

Virginia Council for the Interstate Compact on
Educational Opportunity for Military Children
Minutes
April 2, 2015

The following Council members were in attendance: Delegate M. Kirkland Cox (Chairman); Jill Gaitens; Dr. John B. Gordon, III; Captain Frank E. Hughlett; Dorothy McAuliffe; Senator John C. Miller; Dr. Aaron C. Spence; and Brad Williams.

Dr. Steven R. Staples was unable to attend the meeting but Dr. Cynthia Cave served as his designee.

Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Delegate Cox called the meeting to order at 2 p.m. He welcomed members and guests and introduced Admiral Williamson's wife Robin Williamson to the group. He thanked Kim Bridges who has been helping out in the absence of Melissa Luchau and welcomed Dr. Cave as Dr. Staples' designee. Delegate Cox reminded the Council that **April is the Month of the Military Child** and noted that Council members have two promotional flyers behind their agendas—one promoting the Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) plans for Purple Up day and the other promoting Purple Up day activities across the Commonwealth. He noted that the Virginia Board of Education adopted a resolution of recognition and the Superintendent issued a Superintendent's Memo encouraging schools and divisions to celebrate the contributions of military-connected children. He also announced that in honor of the Month of the Military Child, Council member Jill Gaitens set up a display of student artwork in the lobby of the Monroe Building. He invited Council members to take a few moments after the meeting to stop by and see the display.

Approval of the December 2, 2014, Meeting Minutes

Mrs. McAuliffe made a motion to adopt the December 2, 2014, minutes as drafted. Dr. Gordon seconded the motion. The Council unanimously approved the December 2, 2014, minutes without discussion.

Public Comment

Delegate Cox opened the floor for public comment. There were no speakers during public comment.

Presentation on New Military Identifier Legislation in Virginia

The Chair reminded the Council that at its last meeting Melissa Luchau presented research on military student identifier policies, and he stated that the Council discussed some of the benefits and issues to consider and approved a statement of support. He gave credit to the First Lady for working on this legislation and noted that the 2015 Virginia General Assembly passed legislation impacting the education of Military Families: HB 2373, patroned by Delegate Ramadan, and SB 1354, patroned by Senator Reeves. He indicated that today's discussion on the legislation would focus on how VDOE will begin implementation, led by Dr. Cindy Cave, assistant superintendent, Division of Policy and Communications.

Dr. Cave noted that the Council's resolution supported having students identified to help them receive support and provide good information about the children. Those who worked on this legislation included Senator Miller, Senator Reeves, and Delegate Ramadan. In addition, Dr. Cave noted that the staff of the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs John Harvey drafted the legislation and worked with the First Lady's office and the Office of the Secretary of Education Anne Holton to determine how it could work in school divisions. Dr. Cave also thanked the staff members of the secretariats and office of the First Lady, especially Leslie Frazier, Mike Coleman, Jennie O'Holleran and Lincoln Saunders. She stated that the bills received a great deal of support from legislators.

Dr. Cave recapped the legislation. She noted that the bills require VDOE to establish a process for the identification of newly enrolled uniformed services-connected students by local school divisions and require local school divisions to identify newly enrolled uniformed services-connected students in accordance with the process established by VDOE. The legislation defines a "uniformed services-connected student" as a student enrolled in a public school whose parent is serving in either (i) the active component of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or National Guard, the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Services or (ii) the reserve component of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, or National Guard.

Dr. Cave described VDOE's implementation steps, starting with a number of meetings within the department regarding the technology needed to ensure that VDOE can capture the data without having students identified individually. The Department's Office of Educational Information Management (EIM) will add a field to existing Student Record Collection (SRC) for identification of uniformed services-connected students. The VDOE will be providing in April information to school divisions on the legislation and its requirements for identifying newly-enrolled uniformed services-connected students. In July, a Superintendent's Memo will share this and other new legislation in annual update on student enrollment prior to the 2015-2016 school year, and the department will share this change to the Student Record Collection (SRC) for the upcoming school year by other means as well, including weekly e-mails to the SRC contacts in every school division via the "Tuesday Telegram" and webinars on the change. The VDOE will work with local school divisions to make sure the implementation of the identifier is simple and straightforward.

