented. The majority of military-connected youth experience deployment-related transitions. Deployment-related, wartime transitions usually have an added emotional intensity, anxiety, and uncertainty over the potential death of a parent or sibling, injury of a family member, and separation issues (Bradshaw et al. 2010; Chandra et al. 2010; Mmari et al. 2009). In addition, military children and adolescents often need to deal with the challenges of the family's reestablishment of household roles and responsibilities and financial security after deployment. This includes the reemployment of a parent in civilian society, family struggles to generate income to make ends meet, and the organizational reordering of the family from a single parent or extended family to a two-parent structure (De Pedro et al. 2011; Galovski and Lyons 2004). In addition, a recent commentary in the American media argued that societal contextual factors, such as the lack of civilian support and understanding, have manifested in unique stressors and life circumstances for military families (Astor 2012). Consequently, military families are often isolated in civilian communities that are often detached from war events and tragedies. This civilian-military cultural divide presents a social and psychological obstacle to the reintegration of veterans and military families in civilian communities (Esqueda et al. 2012; U.S. Department of Defense 2008).

Current Responses from Military Community Organizations and School Reform

Efforts from community organizations suggest that transitions and deployments are stressors that could be exacerbated in civilian contexts where the unique struggles of military children, adolescents, and families are not acknowledged or addressed by the civilian community. Furthermore, policy and reform efforts initiated in the past decade have been aimed at educating all public schools on the needs of military students, thereby highlighting efforts to fill the gap between the military and civilian communities. Military-connected schools on or near military installations have organized superintendent organizations (e.g., Military Impacted Schools Association), and nonprofit organizations such as the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) are commonly raising awareness in military-impacted civilian communities.

However, most civilian public school districts are not located near a military base and lack procedures for identifying military students (Astor 2012). Hence, teachers, principals, and other school staff are often unable to target and support the social, emotional, or developmental needs of military children in wartime. National practice and policy efforts have associated the invisibility of military students in civilian contexts as one major reason that military students sometimes feel alienated, lack a sense of belonging, show signs of depression and make risky peer group choices in civilian school contexts (Esqueda et al. 2012). Moreover, the inability to identify military students is an obstacle when schools must present military student enrollment data for federal resources such as military impact aid. It is also possible that resources and social supports are needed more intensely for military students during a specific stage of development and in specific school contexts.

Together, national school reform efforts and military community organizations have begun to address multiple transitions and deployments in the current war context as well as the civilian-military cultural divide in federal educational policy. This effort represents how two social contexts—school reform and support from the military community organizations—have attempted to enhance a school's capacity to promote positive outcomes among military students (see right-hand side of Fig. 1). School climate reformers and developmental researchers interested in transforming multiple social contexts to support the social and emotional development of military-connected youth could view the premises underlying these policy initiatives as hypotheses for future theories and studies.

The Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission's (MIC3) creation of the Interstate Compact on Edu-

educational Opportunity for Military Children is a policy initiative that can change public school practices toward the military community. These changes include excusing absences for military children during parental deployments, and allowing flexible academic requirements to accommodate frequent school transitions and to address issues such as the timely transfer of records, enrollment, and special education services (Esqueda et al. 2012). In addition, making extracurricular participation requirements flexible for highly mobile military students could potentially provide them with opportunities to forge new social-peer relationships, which is critical for students in transition. As mentioned, how these efforts differentially affect development in the context of elementary, middle, and high school, and the ever-growing homeschooling movement are not fully conceptualized or researched in empirical studies.

When these contextual challenges are addressed and supports provided, military-connected students and their families appear to be able to invest their time and energy into transitioning socially, emotionally, and psychologically (e.g., making new friends, saying good-bye to old friends). These central issues are rarely addressed in the theoretical or research literatures exploring military-connected schools. The MIC3 policy reflects the military community's efforts to bridge the civilian-military cultural barriers and address wartime transitions and deployments within the context of the civilian public school system. As seen on the right-hand side of Fig. 1, these contextual domains—school reform, support from community organizations, school environments—could be incorporated into empirical designs. In future research on the development of military students, researchers in school reform and child development can then generate and test hypotheses and collect data across different contextual domains.

Conclusion

Research that examines the role of supportive school environments is needed to advance current empirical work on military children and adolescents. In general, this article synthesizes theories and research studies from multiple academic disciplines (i.e., child development, studies on at-risk youth, educational reform, goodness of fit theory, and school climate) to illustrate how supportive primary and secondary school environments can promote the development of at-risk children and adolescents. A supportive school climate and the social-ecological contexts surrounding the school (i.e., universities, communities, school districts) can protect military children and adolescents from an array of negative social, emotional, and psychological outcomes. The heuristic model presented in this article

helps guide future research on military children and youth. Promotional civilian school environments nested in supportive and inclusive contexts (i.e., communities, military installations, school districts) can create a social infrastructure responsive to the needs of military children and adolescents.

Overall, future research needs to assess the impact of civilian school environments on the social, emotional, and psychological development of military children and adolescents. New studies need to acknowledge that school environments are nested within different social-ecological contexts. These contexts could help protect military students from negative social and emotional outcomes. The conceptual and empirical integration of the influence of different ecological contexts on the outcomes of military children and youth should include their family experiences of war (i.e., multiple deployments and school transitions) as well as the ecological supports or lack thereof. Investigating the dynamics within all contexts outlined in Fig. 1 can result in a more comprehensive picture of the developmental outcomes of military children and adolescents.

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