



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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December 20, 2023

The Honorable Governor Glenn Youngkin  
Office of the Governor  
PO Box 1475  
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Members of the General Assembly  
General Assembly Building  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Youngkin and Members of the General Assembly:

I am pleased to submit the enclosed report titled, 2023 Executive Summary of the Interim Activity and Work of the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.

In accordance with the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, the Virginia Council shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an annual executive summary of the interim activity and work of the Virginia Council no later than the first day of each regular session of the General Assembly, pursuant to § 22.1-361 of the *Code of Virginia*.

Please direct questions to Melissa K. Velazquez, Assistant Superintendent of Policy and Government Relations, at [melissa.velazquez@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:melissa.velazquez@doe.virginia.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Coons".

Lisa Coons

LC/smh

2023  
Executive Summary of the  
Interim Activity and Work of the

**Virginia Council on the Interstate  
Compact on Educational Opportunity  
for Military Children**

Presented to  
the Governor  
and the General Assembly

December 2023

**Members of the  
Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact  
on Educational Opportunity for Military Children**

As of December 12, 2023

<b>Dr. Lisa Coons</b>	Compact Commissioner, Council Chairman, Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction
<b>Senator Mamie E. Locke</b>	Hampton District, Virginia Senator District 2, Senate Representative
<b>Delegate Ms. Anne Ferrell Tata</b>	House of Delegates Representative, Delegate 82nd District
<b>Dr. Victor Shandor Brown</b>	Superintendent, York County Public Schools
<b>Rear Admiral Wesley R. McCall</b>	USN, Commander, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic, (Military Installation Representative Member)
<b>Mrs. Shawnee Edwards-Zollar</b>	Customer Technical Service Specialist, Afton Chemical, (Citizen Member)
<b>Mrs. Tian Olson</b>	Military Spouse, Attorney, Education Advocate, Parent of a Military Child (Military Child Member)
<b>Mrs. Michelle Norman</b>	Executive Director and Founder, Partners in PROMISE, (Military Student Support Process Action Team Military Spouse Member)
<b>Mr. Raul Vargas</b>	President, VARCom Solutions; Founder, CEO, and Chairman, American Latino Veterans Association, (Citizen Member)

## Statutory Requirements for the Executive Summary

The *Code of Virginia*, § 22.1-361 states:

*In accordance with the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, there is hereby created the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, hereinafter referred to in this section as the "Virginia Council."... The chairman of the Virginia Council shall submit to the Governor and the General Assembly an annual executive summary of the interim activity and work of the Virginia Council no later than the first day of each regular session of the General Assembly. The executive summary shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.*

# **Executive Summary**

## **Introduction**

The Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (the Council) was created in 2009 to consider all matters related to the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The Compact seeks to remove barriers to educational success imposed on children of military families because of frequent moves and deployment of their parents. The Compact addresses such issues as timely enrollment and placement, on-time graduation, and sharing of information between states to ensure a smooth educational transition for dependents of military families as they move from and to other states.

Virginia is home to some of the Nation's largest and most important military installations, so it is not surprising that the Commonwealth's schools educate more military children than most states. As of July 31, 2022, the United States Defense Manpower Data Center estimated that there are 71,293 school-age military-associated children of active-duty military, United States Public Health Service (USPHS), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) members ranging in age from five to eighteen residing in Virginia. According to this data, Virginia is home to nearly 11,000 more military-connected students than Texas, the next highest state. These are students whose parents serve on active duty in the United States Armed Forces, United States Reserve Forces, or in the Virginia National Guard.

The average military student faces transition challenges more than twice during high school, and most military children will attend six to nine different school systems from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The Compact seeks to make transitions easier for the children of military families so that they are afforded the same opportunities for educational success as other children and are not penalized or delayed in achieving their educational goals.

The continued focus for the Council in 2023 was identifying the needs of key stakeholders and working to ease the needs of military-connected children in our schools. New appointments to the Council occurred in May of 2023 and the Council met for the first time on October 26, 2023. This executive summary provides an overview of the work conducted by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Council to support military-connected children and their families.

## **Virginia Council Meetings**

The Council held one public meeting in 2023. The meeting was held on October 26, 2023, in person at the James Monroe Building on floor 22. The meeting was attended by military school liaison officers and VDOE staff. The meetings were streamed live on the Department's YouTube channel and recorded for archival purposes. The meeting's agenda covered several issues related

to the education of children of military families in the Commonwealth. Additional details about the meeting are included below.

