



**BLUE STAR  
FAMILIES**

**MILITARY  
FAMILY  
LIFESTYLE  
SURVEY**

# **2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report Recommendations**

In collaboration with

**S** **Syracuse University**

**Institute for Veterans  
& Military Families**

JPMorgan Chase & Co., Founding Partner

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## MILITARY LEADERS

**Conduct routine exit interviews to understand service members' motivations for leaving the military; assess this data to determine reasons for leaving among underrepresented communities. [Finding 1]**

Discrimination at the unit and installation level negatively impacts the military's readiness, recruitment, and retention. As reported in Finding 1, experiences of discrimination and harassment weigh more heavily on active-duty service member respondents from underrepresented groups, as they consider leaving active-duty service due to:

### Gender-based discrimination:

- Female active-duty service member respondents reported they experienced gender-based discrimination in their unit or command (48%), in military-connected training opportunities (26%), and in promotion or advancement opportunities (37%).\*
- Other than military retirement or medical/administrative discharge, 12% of female active-duty service member respondents indicated gender discrimination was one of the primary reasons why they would leave the military (compared to 1% of their male peers), and 8% indicated sexual harassment/assault was a reason (compared to 1% of their male peers).
- Excluding those who left due to retirement, 1 in 10 female veteran respondents (10%) reported leaving military service due to gender-based discrimination (compared to fewer than 1% of their male peers).

### Racial discrimination:

- Active-duty service member respondents of color reported they have experienced racial discrimination in their unit/command (26%), on the base/installation (19%), and in promotion/career advancement opportunities (21%).
- Other than military retirement or medical/administrative discharge, 10% of all active-duty service member respondents of color would consider "racial discrimination" as one of the primary reasons for choosing to leave military service.\*



\*Statistic not reported in Finding 1 documentation

- Excluding those who left due to retirement, 8% of veteran respondents from communities of color cited racial discrimination as a reason they left the service; the number rises to nearly one in five (18%) for Black veteran respondents.

### **Sexual orientation-based discrimination:**

- While only 4% of active-duty service member respondents in this sample identified as LGBTQ+, more than one-third (37%) of all active-duty service member respondents agreed there is sexual orientation-based discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in the military.

The DoD Board on Diversity and Inclusion “believe[s] [that] diversity is the key to innovation,” and that “inclusion is imperative for cohesive teamwork.”<sup>1</sup> Moreover, its report argues it is critical “that the military across all grades reflects and is inclusive of the American people it has sworn to protect and defend.”<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, the departure of service members from underrepresented communities due to discrimination/harassment undermines DoD’s strategic efforts to increase diversity and inclusion within the ranks. By conducting routine exit interviews, the services can gain a better understanding of the extent to which racism, sexism, and discrimination influence service members’ decision to leave service and take Department-wide action to prevent it.

## **Expand broadening assignment opportunities to include increased civilian leadership training for a larger percentage of mid-career service members. [Finding 2]**

The DoD defines career broadening as “the purposeful expansion of an individual’s capabilities and understanding provided through planned opportunities internal and external to the Department of Defense throughout their career.”<sup>3</sup> According to the U.S. Army:

Broadening is accomplished across an officer’s full career through experiences and/or education in different organizational cultures and environments. The intent for broadening is to develop an officer’s capability to see, work, learn and contribute outside each one’s own perspective or individual level of understanding for the betterment of both the individual officer and the institution.<sup>4</sup>

Data from this year’s survey indicates that service members who reported good communication, leadership, and flexibility in their unit also reported a greater sense of belonging to their unit or command, which, in turn, could impact military recruitment, readiness, and retention. Yet, as reported in Finding 2, fewer than half (46%) of active-duty service member respondents agreed that they felt a

sense of belonging to their unit/command. In contrast, 92% of civilian adults felt they belong within their current workplace.<sup>5</sup> Providing mid-career service members with broadening assignments targeted towards civilian leadership training might prove to be an effective strategy for improving command communication, leadership, and flexibility.



