

## Building Capacity and Welcoming Practices In Military-Connected Schools

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### Resource Guide Corner

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## Consortium Districts Set to Welcome Newcomers With K-12 'Student 2 Student' Programs

Oceanside High School freshman Michael Ottewell remembers what it's like to adjust to an unfamiliar school. Now he wants to help other students through that same transition.

"I am a military child and I know how hard it is for people to move around," said Michael, one of seven students working to organize a new Student 2 Student (S2S) club at Oceanside High.

The students gathered in a hotel conference room last month to create a plan for implementing S2S, a [Military Child Education Coalition](#) program that trains both civilian and military students to develop and maintain programs to support students when they are moving between schools.

As part of the new *Welcoming Practices* grant, four Consortium districts have been participating in training sessions over the past few months.

The Oceanside Unified School District (OUSD) and the Temecula Valley Unified School District (TVUSD) are implementing S2S. Teams from the Bonsall Union School District (BUSD) and OUSD are implementing the [Junior S2S](#) for middle school students, and the Chula Vista Elementary School District (CVESD), BUSD and TVUSD are beginning a new Elementary S2S version, which is led by school staff members.



**Freshman Michael Ottewell takes a turn during an "ice-breaker" activity, similar to musical chairs.**

resource guides for educators and parents, please click [here](#) to request a copy.

If you have already provided us feedback on the books, thank you. If you haven't we still want to hear from you. Click this [link](#) to answer a few questions, and use a computer or a laptop instead of a smart phone.

### Quick Links...

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mail us at  
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The Fallbrook Union High School District opted to continue using the [Safe School Ambassadors](#) program instead of adding S2S this year. Safe School Ambassadors has also been used in the Fallbrook Union Elementary School District and the Escondido Union High School District. The Escondido Union School District has a similar ambassadors or "buddy" program to help welcome new students. Several schools in the district also have a Peace Patrol program to encourage positive behavior on the playground.

### ***Teaching 100 Percent Acceptance***

The S2S training for students emphasizes "100 percent acceptance" of transitioning military students and focuses on three major themes--academics, building relationships and finding the way.

The Oceanside High students, for example, created a map of their campus to help direct new students. They practiced leading "ice-breaker" activities to help students get to know each other, and they discussed how a student's classes and extra-curricular activities might match up with what is offered at Oceanside High.

Trainer Bill Lawson, however, stressed that their job is not to try to advise students, but to make sure newcomers find the counselors, administrators or coaches who have the answers.

"There's no way you're going to know all the academic stuff," he told them. "But know who to direct kids to."

Lawson also talked about the multiple opportunities available to the students who participate in S2S, such as a leadership development camp at West Point and being recognized at MCEC's annual conference.

"You're now part of something that is much bigger than just Oceanside High School," Lawson told them.

The students left with plans for getting their club up and running this year, while also looking forward to the fall. They want to meet twice a week, pass out flyers to promote the group, elect officers and seek sponsors from the business and nonprofit sectors to support club activities.

"It's a great program to make military kids feel welcome," said Monica Santiago, a sophomore. "I want it to be a nice, friendly, welcoming group."



**The Oceanside High students practiced an activity they might use in their new S2S club.**

### ***Staff Members Take Lead on New Elementary Program***

Consortium schools are among the first to implement the new elementary version of S2S.

The new effort calls on school staff members-- particularly secretaries, registrars and others in the front office--to help create a welcoming environment and support students and parents as they transition between schools.

"I'm the first person the parents meet when they come to school," says Margaret Atkinson, the registrar at Abby Reinke Elementary in the Temecula Valley Unified School District. "I can always feel the parents' stress because of all the changes."

In one activity at their training, staff members discussed the differences between bumpy and smooth transitions for families.

Atkinson said she learned that it's important to have an exit strategy for families as well as welcoming procedures when they enroll. One idea her school staff has discussed is to have students decorate a rock that will then be used to create a permanent stepping stone at the school.

A computer station is also set up at the school's entrance where families can find links to resources, such as the *Building Capacity* website. And the school librarian is planning to display a world map to show where students have lived or where they are moving.

"Everybody kind of took a piece of it," Atkinson said about the training. "I feel more confident knowing that we will have resources available."



**Dr. Nancy Kerwin (far left), of CVESD, and Froylan Villanueva (right), principal of Veterans Elementary, work with other participants to describe bumpy and smooth transitions for students and families.**

### **Building Capacity Team Participates in L.A. Mayor's Event Recognizing Military Children**

Military-connected children gathered in downtown Los Angeles last month to be honored and thanked for the sacrifices they make as part of military families.

"Because they don't wear uniforms, military children often don't get recognized," Nathan Graeser, coordinator of the Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative (LAVC), said as he welcomed the families.

The *Building Capacity* team, participated in the Month of the Military Child event, which was organized by multiple partners including Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's Office of Veterans Affairs, the Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families in the USC School of Social Work, the Los Angeles Unified School District, the LAVC's Families and Children Work Group, the Military Children's Collaborative Group and Holman United Methodist Church.

The children each received certificates, backpacks and goodie bags. Proclamations were also read from Congresswoman Karen Bass, state Sen. Holly Mitchell, Mark Ridley Thomas of the L.A. County Board of Supervisors and L.A. City Council member Herb



**Joshua Flores shows off his certificate.**

Wesson.