Dr. Cave indicated that the department looks forward, beginning October 2015, to having the first non-identifiable aggregate data on uniformed services-connected students. She noted that this information will help position the state for federal resources and school divisions for help in their support for students and outreach to military families. She expressed gratitude to the Virginia General Assembly and the First Lady for their work on the bill's passage.

Mrs. McAuliffe also thanked Senator Miller and emphasized the bipartisan effort on the bills. She acknowledged the work of the military leaders, especially Captain Hewlett and the former commander of Norfolk Naval Station Admiral Dixon, who first brought the issue to her attention.

She noted the full support of Commander Williamson and his wife Robin who is a School Liaison Officer (SLO) and a military wife and mother who understands these issues herself.

The Chairman added that Captain Hewlett has been chairman of the Council and has been a driver of this legislation. Senator Miller noted that when the First Lady testified she “hit it out of the park” and was instrumental in making it happen.

Perspectives from Military-Connected Youth in Virginia Beach City Public Schools

The Chair indicated that Council members had asked to hear directly from our military-connected youth about their experiences transitioning to new schools due to military moves. He reminded them that in December they were joined by two students from Stafford County Public Schools and welcomed three students from Virginia Beach: Zack Butler, a student at Kellam High School; Brooke Chapman, a student at Ocean Lakes Math and Science Academy; and Odyssey Swiatowski, a student at Green Run High School.

Zack Butler thanked the Council for the honor of getting to speak to them. He described his experience moving among Virginia, California, Hawaii, and Colorado and the benefits of exposing him to diverse cultures and experiences that he would not have had otherwise. He also described the moves as challenging and a reason he formed an S2S program when he came to Kellam High School. He said the program is a place for new students to go and feel welcomed and get information. He recalled how overwhelming it was at first to receive his letter about Virginia’s educational requirements including SOL testing, but how nice it was to learn from his guidance counselor that he could have many requirements waived and credits transferred through the Military Interstate Compact. However, he described one issue that could not be resolved by the Compact: Due to differences between the states in weighting honors courses, Zack’s GPA dropped from 4.3 in Colorado to 3.9 in Virginia. This took him out of the Top 10% of his class and reduced his access to some scholarships and schools that look for applicants from that Top 10%. Zack suggested evaluation of other states’ weighting of honors classes to determine if some credit could be applied for transferring military-connected students.

Brooke Chapman, a senior at Ocean Lakes Math and Science Academy, spoke about her experience becoming a military-connected student half way through her father’s career as she entered high school, a tricky time for her to make such a transition. She moved from Michigan to Northern Virginia from one IB school to another. Graduation requirements, particularly the requirement for Personal Finance and Economics, proved to be a challenge. After their subsequent move to Virginia Beach, she talked to her military counselor about options and applied to colleges in Virginia despite not knowing if additional orders might take the family back out of state. She contemplated abandoning four-year colleges for community college. Brooke recommended that the Council consider having counselors talk to student about the GI Bill and how it can help with paying for college. She noted that she learned a number of helpful financial aid tips not only from her counselor but from other military-connected students when she joined Student 2 Student (S2S.) She credited her successful transition to joining S2S. Brooke shared a few challenges resulting from her moves. The different IB application timelines between Northern Virginia and Virginia Beach schools meant that she couldn’t be in the IB Academy in Virginia Beach. Due to a difference in math titles between Michigan and Virginia, she had to re-take Algebra 1 upon moving to Virginia even though the content was the same in

the class she had completed. Brooke stressed the importance of having someone at the school who understands the issues of military families.

