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DoD, states work to help military schoolkids

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — In hopes of making school transitions easier for military children, the Defense Department and the Interstate Council of State Governments have developed a “compact” agreement dealing with issues children face during their frequent moves.

Defense officials will now seek legislation in the 54 states and U.S. territories to carry out the compact, said Leslye Arsht, deputy undersecretary of defense for military community and family policy, at the annual conference of the Military Child Education Coalition here. More than 600 educators and other youth-serving professionals attended.

Schools operated by the Defense Department serve a small percentage — about 12 percent — of military school-age children, according to defense officials. The other 88 percent attend civilian public schools, charter schools, private schools or are home-schooled.

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children addresses such issues as:

- Education records and enrollment. For example, if a child has successfully completed kindergarten in one location and moves, he should be eligible for first grade at the next location, even if the new district requires children to start kindergarten at an older age.

- Placement and attendance. One example is how deployment-related absences are considered. One mother who took her child out of school in San Diego to meet the father’s ship received a letter of truancy from the school, said Laurie Crehan, regional quality of life liaison for the Defense Department’s state liaison office.

- Graduation requirements, such as giving consideration to students who transfer during their senior year, for example.

If states accept the compact and pass laws and policies related to it, Crehan, said, there are provisions to form state councils to resolve issues from district to district, and for an interstate council that will look at other issues that need to be addressed.

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