The event was also used to highlight LAUSD's new effort to identify military-connected children by adding a box for military parents to check on their child's Student Emergency Information Form. The question asks whether a parent is on active duty, a veteran or a member of the National Guard or reserves. The form also asks in which branch the parent serves and whether he or she is currently deployed.

The policy change occurred as a result of the collective efforts of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti's office, the Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative, the USC *Building Capacity* project, the USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families, and the Military Childrens Collaborative Group.

"This is really going to help us identify where everybody is," said Maria Castro, the coordinator for Student Health and Human Services in LAUSD. "We're going to learn from you and we're going to provide support."

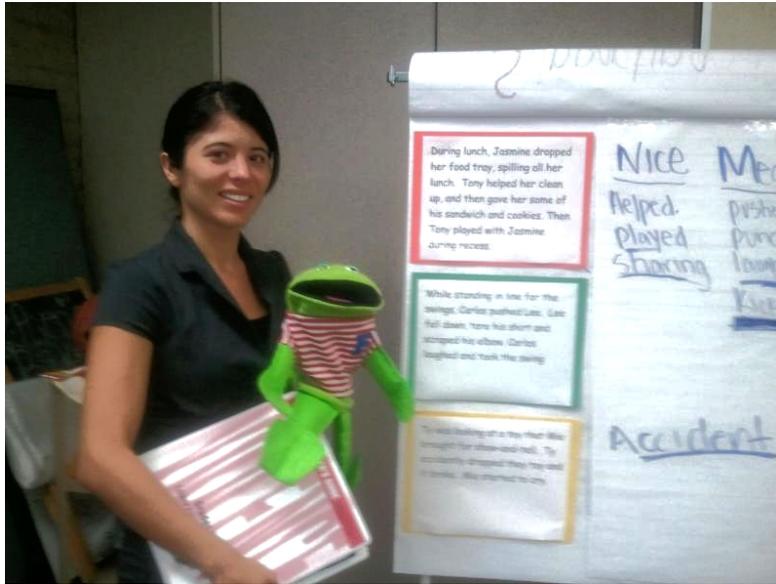


## **'Mr. Frog' Helps Kindergarteners Learn About Being Nice**

USC MSW student Michelle Mendoza thought she only wanted to work with adolescents. Then a puppet named Mr. Frog taught her about communicating with younger children.

Mr. Frog is a puppet character used as part of the "Get Real About Violence" curriculum, which Mendoza presented to kindergarten students at San Onofre School in the Fallbrook Union Elementary School District.

Using the program, which she delivered over a 10-week period, was a way to extend counseling services to the school, which does not have a full-time counselor.



Mendoza used the puppet to play the role of a child who is learning what it means to be mean and what it means to be nice. The lessons focus on typical scenarios that might take place at school, such as what to do if someone drops a food tray at lunch or if tensions arise while waiting for playground equipment.

"I think it was very effective because they listened to the puppet probably more than they would listen to me," Mendoza says.

Mr. Frog was also useful in Mendoza's one-on-one sessions with students at the school, in which she was able to talk more specifically with students about their experiences as military children.

"They would start talking to the frog and not to me," she says. "Now I really like working with children."

## **Featured Resource: Star Behavioral Health Providers**

The Star Behavioral Health Providers (SBHP) initiative will continue offering training sessions for service providers throughout California this spring and summer.

SBHP is a three-tiered training program, with each training tier building upon knowledge from the previous tier.

The initiative works with course content created by the Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP). Tier One will be taught by SBHP partners in California. Tier Two and Tier Three will be taught by special teams from CDP.

Click on this [link](#) for information on how to register.



- Tier One provides awareness about topics specific to the military and an introduction to military culture and information about deployments.
- Tier Two provides education about challenges and difficulties that may present and are often associated with the military.
- Tier Three offers clinical skills that focus on specific evidence based treatments to address some of the behavioral health issues facing service members, such as PTSD.

**Tier One** training: June 10. Military Intelligence Battalion, 100 Armory Drive, San Francisco, CA 94132

**Tier Two** training: July 14-15, Military Intelligence Battalion, 100 Armory Drive, San Francisco, CA 94132

**Tier Three** training:

- May 21-22, Okinawa Armory, 8400 Okinawa Street, Sacramento, CA 95828
- May 28-29, Joint Forces Training Base 11200 Lexington Drive, Los Alamitos, CA 90720
- Aug. 4-5, Military Intelligence Battalion, 100 Armory Drive, San Francisco, CA 94132

## Headlines and Resources

We regularly feature stories, reports and resources related to military children on our [website](#). Check back often for new additions, such as these:

- The Military Child Education Coalition's magazine *On the Move* is available online at this [link](#).
- This [commentary](#) by Dr. Ron Astor, calling for a community-based approach to addressing the mental health needs of military-connected family members, appeared in the Huffington Post.
- Applications are now being accepted from school districts for School Climate Transformation Grants from the U.S. Department of Education. Click [here](#)

for more information. The grants are intended to "develop, enhance, or expand systems of support for, and technical assistance to, schools implementing an evidence-based multi-tiered behavioral framework for improving behavioral outcomes and learning conditions for all students. The deadline is June 23.

- This [story](#) from KXLH in Great Falls, Mt., discusses efforts in that state to improve school transitions for military children.
- Click [here](#) for articles on supporting military-connected children in a special issue of the journal *Children & Schools*, published by the National Association of Social Workers and Oxford University Press.

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