

Easing Change for Children of Military Families

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Monterey, California

“Military families make many sacrifices in service to our country. The stresses associated with periodic, and sometimes unexpected, deployments can take their toll on children and spouses,” said Tom Jennings, former noncommissioned officer and board president of Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD). “The district is committed to serving military families to ensure their children don’t miss out on vital educational and childhood opportunities.”

MPUSD is situated along the central coast of California and stretches from the city of Marina in the north down to the city of Monterey at its southern end. It serves more than 10,000 students, 11 percent of them in military families stationed at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, the Defense Data Manpower Center, Naval Support Activity Monterey, Naval Postgraduate School, Fleet Numerical Meteorology and Oceanography Center, and the Naval Research Lab.

The children of service families typically are enrolled in the district for only five to 18 months. Of the more than 20 schools in MPUSD, four predominantly serve military students and their families. These are La Mesa Elementary, Marshall Elementary, Walter Colton Middle and Monterey High School.

“Improving educational opportunities for all our families, especially our military families, is a top priority,” said Monterey Mayor Clyde Roberson, and the district has proved this to be so. MPUSD established a record of working with specialists from the military to respond to the social and emotional needs of these students, as well as to behavior and conditions that could interfere with learning. In 2015 it received a \$1.2 million Department of Defense Education Activity grant to further this work. At the elementary school level, the grant will fund a behaviorist counselor to work with teachers. At the middle- and high-school levels, whether a student is transitioning to a new school environment or simply navigating adolescence, he or she will receive support through an on-campus liaison. Students also have the opportunity to participate in the Military Child Education Association’s Student 2 Student program.

Also expected to positively affect students is the adoption of the International Baccalaureate (IB) degree program at Walter Colton Middle School and Monterey High

School. This program is rigorous, fully portable and is recognized around the world wherever a military family might be posted. The IB emphasizes practical connections and applications to the real world. It involves cross-curricular learning with an international emphasis and also will serve as an advantage to students from civilian families. The 2016-2017 school year will be devoted to planning with rollout to begin in 2017-2018. The IB program comes out of MPUSD's innovative Reimagining Secondary Teaching and Learning Initiative to increase engagement and self-directed learning. It will draw on assistance from the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defense Language Institute, as well as the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey.

"The Monterey Peninsula School District is important both locally and globally," said Capt. Kevin Bertelsen of Naval Support Activity Monterey. "The district provides direct, effective support to the Department of Defense and Department of State by providing high-quality education to children of American service members, as well as those of our allies. Supporting military children enhances the quality of life for our entire armed forces community, and has long term, positive benefits for national security. I appreciate the district's support of our nation's defense and overall stable security posture the United States is able to provide around the world." — KB