Odyssey Swiatowski, a sophomore at Green Run High School and a member of S2S there, shared her own experience moving seven times during the course of her K-12 education. Her previous schools didn't have S2S and she felt this would have made a tremendous difference for her. At Green Run, S2S has helped her feel connected with the school; she has enjoyed the focus on service learning and community service she has gained through her participation in S2S. In particular, she also believes that their new student orientation helps military-connected students feel welcome and reduces the stress of starting a new school.

Dr. Spence commented that a Virginia Beach celebration of the Military Child had been held the previous evening. He noted that with more than 30% of VBCPS students, or roughly 20,000 students, coming from military families, the three student guests are part of a large family in VBCPS. He thanked the group and expressed his pride in them. He thanked Zack for starting the S2S at Kellam, and Zack indicated that establishing the club was easy with the help and training available from the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC.)

Senator Miller asked about the change in GPA from Zack's move from Colorado to Virginia. Zack stated that he couldn't take AP classes in Colorado so he took honors courses instead. He noted that Virginia students can begin taking AP classes as early as ninth grade but because he wasn't here then he did not have that advantage of accruing AP credits early. Senator Miller inquired about why the states would differ in GPA weighting. Del. Cox noted that AP is a national program with shared standards but honors programs depend upon how they are defined by each state. Dr. Cave noted this issue as a barrier for students and indicated that VDOE would bring back additional information.

Mrs. McAuliffe commented that counselors can speak to the issue of GPA weighting in their college recommendations for students so that students are not penalized in college admissions. She noted that it is incumbent upon school administrators to ensure that all children impacted in this way are provided with the same help as they are applying to college.

Captain Hughlett asked about the difficulty of navigating extracurricular activities for these students. Zack indicated that he had not experienced any difficulties, even with sports. He joined the football team through information posted on the school Web site. Delegate Cox asked about missing spring and summer preparation activities, but Zack indicated that his coaches understood that he had also been conditioning in Colorado so that was not an issue. Brooke noted that it took a while for her to become part of advanced choral group because she wasn't notified about auditions but that the transition was largely easy. Odyssey did have lower tryout times for cross-country because she couldn't attend the summer conditioning and wasn't able to make the varsity volleyball team for the same reason.

Dr. Gordon noted how impressive all three students had been and thanked them for sharing their experiences and specific issues for the Council to proactively consider. He noted the concern about GPA weighting and indicated that different school divisions have different GPA scales based upon weighting. As an example, he noted that the 5.25 scale used by Fredericksburg would

have given Zack a higher GPA. He asked the students about their plans after high school. Brooke is starting with prerequisites at Tidewater Community College with the hope to move to the Sentara College of Health Science. Zack is considering eight offers with his top choice currently at the University of Texas at Austin. Odyssey will remain at Green Run for her junior year.

Mrs. McAuliffe asked about S2S clubs and their prevalence in Virginia. Jill Gaitens noted that MCEC has trained about a fourth of Virginia high schools and started training all middle schools and have implemented S2S in two elementary schools. The MCEC has used Virginia Beach as a testing ground due to the high density of military-connected students but has also done training in other divisions including Norfolk, Portsmouth, Newport News and Richmond. She indicated that 111 trainings have been done across the state and she can provide the Council with a full list.

Captain Hughlett echoed that S2S is a good thing and wondered if information about them should be taken back to the Virginia Military Advisory Council that he attends in June. He indicated a willingness to share information to help spread the word about S2S across the state. Ms. Gaitens recognized **Debbie Vanch, the MCEC regional school liaison officer**. Debbie shared that most S2S clubs are run through the Military School Liaison Officers (MSLO) in the schools with MCEC offering professional development. All MSLOs have been through training in Texas. Ms. Vanch addressed the council explaining that the Department of the Navy in the mid-Atlantic region has a contract with MCEC to bring training to those divisions and schools for the S2S program. The other service branches (Marines, Army, Air Force) would have their own arrangements.