The military has experimented with broadening assignments in the civilian workforce as part of its Training with Industry (TWI) program (DOD Instruction 1322.06). TWI is a one-year work experience training program designed to take mid-level officers and non-commissioned officers from specific military occupational specialties (predominantly acquisition and logistics fields) out of the military environment and expose them to the latest commercial business practices, organizational structures and cultures, technology development processes, and corporate management techniques.<sup>6</sup> Dozens of companies partner with the services as part of the TWI program, including Amazon, Raytheon, FedEx, Honeywell, Microsoft, Deloitte, IBM, and Samsung.<sup>7</sup> Each branch of the military, with the exception of the United States Marine Corps (USMC), participates in the TWI program; however, the number of annual participants, types of assignments, and training requirements vary by service.<sup>8</sup>

An evaluation of the Navy's TWI program in 2017 by Melissa Flynn and Amphay Souksavatdy at the Naval Postgraduate School found the return on investment (ROI) of the Navy's program (net benefit of the program divided by the program costs) was 88%. According to the authors: "Additional intangible benefits obtained include meeting capability gaps, meeting Naval Supply Systems Command's objectives, and increasing the professional value of the Supply Corps officers."<sup>9</sup> Given the apparent success of the TWI program across the services, Blue Star Families recommends that similar broadening assignments be made available to mid-level officers and non-commissioned officers in all services and military occupational specialties.



### **Diversify the methods of communication that commands use when connecting with the families in their unit. [Finding 3]**

Communication from the military unit was also an important issue for military-connected family respondents who experienced deployment or activation from March to October 2020, or who anticipated an upcoming deployment within nine months. Indeed, communication was one of the top reported needs among active-duty spouse respondents — with 79% saying the ability to communicate with a spouse is a top need, and 72% saying emergency contact information for their command/unit is a top need. Moreover, while more than a third (37%) of active-duty spouse respondents indicated their service member's unit or command "communicates well," only 33% agreed their command "communicates well during deployment."

Effective communication requires not only the ability to routinely, succinctly, and clearly convey information, but also an understanding of the most effective vehicle for sharing that information. In this year's survey, 81% of active-duty spouse respondents shared they prefer receiving information via email, 45% prefer social media, and 41% prefer a phone call or text message.

Unit/command leadership should be cognizant of these media preferences and diversify how they communicate with family members, particularly during deployment.

### **Empower active-duty families to make informed decisions about their voter registration by providing clear and consistent information about voter registration requirements. [Finding 4]**

In 49 states, an eligible citizen must be registered to vote.<sup>10</sup> However, voter registration requirements and deadlines vary by state. In some states, you can register to vote online; in others, you must do so via mail or at an authorized voter registration center. A few states provide automatic voter registration — wherein individuals are automatically registered to vote at their state DMV unless they "opt-out."<sup>11</sup> Some states permit voters to register up to and on Election Day, while others have voter registration deadlines weeks ahead of an election. Finally, some states prohibit individuals with a felony conviction from voting, while others do not.

As reported in Finding 4, active-duty family respondents' voter registration decisions were influenced by a number of factors — the most common being state residency rules and requirements (42%), and the ease or convenience of registering (23%). While the current level of voter registration among military families is high, approximately one in 10 (9%) active-duty family member respondents reported not being registered to vote at the time of the survey. Of those who were not registered, one of the most common reasons involved a lack of knowledge regarding the voter registration process: 12% of active-duty family respondents who were not registered to vote at the time of the survey reported not knowing where to register, and 12% reported not knowing how to complete the voter registration process. Therefore, Blue Star Families recommend that military leaders provide clear and easy access to registration materials and timely voting information for all service members and their families. Examples might include adding voter registration materials to welcome packets, incorporating links to local registration instructions on websites and social media platforms, and sending out reminders regarding upcoming deadlines.



**Standardize and expand the Career Intermission Program (CIP), while simplifying and expediting the CIP application process, for service members who are unable to implement their family care plans due to an unexpected extended emergency (such as virtual schooling during a pandemic). [Finding 6]**

The Career Intermission Program (CIP) allows service members the ability to transfer out of the active component and into the Individual Ready Reserve for up to three years while retaining full health care coverage and base privileges. Currently, the services require members to apply for CIP six to 12 months in advance of their projected rotation date (PRD) or “soft” end of active obligated service.<sup>12</sup> This lengthy application timeline makes CIP an unworkable option for service members who might otherwise wish to use the program to take a temporary sabbatical in order to tend to their dependents' care during the pandemic or in response to a family emergency. Furthermore, CIP application timelines and accessibility vary by service. The Army, for example, limits the program to 20 officers and 20 enlisted members per calendar year.<sup>13</sup> No such CIP quotas exist in other services.

