

EDITORIAL

Supporting Military-connected Students: The Role of School Social Work

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We are proud that NASW Press and Oxford University Press (OUP) have published this special issue of *Children & Schools* on the needs of public schools serving military students. These students and their families experience multiple deployments—often to war zones—as well as family separation, frequent transitions and relocations, and other stressful life events that their nonmilitary peers do not undergo (De Pedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty, & Esqueda, 2013).

Recent studies have presented findings that supportive schools can help shield students from intense depression, conduct problems, feelings of alienation, anxiety, and school failure. However, for schools to serve as protective settings for military-connected (MC) students, school personnel need to be aware that this population exists in their schools and that these students have particular needs (Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbenishty, 2013; De Pedro et al., 2011).

Over a million of the nation's MC students attend public schools. If 9/11 veterans' children are included, it is estimated that over 4 million children and youths have had parents serve the nation. Nevertheless, many civilian school district personnel do not realize that students from military families are attending their schools. In addition, civilian school personnel are frequently unaware of the needs of MC students because they have not been trained to respond appropriately to the unique and often intense experiences of such students (Astor et al., 2012; Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012). Awareness of the presence, experiences, and needs of MC students in public schools must be increased.

School social workers can take a national leadership role in developing and implementing practices and policies that will increase awareness of MC students, foster understanding of their unique culture,

and address their needs. Social workers have the capacity to address and integrate issues of policy, to sensitize school staff to diverse cultures, bring evidence-based practices to MC schools, improve school climate, and work with military families.

The overarching goal of this special issue is to present articles that describe the current state of school social work knowledge and best practices in MC schools. These articles provide insight and implications that will help teachers, principals, school social workers, and other staff better serve MC students in the future. In this special issue, we present articles examining the perspectives of school staff, students, and parents in MC schools and outline best practices for such schools.

The anonymous peer reviewers and NASW/OUP staff were critical to the success of this special issue, and we thank them. We are also thrilled that NASW and OUP allowed this to be the first special issue with both print and online versions of *Children & Schools*. All content will appear online, and only some will appear both in print and online. Designation of online or print does not imply quality of manuscript or importance of specific topic. This online extension will provide more comprehensive coverage of the topic and allow social workers, counselors, and educators to delve deep into the many ecological layers and methods of supporting MC students. We hope social workers, other professionals, and scientists will use the insights gleaned in this interdisciplinary special issue to move the field forward.

The article by Guzman, "School-Age Children of Military Families: Theoretical Applications, Skills Training, Considerations, and Interventions," provides a brief overview of relevant studies and interventions, as well as a call for more specific research on the topic. This article serves an important introduction to some of the major issues facing our field. The article describing an original study

by Jagger and Lederer, "Impact of Geographic Mobility on Children's Access to Special Education Services," focuses on issues of transition for military children with special needs. Frequent moves have a particularly profound effect on military children with disabilities and their families because they need to navigate the complexities of a new special education system. Interviews and focus groups with over 100 individuals provide insight into how intervention programs and service providers can more effectively support these families and children in schools. The article by Gilreath, Estrada, Pineda, Benbenishty, and Astor, "Development and Use of the California Healthy Kids Survey Military Module to Monitor Students in Military-connected Schools," presents a heuristic example of how California has created a system that identifies MC students and provides specific data relevant to their special situation and needs within each school district and school. Knowing where MC students attend school and understanding what their needs are in each school is perhaps the most important current policy goal for social workers and the military community. These data can be used for proposing new grants, creating resources, raising awareness, identifying needs, matching needs with appropriate evidence-based programs, and hiring new social workers and other pupil personnel.

The study by Garner, Arnold, and Nunnery, "Schoolwide Impact of Military-connected Student Enrollment: Educators' Perceptions," gathered the perceptions of principals, school counselors, and teachers on how transitions and deployments affected educators' work in specific ways. The authors describe educators' perceptions of how academic and socioemotional support, administration and student record management, cultural responsiveness, and school-military-community partnerships could ease the impact of deployments for MC students in public schools.

The article by Esqueda, Cederbaum, Malchi, Pineda, Benbenishty, and Astor, "Military Social Work Fieldwork Placement: Analyzing the Time and Activities Graduate Student Interns Provide to Military-connected Schools," describes a study on what MSW interns do when their placements are in MC schools. Universities and MSW programs that want to serve military families can use this as a template to create their own internship placements in MC schools and examine their effect on their students.

The Practice Highlight column by Buehrle, "Us" as the United States: Sparking Community-based Solutions for Supporting Military-connected Children and Their Families," describes how the San Diego Military Family Collaborative (SDMFC) organization has made a community-level impact. The SDMFC is a wonderful example of how communities can organize to provide partner services to schools. School social workers can greatly increase services for military families by creating, participating in, or partnering with such local collaborative groups.

A related study by Cederbaum, Malchi, Esqueda, Benbenishty, Atuel, and Astor, "Student-Instructor Assessments: Examining the Skills and Competencies of Social Work Students Placed in Military-connected Schools," examines how social work interns placed in MC schools learn critical skills needed to serve this population. University training programs can use the findings from this study to better prepare undergraduate and graduate students to work with this population.

Parental involvement in school and parents' perceptions of how welcoming the school is to their children may have a major effect on students' well-being and academic achievements. The article by Berkowitz, De Pedro, Couture, Benbenishty, and Astor, "Military Parents' Perceptions of Public School Supports for Their Children," brings forth the voices of military parents and describes how they see the public schools that serve them. The parent surveys could be used by school districts across the country and within states. The findings from this article are from the California Healthy Kids Survey military module.

The article by Arnold, Garner, and Nunnery, "Understanding Teaching and Learning with Military Students in Public School Contexts: Insights from the Perspectives of Teachers," explores how 74 educators in public schools with large populations of military students apply their professional knowledge and skills to support of military students' academic and social development in the school context. Finally, the article by De Pedro, Atuel, Malchi, Esqueda, Benbenishty, and Astor, "Responding to the Needs of Military Students and Military-connected Schools: Perceptions and Actions of School Administrators," provides one of the first empirical studies on how school administrators view services for military students in their schools. As any school social worker or pupil

personnel worker knows, how teachers and administrators view the need for services often determines the extent of services allowed in the school.

A cornerstone of social work practice, research, and theory is the ecological perspective. The articles in this special issue provide some of the first empirical evidence on the ecological environment of the school as it pertains to military students. An understanding of how parents, teachers, principals, university MSW interns, community organizations, and evidence-based program providers support military students is an important contribution to the research, practice, and policy literature. **CS**

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