



Schools, Education, and Quality of Life

Issue

The quality of education provided in public schools in the United States varies widely. In some locations surrounding military bases, test scores for local public schools are well below the national average. Military parents in these areas may be faced with few options other than home schooling or the financial burden of sending their children to a private school. What about a voucher system?

Background

There are more than 965,000 children ages 3 to 18 in military families. DoD schools—both overseas and stateside—educate about 110,000 students. That means that more than 850,000 military connected students attend education programs in civilian communities. Until recently, no office or agency within DoD has had the specific responsibility to advocate for those students not attending DoD schools.

Current Status

Within the United States, DoD has no legislative authority or funding to operate a voucher system for alternative education or to reimburse military parents for costs associated with their placing their child in a tuition-paying or private school. The presumption is that all students whose military parent is stationed in the US may attend free public schools. DoD recognizes that instruction and achievement varies between states and schools, and has recently created an Education Opportunities Directorate to address education issues and concerns affecting the quality of kindergarten through 12th grade educational opportunities for all military connected students, whether in DoD schools or in local school districts in the US. The end result should be a continuum of quality education for all military children, no matter where their sponsors are assigned.

Current Initiatives

The Education Opportunities Directorate will take the first step in working issues with its Texas Round Table Discussions. This is the first in a series of planned regional round table discussions on youth and education, focused on identifying the unique issues and challenges confronting the school age children of our mobile military population and the local education agencies (LEAs) that serve them. An additional outcome of these discussions will be the development of partnerships and supporting mechanisms that will benefit both students and LEAs.

“We have asked them [DoD] to explore providing tuition assistance to spouses.”

“In some areas where service members are assigned, test scores for local public schools are well below the national average.”

*—Mrs. Laura Ball,
Air Force Member’s wife*





This “Connect with America on Education” initiative is an unprecedented opportunity to share, listen, and learn about the school experiences and how they affect the likelihood of a military child’s current and potential academic success. Included in discussions will be state education policymakers, senior leaders representing both the military and the education communities, military parents, teachers, school counselors, and military connected students. Other State Round Tables will be conducted to gather information. A senior leader meeting will follow the round table discussions. At this meeting, leaders from the Military Departments, the Department of Education and interested stakeholder groups and associations that deal with military community and education issues will meet to identify obstacles to success in the categories of funding, legislation, legal, policy and practice.

Finally, a national planning session will focus on better educational opportunities for all military children by calling together members of the Military Departments along with State educational leaders, the Office of Management and Budget and congressional members from impacted states to develop a strategic agenda to enhance school improvements.

Concurrently, working with DoDEA, a military/community school partnership program similar to the sister city concept will be explored. Through this program, DoDEA schools could be partnered with local school districts serving military students to promote shared experiences, common lessons plans, collaboration on a number of school activities, and shared video and computer lessons.

Issue

The current ceiling on tuition assistance (TA) for servicemembers (\$3,500) is too low and needs to be reevaluated. The cap forces active duty and reserve personnel to go to schools of lesser quality or pay significant amounts out of their own pockets. Provide higher TA based on years of service.

Background

Effective October 1, 1999, the Services implemented a DoD-wide uniform tuition assistance policy that had been agreed upon in 1997. Prior to that time, each Service had a different policy and, in most years, tuition assistance was reduced or curtailed during the year and, in many years, funds were depleted before everyone was able to receive some of the benefit. The uniform policy was implemented to ensure that members of all Services had available to them the same level of support and that such a level of support would be available for the entire fiscal year. The \$3,500 ceiling helps ensure that funds are not depleted.

Current Status

Review of costs and tuition assistance usage during fiscal 1999 suggests that \$3,500 is sufficient for most members. Less than 10 percent of all participants reached the ceiling, and the average cost per participant was well below the ceiling.

Current Initiatives

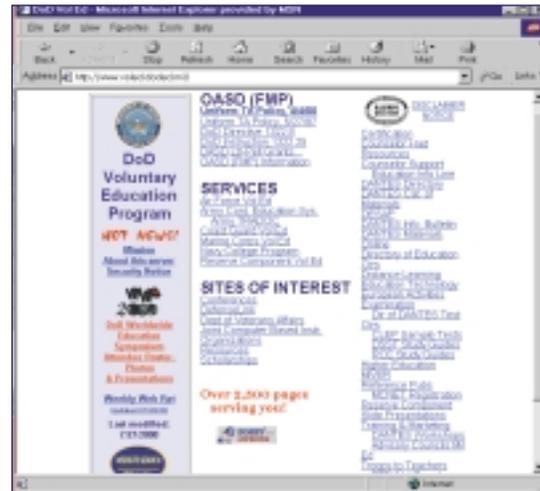
The Interservice Voluntary Education Working Group has considered changes to the uniform policy on tuition assistance, including changes to the course cap and annual ceiling. Each Service was asked to evaluate the question and make recommendations regarding changes to both the course cap and the annual ceiling. At least one Service recently considered providing greater amounts of tuition assistance based on years of service. The issue will be re-introduced as part of future discussions on raising caps and ceilings.