Pandemic-related social distancing requirements, travel restrictions, and exposure concerns for extended family members rendered many service members' family care plans inoperable.<sup>14</sup> According to a COVID-19 Military Support Initiative (CMSI) Pain Points Poll, 6% of active-duty family respondents with child care needs reported they were unable to implement their command-approved family care plan.<sup>15</sup> This figure is



worrisome, because, according to Section 4(c) of Department of Defense Instruction Number 1342.19, “service members who fail to produce a family care plan may be subject to disciplinary or administrative action that may result in separation from the Service.”<sup>16</sup>

The lack of available dependent care seems to be disproportionately impacting female service members, 20% of whom are in a dual military marriage.<sup>17</sup> According to a CMSI Pain Points Poll, while a small proportion of female service member respondents reported their work had not been impacted by the pandemic, a greater proportion reported

the following: They had reduced work hours because of school closures or a lack of child care; their work quality had declined because they were caring for children while working; and they had shifted work hours later or earlier in the day due to a lack of child care.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in this year's MFLS a higher proportion of female veteran respondents (27%) compared to male veteran respondents (16%) selected a cluster of reasons for leaving the military related to challenges in balancing family life with a military career, such as “concerns about the impact of military service on my family.” Similarly, a third (33%) of female service member respondents in this year's survey reported lack of child care is a top concern in military life – compared to only 15% of their male colleagues.

The lack of dependent care might influence female service members' decision to leave the service. Prior to the pandemic, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported women were 28% more likely to separate from service than men – often for issues related to dependent care.<sup>19</sup> This year's survey found that two in 10 (19%) female active-duty service member respondents said that one of the reasons they would leave the military, other than medical or administrative discharge, would be because “being in a dual-military family is too difficult,” compared to only 3% of male active-duty service member respondents who reported the same. Therefore, Blue Star Families recommend that the CIP application process be standardized, expedited, simplified, and expanded for service members who are unable to implement their family care plans due to an unexpected extended emergency. Service members might then choose to enroll in CIP rather than leave the service all together. Such action might thereby reinforce service member retention, especially among female service members. Participation in CIP, however, must not negatively impact a service member's opportunity for promotion, and any additional certifications or work conducted while on intermission should be considered professional development.



## CONGRESS

**Commission a report on the civilian employment ramifications of activation for National Guard and Reserve members. The report should include an assessment of the extent to which arbitration clauses in employee contracts undercut USERRA protections. [Finding 5]**

Under section 4311(a) of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) of 1984, it is unlawful for an employer to deny a person initial employment, reemployment, retention in employment, promotion, or any benefit of employment on the basis of that person's membership in a uniformed service or performance of their obligated service.<sup>20</sup> Yet, as reported in Finding 5, nearly a quarter (23%) of National Guard and one-third (34%) of Reserve service member respondents to this year's survey reported they had faced negative consequences with their civilian employer after returning from an activation. Examples of negative consequences included the loss of a job, promotion, or training opportunities, as well as involuntary reduced hours and/or pay. Therefore, Blue Star Families recommends that Congress commissions a report on civilian employment retaliation/discrimination against National Guard and Reserve members as a consequence of their activation.

It is possible that employers are not being held accountable for USERRA violations because National Guard and Reserve members are failing to report such violations; failure to report might indicate a lack of knowledge on the part of the National Guard and Reserve members regarding their rights under USERRA, and future research should explore this possibility. Alternatively, it is possible that mandatory arbitration clauses in employee contracts are undercutting USERRA protections. An arbitration clause in an employment contract can force National Guard and Reserve members to forgo their right to prosecute a USERRA violation in court in favor of an arbitration. While arbitrators are supposed to adjudicate cases impartially, there is no remedy if an arbitrator misapplies USERRA, because their decisions can only be appealed in a very narrow set of circumstances.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, mandatory arbitration clauses have become all too common in modern-day employment contracts.<sup>22</sup> As such, these binding arbitration agreements might be undercutting USERRA protections.





