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## Group to aid military kids

*By Curtia James, Delaware State News*

DOVER — A new national advisory group is creating an interstate agreement to make educational transitions a more seamless process for children in military families and students facing relocation.

The average military child changes schools more than twice during high school and can expect to attend six to nine different school systems from kindergarten through their senior year, according to the Military Education Coalition.

Ernestine Adams, principal of the Dover Air Force Base Middle School, said she thought a unified approach to ease these students into their new locations and schools was a wonderful concept.

“We get kids from diverse levels of academic needs,” she said.

“The challenges and opportunities are for us to help them to make that transition” socially, emotionally and academically, she said.

The Council of State Governments and the U.S. Department of Defense assembled the national advisory group from such organizations as the National School Boards Association, the U.S. Department of Education, the Southern Region Education Board, the National PTA and the National Military Family Association.

Participants were charged with coming up with a strategy to approach legislators to break down “inflexible administrative and bureaucratic practices” that impact these students’ educational achievement.

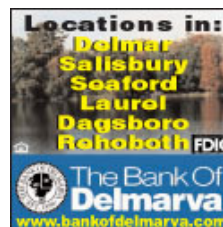
John Mountjoy, director of the National Center for Interstate Compacts, a subsidiary of the Council of State Governments, which is organizing the initiative, said in its first meeting in mid-October, the group identified the problems that military children face.

Such obstacles are that “states all have different entrance ages for kindergarten,” he said.

“There needs to be some consistency and continuity there.”

In addition to differing immunization requirements, he said the group would like to make a policy recommendation “that all schools maintain a Web site and that those Web sites contain all of the information that families need to register a child.”

Other pressing concerns as students transfer from state to state, or, as Mr. Mountjoy noted, “even from one school district to the next” stem from time lapses in record transfers and various prerequisite course and





graduate requirements.

He also pointed to the inconsistent powers of custodial parents when parents are deployed and exclusions from extra-curricular activities, which impacts students who enroll in schools too late for auditions, tryouts or recruitment periods.

“For the military family and any family that is moving, these things turn into stumbling blocks,” Mr. Mountjoy said.

Ms. Adams agreed.

“The military makes every effort to link and match curriculum and socioeconomic needs,” she said.

“We all need to be doing the same thing.”

In the group’s second meeting this month, members attempted to identify solutions.

“In the middle of December, we’ll be convening that small core group of folks,” to work on a purpose statement, Mr. Mountjoy said.

The statement, he said, will request equal education for all children and ask school districts to seek to understand the unique situation relocated children face.

He expects the group’s interstate compact to be complete in the spring, but fears it might be too late to produce legislative action.

“We will have missed more than half of the legislative session,” Mr. Mountjoy said.

“I think the big push would be 2008.”

Ms. Adams described military families as “extremely resilient.”

“They understand the mission of what is required of them,” she said.

“Whatever we can all do to create a universal system that can help them to ease their transition is important.”

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