Any changes to tuition assistance or voluntary education policy are published on the DoD Voluntary Education Web site: <http://www.voled.doded.mil>.

Issue

Explore providing tuition assistance to spouses, especially those located overseas. Currently, no tuition assistance is provided for advanced education. Also, States do not provide the same benefits for spouses that are offered to servicemember residents with respect to college enrollment and tuition. Military families would like to see DoD publicize grants and tuition assistance offered through Service aid societies and enlisted associations.



Background

DoD has been exploring options for providing education-related financial assistance to military spouses, and will continue to seek ways in which to assist spouses interested in pursuing educational opportunities.



Current Status

Spouses of active duty military personnel stationed overseas are provided tuition assistance by Service-related aid and relief organizations. Army Emergency Relief (AER), Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS), and Air Force Aid Society (AFAS) are private non-profit organizations. Historically, they have raised money in order to provide financial assistance to servicemembers and their families in time of emergency. More recently, that role has been expanded to include tuition assistance for spouses accompanying military personnel assigned overseas.

Current Initiatives

The Army Emergency Relief (AER) “spouse education assistance program” is the newest program among the Services. Spouses of soldiers assigned to the United States Army, Europe (USAREUR) are eligible to receive awards of up to half the cost of tuition, to a maximum of \$350 per term, for each of five terms per year. Assistance is provided for both post-secondary undergraduate studies, as well as for vocational training.

The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society conducts the “spouse tuition aid program” for spouses of active duty Navy and Marine Corps personnel stationed overseas. Aid is available for full- or part-time study as follows: \$300 per term for vocational or undergraduate study and \$350 per term for graduate study. Support is provided for up to five terms per year. The Society also offers a scholarship and loan program. Spouses of active duty members are eligible, regardless of location; however, they must be full-time undergraduate students. Each year, 1,000 scholarships of \$2,000 each are awarded. Interest-free loans of up to \$3,000 are also available.



The Air Force Aid Society began its tuition assistance program for overseas spouses 10 years ago. The Society pays 50 percent of tuition charges up to a maximum of \$1,200 per academic year. On average, 20 percent of spouses on major overseas installations participate in the program.

Information about the programs mentioned above is available at family support centers in overseas commands or at education centers on military bases overseas. Many military installation Web sites have a page or link to a relief/aid society Web site.

Issue

Establish a single standard for high school graduation requirements. Graduation requirements differ from State to State, creating difficulties for the children of military families when they relocate due to a permanent change of duty station.

Background

The responsibility for education rests at the State and local level. The Department of Education has only general responsibility for the oversight of public education in the United States. It is highly unlikely that any single standard for high school graduation requirements will be established in the near future.

Current Status

DoD is working in partnership with the Military Child Education Coalition to address educational issues—such as differences in graduation requirements—that impact military students when their military parents transfer to a new duty station.

Current Initiatives

The Connect with America Round Table discussion, co-hosted by DoD and the Military Child Education Coalition, will focus on education issues relating to academics (e.g., State requirements, transfer of credits, student performance standards, student preparedness, relocation) funding, and military related issues (e.g., special concerns/needs of military students, desire for greater involvement such as representation on school boards; and opportunities for collaboration). The first Round Table discussion is planned for San Antonio, Texas, September 27-28, 2000.

DoDDS and DDESS National Rankings for the NAEP Assessment 1994-1998

	1994	1996	1996		1998		1998
	Reading	Science	Math		Reading		Writing
	4 th Grade	8 th Grade	4 th Grade	8 th Grade	4 th Grade	8 th Grade	8 th Grade
DoDDS	9 th	8 th	9 th	8 th	5 th	4 th	2 nd
DDESS	**	9 th	8 th	12 th	7 th	4 th	1 st

**DDESS did not participate as part of DoDEA.

On the 1998 NAEP test on writing, DoD students lead the nation. Among the 39 participating states and jurisdictions, no system scored significantly higher than DDESS, and only one State, Connecticut, scored significantly higher than DoDDS. In addition, DDESS had the highest percentage of students in the Nation scoring in the “Advanced” category on the exam.