## Ensure that military dependents are not unfairly penalized (relative to their civilian peers) for utilizing mental health care, if and when they choose to join the military. [Finding 7]

A primary barrier to seeking mental health care for military families is concern over the confidentiality of treatment.<sup>23</sup> It was the second most commonly-cited barrier by active-duty service member respondents who would like mental health care but don't currently receive it, as reported in Finding 7. Yet, military children's mental health records, for those who sought mental health care in military treatment facilities, are available to the Army, Navy, and Air Force if those individuals choose to join the service as adults.<sup>24</sup>

In 2018, *Military Times* reported that a number of military dependents were being dismissed from basic training because of various notations in their minor dependent records.<sup>25</sup> Under existing service policies, military children's pre-existing "military dependent" medical records are merged with their nascent "military service" medical records.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is possible the merging of dependent and military service medical records could deter military families from seeking mental health care for their dependents if the dependent has expressed interest in future military service.

As a result, Blue Star Families recommends that Congress takes proactive steps to prevent military dependents who seek to join the service from being penalized for utilizing mental health care (e.g., by instructing commanders to give liberal consideration to children raised in military families when deciding whether or not to grant waivers allowing them to join the military despite prior mental health conditions).<sup>27</sup>

## Commission a longitudinal study on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual schooling military children's education and military spouse employment — comparing long-term outcomes of military-connected family members to those of their civilian peers. [Finding 9]

COVID-19 has had a ubiquitous effect on children's education and employment outcomes throughout the United States. However, it is likely to have longer-lasting effects on military families, who were already experiencing routine disruptions to their children's education and their civilian spouse's employment pre-pandemic.

The average military child moves three times as often as their civilian peers,<sup>28</sup> and dependent children's education was one of the top five issues for active-duty military families pre-pandemic.<sup>29</sup> Multiple

moves have been associated with educational consequences, such as gaps in learning and difficulty transferring credits and meeting graduation requirements — which might entail repeating classes. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these transition-related challenges by forcing schools to switch to virtual learning. As reported in Finding 9, virtual education delivery among active-duty families more



than tripled from the 2019/2020 school year to the 2020/2021 school year — from just 15% to more than half (51%) of active-duty family respondents with at least one school-aged child. Some are concerned that the rapid shift to virtual learning has produced emergent learning gaps.<sup>30</sup>

Homeschooling was a popular practice among active-duty families pre-pandemic, as it enabled them to offset some of the challenges endemic to the military lifestyle, e.g., relocation and gaps in child(ren)'s education. As reported in Finding 9, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have sparked new families to shift to this education style; 7%

of active-duty family respondents whose oldest child was in public or private school moved their child to homeschooling for the 2020-2021 school year. While a quarter of currently homeschooling active-duty family respondents (26%) indicated they intended to homeschool their children until they graduate, most (63%) intended to transition to traditional school at some point. The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which aims to support military families as they negotiate school transition challenges, does not include guidance for schools supporting military families transitioning from homeschooling to public school. As such, it is possible that military children who are currently being homeschooled, but who plan to return to traditional schooling, might suffer from adverse educational impacts. Therefore, Blue Star Families recommends that Congress commissions a longitudinal study to evaluate the effects of the pandemic on the long-term educational outcomes of military children, relative to their civilian peers.

COVID-19 has also severely impacted active-duty spouse respondents' ability to work and retain employment. Since March 2020, 42% of military spouse respondents who had been working prior to the pandemic reported they had stopped working at some point during it, with layoffs and furloughs as the top reported cause. Most (68%) of those who stopped working remained unemployed as of survey fielding (September–October 2020). As stated in Finding 13, the unemployment rate of military spouse respondents is nearly seven times the rate of similar civilian peers (20% vs. 3%).<sup>31</sup> For that reason, it is critical that any longitudinal study of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on military families includes an evaluation of military spouse employment outcomes, relative to the civilian workforce.

## Restore BAH to 100% of local area rent. [Finding 10]

Starting in 2015, the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) was incrementally reduced to 95% of local area rent,<sup>32</sup> making it a matter of policy for military families to pay out-of-pocket for quality housing, though they rarely have full control over where they are stationed or when they move. As reported in Finding 10, 83% of active-duty family respondents who live off-installation reported varying levels of out-of-pocket monthly housing costs. Of those who reported out-of-pocket costs, more than three-fourths (77%) reported the costs exceeded the DoD's anticipated range for out-of-pocket costs (\$70 to \$158 per month).<sup>33</sup> By contrast, only 17% of respondents reported all of their monthly housing costs are covered by their BAH. It is worth noting that of those families who listed "desirable school for children" as one of the important factors in their housing choice, 76% reported paying more than \$200 per month in out-of-pocket housing expenses. This figure is in line with research findings that desirable school districts often come with higher housing costs<sup>34</sup> due to zoning restrictions that ban rentals, multifamily housing, and smaller homes like those used to determine BAH rates.<sup>35</sup>