- **October 26, 2023, Virginia Council Meeting  
Richmond, Virginia**

During the October 26, 2023, meeting the Council was provided a presentation on the Student Ambassador Convening held on June 21, 2023, at George Mason University (GMU). GMU, Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), and VDOE partnered to hold a Student Ambassador Convening pilot upon realizing the varying differences that existed between the quality of the peer-led programming required by schools seeking to become Purple Star designated. The presentation was conducted by Dr. Jennifer Drake Patrick, Associate Professor of Education, George Mason University Sturtevant Center for | Leadership Team for the Military, Veterans, and Families initiative, Mrs. Meredith Ayala, Family Partnerships Specialist, Military-Connected Youth and Families, and Mr. Dan Dunham, Military Student and Families Specialist, Virginia Department of Education.

The Council shared their satisfaction of the peer-led programming and appreciation for the presentation and offered continued support for the effort and continuation of the training Pilot.

The Council approved –110 schools for the 2023-2024 Purple Star Designation Award.

Mr. Dunham then provided the Council with an update that included the naming of the newest Virginia’s Military School Liaison Officers, the hosting of the 2023 Annual Business meeting of the Military Children’s Compact Commission (MIC3), the passing of House Bill (HB) 1929, military signing day, and the development of peer-led support team training materials.

Dr. Shandor made a comment concerning the Compact 22.1-360, specifically Article V, Placement and Attendance, as it relates to absences related to deployment activities. He mentioned that he wished to go on record stating that he had approached Dr. Lisa Coons in writing that York County Public Schools had proposed an attendance code be added to track the absences of military-connected students related to this Compact provision and that those absences be removed from the calculations of chronic absenteeism. Those families, students, and schools should not be penalized for those occurrences which are permitted under the Compact.

During open discussion, Ms. Tian Olson asked if there was a process, like that in place to identify eligibility for the Compact, for those who would be covered under HB 1929. Mr. Dunham shared that the States do not mandate a particular process but that the process to identify eligibility is left up to the school division to develop. Dr. Shandor then inserted that York County Public Schools does have a process in place and shared how it works in their school division.

### **Military Family Education Liaison**

Pursuant to § 22.1-361, the VDOE employs a military family education liaison to provide staff support to the Virginia Council and to assist military families and the state in facilitating the implementation of the Compact.

The military family education liaison, otherwise referred to as the VDOE Military Student and Families Specialist, provides for the coordination among state agencies of government, local educational agencies, and military installations concerning the state's participation in, and compliance with, the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. A key function of the position is to assist military families and local educational agencies in the implementation of the Compact to ensure a smooth academic transition for military children in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The liaison works with families and school divisions to resolve problems related to educational records and enrollment, course placement, graduation requirements, and other important issues. The liaison also serves as a policy consultant on issues related to military transfer students, including drafting guidance documents for distribution to school divisions, maintaining communication with school liaison officers, providing training on the Interstate Compact, and maintaining the military resources' webpages. The VDOE Military Student and Families Specialist is:

Daniel L. Dunham  
Military Student and Families Specialist  
101 N. 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Richmond, Virginia 23219  
(804) 923-0958 (office)  
[Dan.Dunham@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Dan.Dunham@doe.virginia.gov)

### **Dissemination of Information**

Through a variety of mediums, the VDOE, on behalf of the Virginia Council, has provided training and disseminated timely and relevant information related to the education of military children to school divisions, school liaison officers, exceptional family member program case managers, military organizations, and other important stakeholders.

The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps school liaison officers play an invaluable role in sharing information about the Interstate Compact with military families and Virginia educators.

School Liaison Officers (SLOs) connect military families with educational opportunities and critical information about state and local school laws, policies, and standards. The SLOs work in partnership with local school divisions and the leaders of military commands and installations to enhance the public school experiences of military children. They equip school division staff with resources and information about the challenges faced by military children while working in partnership with schools and community organizations to raise awareness about the needs of these students. The SLOs promote parental involvement and assist parents, teachers, administrators, and commanders in troubleshooting and finding solutions to education-related problems.

Military Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) case managers serve to support military families who care for family members with individuals who have special needs. These individuals play a critical role in linking these families to military and community resources that can support the unique needs of these families.

The VDOE Military Student and Families Specialist is in regular communication with the SLOs and EFMP case managers via email, phone, and at trainings. These regular communications serve as opportunities to discuss issues with the implementation of the Interstate Compact, share updated resources, and link families to local and state supports that oftentimes fall outside the scope of the Compact.