Del. Cox indicated that the varying arrangements for the S2S programs would be a helpful agenda item for the Council's next meeting, along with the issue of GPA/honors weighting, graduation requirements, military in-state college tuition benefits, and knowledge among guidance counselors about those issues.

Ms. Vanch noted that Virginia Beach has a Department of Defense (DoDEA) grant to have a specialized counselor on military-specific issues for transferring students. She has gathered a tremendous amount of information that could be of help to other divisions and families.

The Chair thanked Zack, Brooke, and Odyssey for being with the Council to share their experiences.

DoDEA Partnership Grants

Fatimah Pierce, the Grant Program manager for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) Educational Partnership, addressed the group regarding DoDEA Educational Partnership grants and their impact in Virginia. She thanked the Council for their efforts and expressed excitement about the new military identifier legislation Virginia has passed.

Ms. Pierce explained that DoDEA is a federal agency that is a school system for military-connected students here in the U.S. and overseas. She indicated that students often go back and forth between this system and public school systems. The DoDEA's Educational Partnership branch was created in 2008 to bridge the gap between these systems and provide assistance to public schools serving these students. The grant program is a way to share those resources. The

DoDEA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. Department of Education regarding how the two agencies offer this support and is an ex-officio member of the Interstate Compact. The DoDEA also collaborates with MCEC and other non-governmental organizations and other federal agencies to provide outreach, training and support to school liaison officers. The DoDEA also implements the supplement to the DOD impact aid program.

Since 2009, the grant program has awarded 273 grants totaling \$346 million to over 1,500 schools and 750,000 students; over 370,000 of whom are military-connected. With the largest population, Virginia makes sense as the place to go to make sure they are serving students where they are. Nationally, grant programs provide credit recovery, efforts to raise student achievement, access to technology, parental involvement and ways to support social/emotional needs, among others.

In Virginia, 11 school divisions have received 23 grants totaling \$24 million since 2009. DoDEA is hoping to grow this grant to reach more schools and divisions. Previously, grants required that recipient schools have 15 percent or more military-connected students with a focus on student services, STEM, English/language arts, Special Education, strategic foreign languages, and distance learning. Ms. Pierce listed some of the installations from which military families may come to the school divisions and noted that the military student identifier will also help in tracking these students.

She highlighted a number of existing DoDEA grants in Virginia. The National Math and Science Initiative provides funding for seven Virginia high schools to participate in AP training. In those seven schools, the average first-year increase in passing scores in math, science and English for military students was 60 percent. Newport News has a transition program through professional development and a partnership with ODU for teacher training and military support counselors and 90 percent of parents surveyed reported satisfaction or high satisfaction with the transition support they're receiving from this grant. Virginia Beach's grant for counseling support provides school-level liaisons who work directly with special education students and their families. York County's STEM program integrates reading and technology for teachers and students, with proficiency rates increasing by 7 percent.

Fairfax County's grant focused on teacher content knowledge as well as robotics, summer programs, and extended day programs. Newport News also has a grant for math support with teachers receiving math credit through ODU and coaching for added support to military-connected students. Grants also provide resources for English Language Arts in Poquoson, Professional Learning Communities and literacy, as well as College and Career readiness. Chesapeake was one of the first grant recipients focused on special education needs of military-connected students. The DoDEA hopes to develop a best practices publication for divisions on helping students with special needs. Ms. Pierce closed by noting that Virginia has a good model for upcoming grants due May 5 and DoDEA hopes to invest even more to Virginia schools in this new round of funding.

The Chair thanked Ms. Pierce for her presentation and took questions from the Council. Senator Miller asked whether the \$24 million granted is part of a national funding stream or a dedicated state amount. Ms. Pierce noted that it is an award from a larger national total but that Virginia is

well-positioned due to its high performing divisions and the levels of service to be competitive for the grants.