In Blue Star Families' 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, 63% of active-duty family respondents reported they had "some stress" or "a great deal of stress" about their financial situation, and of those financially stressed families, the second most commonly reported contributor to financial stress was out-of-pocket housing costs. In this year's survey, active-duty family respondents reported financial stress more often as their out-of-pocket housing costs increased. As Rep. Susan Davis (D-CA-53) once said: "The military pay system is not designed for junior enlisted members with families in high-cost areas."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, Blue Star Families recommends that Congress restores BAH to 100% of local area rent.



**Commission a report on the demand for various child care options among military families and assess the pros/cons of requiring families to first seek care at their local child development center (CDC) before being authorized to use Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) fee assistance. [Finding 11]**

According to the DoD, 37.8% of military children are five years old or younger.<sup>37</sup> The DoD recognizes that child care is a “workforce issue that directly impacts the efficiency, readiness, retention, and lethality of the Total Force,” which is one of the reasons it is the largest employer-sponsored child care provider in the United States.<sup>38</sup> Despite that, challenges obtaining affordable child care in a timely manner continue to have cascading impacts on the readiness, retention, and well-being of military families.



For example, the lack of affordable child care serves as a major barrier to military spouse employment. In this year’s survey, 34% of active-duty spouse respondents who are not working but need to work reported “child care is too expensive.” This finding concurs with the 2019 Survey of Active Duty Spouses, which found that the second most commonly cited reason among active-duty spouses for not seeking employment was “child care is too costly.”<sup>39</sup> While Blue Star Families’ data shows that child care affordability was a larger barrier to employment than availability before the pandemic,<sup>40</sup> COVID-19 exacerbated both. Reports by Child Care Aware of America,<sup>41</sup> the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC),<sup>42</sup> and the Center for American Progress (CAP)<sup>43</sup> all indicate that the national child care capacity has drastically declined; as of July 2020, 35% of child care centers remained closed.<sup>44</sup>

DoD policies might likewise be hampering military families’ access to affordable child care. Under existing regulations, military families must first seek child care at their local on-post child development center (CDC) before being authorized to use Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) fee assistance.<sup>45,46,47,48</sup> However, 64% of active-duty family respondents live off-installation. Thus, this policy creates undue hardship for military families who live off-installation. Blue Star Families recommends that Congress commissions a report on the demand for various child care options among military families and assesses the pros/cons of requiring families to first seek care at their local CDC before being authorized to use MCCYN fee assistance.



## Support legislation to exclude BAH as counted income for the determination of eligibility and benefits for all federal nutrition assistance programs. [Finding 12]

Our nation is facing a public health crisis with devastating financial consequences. Thousands of low-income military families are currently struggling to put food on the table. Unfortunately, this is neither an isolated problem nor a novel one. Military families are being served by food pantries and distribution programs on or near every military installation in the United States.<sup>49</sup>

Prior to the pandemic, 7% of military family respondents to the 2018 Military Family Lifestyle Survey reported experiencing food insecurity; 9% sought emergency food assistance through a food bank, food pantry, and/or other charitable organization.<sup>50</sup> The actual percentage of military families experiencing food insecurity pre-pandemic was likely higher than these numbers suggest. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated many of the underlying factors of military family food insecurity — including high rates of military spouse un/underemployment, out-of-pocket housing expenses, the limited availability and high costs of child care, etc. As reported in Finding 12, 14% of all enlisted and 29% of junior enlisted (E1-E4) active-duty family respondents reported low or very low food security in the 12 months preceding the 2020 MFLS fielding.

Unfortunately, many of these families are barred from qualifying for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), despite being food insecure. Under current policy, a service member's BAH is treated as income when determining eligibility for SNAP. Meanwhile, housing vouchers for low-income civilians are not treated as income for the purposes of determining SNAP eligibility.<sup>51</sup> Current SNAP eligibility policy (as authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill) thus establishes an unnecessary and harmful barrier to nutrition assistance for struggling military families. Blue Star Families joins other organizations recommending Congress excludes BAH as counted income for the determination of eligibility and benefits for all federal nutrition assistance programs.



