

Welcoming Practices In Military-Connected Schools

Special Issue



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Upcoming Events

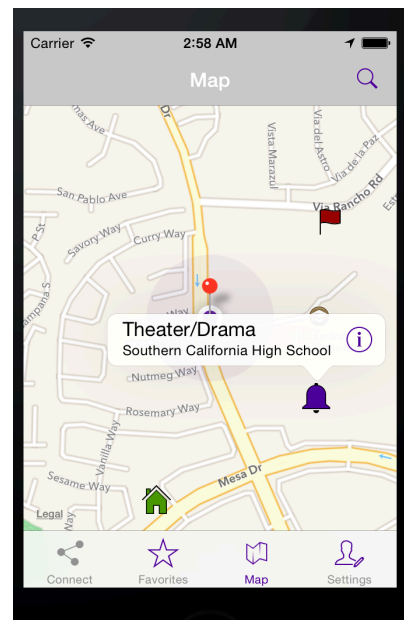
Development of *Welcoming Practices* Site and App Moves Forward

The *Welcoming Practices** registration and mobile app team has taken major steps in designing the technology that will help military, veteran and nonmilitary parents find the resources they want for their children.

Both the registration website and the mobile app are designed with the goal of helping new families integrate smoothly into their new school district and learn about resources and support programs before they even move there.

The *Welcoming Practices* registration site is unlike others because it asks parents what resources or programs they might be interested in learning about in their new school and then automatically recalls that information for the parents when they log in to the app.

In the app, users will be able to save favorites, find maps and contact information for program providers and



* The [International Bullying Prevention Association](#) will hold its annual conference in San Diego, Nov. 16-18. Click [here](#) for more information.

* Veterans Elementary School in the Chula Vista Elementary School District will hold its annual Veterans Day parade on Friday, Nov. 7 at 9 a.m.

Veterans Day Offer! Free Guidebooks

With Veterans Day approaching, free copies of our military resource guides for educators and parents are available. 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.

* **Welcoming Practices** is a Partnership Consortium involving five Southern California school districts and the

eventually connect to social media sites from the app. The app will also allow users to rate and leave comments about resources and providers as a way to inform other families. The web registration site is nearing completion in the winter of 2015 and the mobile app will most likely be ready by mid-spring.

"The application is designed to help teachers, principals, pupil support teams, military school liaisons, and students in the school find natural supports as well as resources from the community, military, or agencies," says Dr. Ron Astor, the USC professor of social work and in the Rossier School of Education who is leading the project. "That's why we are creating parallel structures on the ground."

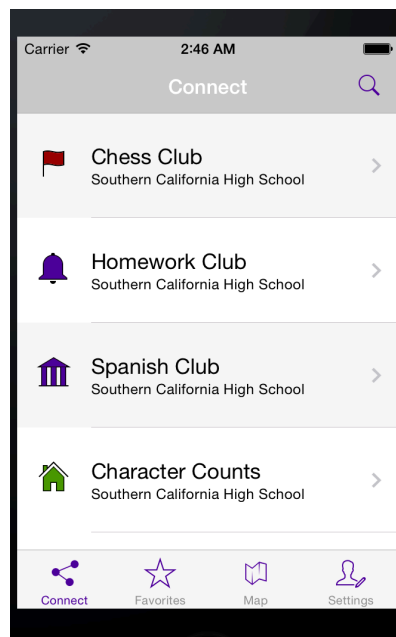
Military students can change schools as many as nine times during their K-12 years, and many veterans' children are also experiencing multiple changes as their parents make the transition out of the military. Many other nonmilitary students also change schools frequently.

The app is intended to help answer the questions that students struggle with when they enter a new school: Who will I sit with at lunch? Who will I hang out with at games, dances or other events? Is there someone who can help with homework?

Work on the Ground

But the technology is just part of the work that the Consortium is doing to make sure both military and nonmilitary families moving into the districts are settling into the community and finding the support they might need.

Having on-the-ground procedures, welcoming centers and social media sites devoted to easing these transitions will amplify and personalize the resources and programs found in the new apps.



Above are examples of how screens in the mobile app might appear.

University of Southern California, funded by the Department of Defense Education Activity's partnership program. Grant #HE-1254-13-1-0017

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These include welcoming centers and two Military Child Education Coalition programs--Student to Student (S2S) and Parent to Parent (PtoP).

PtoP is explained in a story below. S2S trains both civilian and military students to develop and maintain programs to support students when they are moving between schools. At Stuart Mesa Elementary in Oceanside, for example, the S2S students created a welcome video, which was featured on the school's homepage. We featured S2S in a [past newsletter](#) and will be continuing to provide updates as the program moves forward.

These efforts provide the personal connection not offered by the computer and mobile device and nurture a sense of belonging. The overall goals are to reduce bullying, prevent feelings of isolation, and increase supportive resources. Parents and students involved in these groups will also be among the first to use the app and show families how it can benefit them.