The VDOE, on behalf of the Virginia Council, has developed and maintains webpages dedicated to the Military Compact, with resources for military families and educators. The [Military Families webpage](#) features guidance documents to help school divisions interpret key provisions of the Compact, including printable brochures and guides. It also contains links to pertinent Virginia laws related to the education of military children, as well as contact information for military school liaison officers. Additionally, the Purple Star Designation page highlights and encourages school divisions to apply for this award for the hard work of assisting military-connected children. The page provides details about what the school needs to qualify and provides training modules developed to build awareness of the Interstate Compact on the Educational Opportunity of Military Children and on the unique needs and stressors these students and their families face. The Department has also maintained a webpage dedicated to the Virginia Council that includes the Council's meeting schedule, agendas, and minutes from annual meetings and presentations given at the meetings.

With resources provided by the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3), the VDOE, on behalf of the Virginia Council, has distributed guidance documents to school liaison officers and school divisions that can be used in training for school division staff and in meetings with military families. The resources include:



- *Guidance for Military Families with Students in Special Education*, a 16-page document that provides information and answers to questions that military families with school-aged children might have about special education programs in Virginia public schools. Topics include enrollment, special education services, parental consent in Virginia, Section 504, dispute resolution, and procedural safeguards. This document was updated in March 2020.
- *Desk Reference for the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children: Compact Rules*, is shared with school liaison officers as they work with educators in implementing the provisions of the Interstate Compact; and
- *Guide for Parents, School Officials and Public Administrators*, provides information to families, military leaders, and educators about the Interstate Compact.
- *The VDOE Modules*:
  - *Supporting Our Military-Connected Children in School Settings: Moving them from Risk to Resilience, Module 1, and Module 2*, provides school staff online professional development on the unique needs of military-connected students and their families; and
  - *Building Awareness of the Social Emotional Impacts of Military Family Transitions*, provides school staff online professional development on the stressors that military families face routinely and provides clarity on how best to support these families during periods of heightened stress.

The following resources specifically designed for military families were added in 2023 to the VDOE Special Education webpage for Families.

- *Military Families of Students Receiving Special Education Services: Things to Know When Moving to Virginia School Systems*
- *Military Families of Exceptional Family Members – Birth to 5 Years: Things to Know When Moving to Virginia*
- *Are You a Military Family Relocating to Virginia with a Child Who Has a Disability? Check Out These Helpful Hints and Resources*
- *Mental Wellness and Trauma-Informed Practices in Military Families (Video)*

## **Training**

The VDOE, on behalf of the Virginia Council, has provided training on the Compact and the Virginia Council to thousands of educators, military families, and other interested stakeholders since its creation in 2009. The SLOs throughout Virginia frequently provide training on the Interstate Compact to educators in their region as well. In February 2023, The Virginia Military Student and Families Specialist and the VDOE's Department of Special Populations Office of Family Engagement held a SLO and EFMP training to review the process of dispute resolution and how to improve communication and collaboration with families of students with disabilities.

In May, the VDOE's Military Student and Families Specialist presented at the Military Families Symposium for military families with students in special education. This training was funded with grants from the VDOE and conducted by the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC). The in-person symposium provided attendees with an opportunity to learn more about state-level support, self-advocacy, due process, the I'm Determined program, PEATC, and Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Center for Parent Involvement.

The annual Connect for Success Conference was held in September 2023 and included a presentation by the Navy Regional Mid-Atlantic's Special Education Specialist Ms. Erica Swenson, who discussed the unique challenges that military-connected students, and others who are highly mobile, often face and strategies to support them. The VDOE's Office of Special Education Family Support and Special Facilities provides this professional development opportunity to those who work in Parent Resource Centers. This opportunity helps to foster collaboration between the school divisions and military partners.

The Military Student and Families Specialist was requested to present on Purple Star programming and the Compact at three State and National level trainings. These included the following;

- Served as a panelist at the Military Child Education Coalition's (MCEC) Purple Star Convening held at Boeing HQ to share qualifiers for Virginia Purple Star Designation with are school personnel;
- Served as a panelist at the MCEC National Convening held in Washington D.C. providing guidance and direction to attendees on Purple Star programming and provisions under the Compact;
- Presented on the strength of peer-led support programming as a preventative measure for school violence and self-harm at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's (SAMHSA) Service Veterans Virtual training; and
- Presented at the National Purple Star Schools virtual convening.

## **Highlights**

In October 2023, the Council and the VDOE announced that one 110 schools across Virginia were honored with Purple Star Designations. To qualify for a Purple Star in Virginia, schools must have a staff point of contact (POC) for military students and families. The POC serves as the primary link between the military family and the school. In addition, schools must meet four measures that help to build awareness within the school community and foster peer transition support.