## Commission a report on employment discrimination against military spouses as a result of their military affiliation. [Finding 13]

Spouse employment has been identified as one of the top concerns for active-duty families since the inception of Blue Star Families' annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey (aMFLS) in 2009. In this year's survey, more than half (52%) of active-duty spouse respondents and a third (31%) of active-duty service member respondents listed military spouse employment as a top issue of concern. While nearly half of active-duty military spouse respondents are employed, either full-time (30%) or part-time (17%), two-thirds of employed active-duty spouse respondents (67%) reported they are underemployed in some way (indicating their current employment does not match their desires, education, or experience). Furthermore, 35% of active-duty spouse respondents reported they are not employed but need or want employment. Despite multiple efforts over the past decade, the unemployment rate of military spouse respondents is nearly seven times the rate of similar civilian peers (20% vs. 3%).<sup>52</sup>

While the causes of military spouse employment are myriad and complex (including a lack of affordable child care and the unpredictability of service member day-to-day job demands), hiring and promotion discrimination is also a barrier to gainful spouse employment. As reported in Finding 13, more than half of active-duty spouse respondents (51%) agreed their military affiliation prevented them from receiving a promotion at some point in their career, compared to only 16% of veterans. Active-duty spouse respondents were the least likely of all surveyed groups to disclose their military affiliation in an interview: 23% of spouse respondents were "not at all likely" to disclose their affiliation, compared to only 3% of veteran respondents. In an open-ended question, half of spouse respondents who had disclosed their military affiliation in an interview reported the employer expressed concerns about their ability to stay at the position long-term.

In light of these findings, Blue Star Families recommends that Congress commissions a report on employment discrimination against military spouses in the civilian job market. The report should include an assessment of the viability of policy solutions to prevent such discrimination (e.g., expanding USERRA to cover military spouses, identifying military spouses as a protected class, etc.). Moreover, the report should explore potential differential effects across race and gender. This year's survey shows the unemployment rate for military spouse respondents of color (27%) is significantly higher than that of white, non-Hispanic respondents (17%). These trends align with DoD research, which finds that military spouses of color are unemployed at significantly higher rates than their white peers.<sup>53</sup> While Blue Star Families is unable to draw causal conclusions from this data, it is possible that military spouses of color (as well as those from other underrepresented groups) might be facing intersectional discrimination (i.e., discrimination as a result of their race, gender, *and* military affiliation).



## STATE LEGISLATURES

**Enable online school enrollment to enhance the “warm hand-off” between the sending and receiving districts, and to minimize disruptions in special education services.**  
[Finding 8]

Frequent moves can be jarring for all military children, but the effects are intensified for children with special needs. When military families move, children with special needs may experience disruptions in the special education and support services they receive at their current duty station. Under federal law, schools must provide free appropriate public education (FAPE) through an individualized education plan (IEP) to children with special needs.<sup>54</sup> Many states, however, have additional special education laws that establish variant criteria around eligibility for special education services.<sup>55</sup> As such, when a military family moves across state lines their child’s new school must decide if they qualify for special education services under state law. If the child is found eligible, the school will develop a new IEP. Unfortunately, this process is often time-consuming and can cause lengthy disruptions in the child’s special education services.

Despite the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children having been signed by all 50 states and the District of Columbia, which states “the receiving State shall initially provide comparable services to a student with disabilities based on his/her current Individualized Education Program (IEP),” half of active-duty family respondents with a child enrolled in special education who PCSed since March 2020 reported they had trouble transferring their child(ren)’s IEP (51%) or 504 Plan (48%) to their new school. To minimize these disruptions, Blue Star Families echoes Partners in PROMISE and the Military Children’s Education Coalition (MCEC) in recommending that school districts enable military families to enroll their special needs child(ren) online (without requiring a physical presence).<sup>56</sup> Enrolling military students online could start the transfer process before the family arrives, allowing the family and the school to begin the special education needs assessment process earlier and potentially reducing the wait time to re-establish services.<sup>57</sup> According to Michelle Norman, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Partners in PROMISE, “the idea of allowing the military family to advance enroll with a set of military orders would ensure that the receiving school district would have those supports in place on Day 1. [...] With advance notice of a student’s arrival with their current Individualized Education Program (IEP), the new school district can reach out to the family and the previous school district’s teachers and ensure that they are ready to implement the IEP. It is a win-win for both military families and school districts.”

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