Temecula District Opens New Welcome Center To Serve Incoming Families

When military families used to arrive in Temecula, they might hear about community resources through word of mouth, would have to work the phones themselves or pick up information from different offices. Now the Temecula Valley Unified School District's (TVUSD) new [Welcome Center](#) is providing any new family that enters the district with an inviting place to get their questions answered.



Creating such a center is a key strategy of the *Welcoming Practices* partnership, and other districts

in the Consortium are also in the process of planning welcome or transition centers.

At the centers, parents will be able to meet other parents in the district, pick up information on various programs and find out exactly whom they need to contact to get involved in local groups and activities. Parents will be more likely to attend events or meetings at their schools if they are personally invited.

Other districts in the *Welcoming Practices* Consortium are also in the process of planning welcome or transition centers.

Located at the district office on Rancho Vista Road, the TVUSD Welcome Center provides computers for parents to use as well as information on community programs and services for both military and nonmilitary families

"We make sure they have everything they need to get themselves into our community," says Belisa Guerrero, TVUSD's new family engagement specialist.

For example, a grandparent with custody of twins recently visited the center looking for some assistance. Guerrero was able to direct the family to the local library's homework center.

A Marine wife and a former elementary school teacher, Guerrero oversees the Welcome Center and would like to create a group for military parents.



Guerrero

She'll be collaborating with the new San Diego Parent to Parent team to schedule workshops (see the story below) and has been visiting each school to make sure they know about the center.

"I just want to see what kind of parent involvement activities they have in place, and how I can help," she

says.

People working in these centers will also show families how to use the new registration site and the mobile app described in the story above. And these centers will collaborate with the Parent-to-Parent and Student-to-Student programs to make sure both parents and their children have the opportunity to participate in programs designed to make them feel part of the school community.



Visitors use the Welcome Center's computers.

Mobilizing the Supportive Power of Parents

Parent-to-Parent Team Begins Work in Consortium Districts

Parents as well as students benefit from schools that are welcoming and that offer opportunities to connect with other parents.

That's the mission of Parent to Parent (PtoP), a Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) program in which parent trainers provide workshops that help parents learn how to best support their children--from early childhood through the transition into college.

As part of the *Welcoming Practices* grant, a new San Diego PtoP team is working with schools in the five Consortium districts.

"I'm so excited to be part of this," says Jen Gibbons, one of the four PtoP trainers. "Nothing like this has ever been done in Southern California."

The other three trainers are Brie Plott, Corrie Garcia and Catherine White.

They will be offering workshops at schools and in

other community locations on topics such as early literacy, helping children with homework and the college admission process.

So far they have been plugging in to whatever gatherings schools already have planned, such as PTA meetings and principals' coffee hours. But Gibbons says eventually, there will be enough awareness about the PtoP program that they will be able to create their own schedule of workshops.

"We want to jump in where we can and then hopefully become a presence," Gibbons says.

The trainers can be reached by email at ptop.sandiego@militarychild.org



From left: Brie Plott, Jen Gibbons, Corrie Garcia and Catherine White

Pineda Gives Lead Lecture at Princeton University Conference on Military Children

The *Building Capacity* project might officially be over, but other universities are still learning about efforts of the Consortium to improve the lives of military children in public schools.

Diana Pineda, San Diego Project Manager for both *Building Capacity* and *Welcoming Practices*, traveled to Princeton University recently to give one of the key lectures at the School of Policy's Military and Children in School Conference, as part of the Education Research Section program.

Pineda continues to work with universities, school districts, and other major organizations on ways to organize programs and scale their impact. In the past she has traveled to the University of Valparaiso in Chile, Old Dominion University in Virginia, and has worked with numerous other partners to provide key lectures and technical support.

She highlighted the outcomes of the *Building Capacity* and *Welcoming Practices* projects and spoke about how other schools can adopt similar models.

The attendees included faculty members, graduate students, school leaders and school liaison officers. The participants also received copies of the [guidebooks](#) written for pupil personnel and school administrators.



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:

- Several schools in the *Welcoming Practices Consortium* are now implementing the Military Child Education Coalition's Student 2 Student (S2S) program. Check out this [video](#) of the S2S program at Rutherford High School in Panama City, Fla.
- The [FOCUS](#) research team at UCLA is looking for participants for its early-childhood version of the program. FOCUS stands for Families OverComing Under Stress and is a resiliency training program. The researchers are seeking non-active duty veteran, National Guard or Reserve families with children ages 3-6. For more information, call (855) 231-9500 or email info@nfrc.ucla.edu
- The USC Center for Research on Veterans and Military Families recently released "[The State of the American Veteran: The Los Angeles County Veterans Study](#)." The results show that many service members are not prepared for the challenges of transitioning into civilian life.
- Click [here](#) for the latest issue of *Academic Anchor*, a publication of the Navy Region Southwest's school liaison officers.

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