Mrs. McAuliffe asked about the National Guard and grant eligibility. Ms. Pierce indicated that their definition of military students includes active duty, civilians and contractors, as well as employees on federal property which would include Coast Guard, Homeland Security, and others. This broad definition would allow them to meet grant criteria if they complete aid cards.

Update on VDOE Military Family support services

Hank Millward, the associate director of the Office of Dispute Resolution and Administrative Services, provided an update on the Military Family Support Services offered through the Department. Although his office deals primarily with special education, he was tasked with reinvigorating services to military families. With a staff that includes a Parent Ombudsman and others, he participates in several different military-related committees and has presented to groups including base commanders' invitations to present to families on the bases, The Joint Military Services School Liaison Committee (JMSSLC), and others.

This office coordinates efforts with the school division Parent Resource Centers, has provided training and information on meeting the needs of military children for those centers, and has distributed subgrants to assist these centers. The office makes connections between school liaison officers and other parent and children advocacy groups, some of which have dedicated positions for direct service to parents of children with special needs. Mr. Millward's goal is to increase the connections between military families and existing organizations to build resources and opportunities within this network. The office has been working within VDOE to coordinate activities for the Month of the Military Child and to increase understanding of the special education process among military families with two upcoming conferences dedicated to this issue. Two additional conferences will also be targeted to military families to offer training on Parents as Collaborative Leaders. In addition, the Month of the Military Family is in November and activities will be planned through the VDOE Office of Dispute Resolution and Administrative Services. Mr. Millward asked Council members to be involved with these efforts and invited them to attend any of the upcoming events or to provide suggestions for his department.

The Chair thanked Mr. Millward for the efforts of his office and indicated that Council Members would be happy to be involved at his request.

Open Discussion

Delegate Cox opened the floor to Council members as an opportunity to voice ideas, concerns, and questions in order to address particular issues of importance and interest at future Council meetings.

Mrs. McAuliffe offered additional meeting topics to include involvement of military-connected students in extracurricular activities such as sports, eligibility for sports, theatre and others. She added as a topic of interest the issue of Governor's School slots and availability for military

children as well as opportunities for AP and Honors classes in comprehensive high schools when children transfer in after courses have begun. She thanked Dr. Spence and Capt. Hewlett for the art celebration in Virginia Beach and their partnership between the military, the schools and Lynnhaven Mall and noted that it is a good example of a community effort.

Dr. Spence echoed the concern with the honors and AP credit and noted that he would like the Council to hear from local school divisions about the different ways they approach the issue and have a discussion about whether local policies or statewide policies might come into play.

Dr. Gordon suggested the use of student-generated videos to help military-connected students in their transitions to new schools. Having such projects as an introduction to the school for military students would be a good way to make students comfortable.

Captain Hewlett shared with the group that many families remain unaware about the Interstate Military Compact and wondered if a broader strategic communication plan was needed to increase awareness. He thought the military identifier might provide one way to ensure that families are connected to this information at the point of school enrollment.

Senator Miller requested an update on the implementation of the military identifier process and the results being seen as a result of the Code change.

Ms. Gaitens added her interest in the issues of student transitions and gifted programs for military-connected students. She noted that some states provide IEPs for gifted services but Virginia does not and that gifted students moving to Virginia may not receive some of the specific services being provided to meet their needs.

Mrs. McAuliffe noted that she's seeking a picture of statewide efforts to promote April as the Month of the Military child. She noted how well Virginia Beach does in many of these efforts, yet there are also many facilities elsewhere in areas that may not be taking full advantage of the resources available. She asked the group to consider how state-level efforts could help bring awareness to those areas.

Closing Remarks

Delegate Cox invited the group after adjournment to view the display of military student artwork in the lobby downstairs. He thanked everyone for their attendance and Delegate Cox adjourned the meeting at 3:20 p.m.

Adjourn

Presentations are available online at

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_family/military/va_council/index.shtml#