There were 29 schools honored this year as second-time recipients of the distinction. This is the fifth year the VDOE has designated Purple Star schools. Since 2018, the VDOE and the Council have selected 569 schools across Virginia for the award of which 360 have maintained the award and 185 have been twice honored.

The Ambassador Training held on June 21, 2023, at GMU was a tremendous success. It was attended by over 100 Fairfax County high school student ambassadors and their sponsors who took time away from their summer for the purpose of strengthening their school's peer-led support programming. The training focused on equipping the students to be better equipped to run a program aimed at welcoming new students to their school and assisting others who may be self-isolating in connecting with their peers.

These students and their sponsors will be followed throughout the coming year to check on their progress and implementation of what was learned during the training, in addition to continued analysis of the following:

- Social Emotional Learning Screener;
- Fairfax County Youth Survey;
- Youth Surveys and Focus Groups; and
- Safe and Supportive Schools Survey.

## **Military Student Identifier**

In 2014, the Virginia Council unanimously adopted a statement in support of a military student identifier:

*The Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children supports the implementation of a military student identifier in Virginia as a means for local school divisions to collect information on military-connected children enrolled in the school division, beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. Further, the Virginia Council on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children encourages the use of such data by local, state, and federal entities to enhance the funding and quality of services provided to serve the unique needs of military-connected children residing in the Commonwealth.*

The 2015 Virginia General Assembly passed, and the Governor signed, legislation (HB 2373 and SB 1354) to require the *“identification of newly enrolled uniformed services-connected students by local school divisions.”* School divisions were provided flexibility in how they identify the students and collect the data. The data is collected three times per year, via the VDOE’s Student Record Collection. The VDOE communicated with school divisions about implementing the military student identifier through Superintendent’s Memorandums and webinars hosted by the VDOE Office of Educational Information Management. Students are *“coded”* as either not military-connected, active duty-connected, or reserve-connected.

According to the VDOE’s 2022-2023 military identifier Fall Count, public schools in Virginia serve 77,534 military-connected students. There are connected students in 130 of the 131 school divisions. The Virginia Council and the Virginia Department of Education will continue encouraging school divisions to identify and reach out to the military-connected students in their schools. The identifier serves as an important tool in connecting military-connected children with counselors, services, and resources for academic, social, and emotional support. The identifier also provides data for becoming eligible for critical funds for schools to further meet the needs of uniformed services-connected students residing in the Commonwealth.

### **Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission**

The Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission (MIC3) is the national organization that oversees the implementation of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The VDOE, on behalf of the Virginia Council, is in regular communication with MIC3 to disseminate policy information related to the Military Compact. The VDOE Military Student and Families Specialist also works with Commission staff in some cases where a military family’s transfer in or out of Virginia schools needs assistance.

The VDOE Military Student and Families Specialist as Commissioner Designee attended the 2023 Annual Business Meeting (ABM) of the Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunities for Military Children as Virginia’s Commissioner’s designee. This year Virginia hosted this assembly. Commissioners and their guests were very complimentary of the venue and the opportunity to hold the reception at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Commissioners also shared gratitude for the warm welcome provided by Virginia Secretary of Veteran and Defense Affairs Craig Crenshaw, Virginia Secretary of Education Aimee Guideria, and Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Lisa Coons. They also enjoyed the presentation made before the body on the Project Search programming on military installations in Virginia. The ABM provided valuable opportunities for the VDOE Military Student and Families Specialist to dialogue with other state commissioners/designees about the implementation of the Interstate Compact and on best practices for navigating challenging issues. During the meeting, Commissioners approved a new policy on selecting new Ex-officio members, elected a new Chair, Treasurer, and Vice Chair, approved rule amendments, and approved Dues and Budget proposals for fiscal year 2025.

## **Conclusion**

The VDOE, the Council, and the Virginia Military Families Specialist continued to provide support and technical assistance to both individual families and schools during 2023.

The network that encompasses the Military Student Support Process Action Team (MSSPAT), SLOs, and EFMPs continues to be impactful. These partners routinely help to review Purple Star applications, conduct training, and provide expertise to support improvements to students, parents, and schools.

In nearly every community in Virginia, there are children with parents or guardians on active duty, Reserves, National Guard, NOAA, or USPHS. While their parents honorably serve our nation and our Commonwealth, we should **CONTINUE** to recognize the contributions of military-connected students and celebrate their spirit. To this end, the VDOE is honored to support the transitional needs of military-connected students and their families.