Report to Congress
Responding to Senate Armed Services Committee Report 111-201

BACKGROUND

The Senate Armed Services Committee, in its report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2011, S. Rep. No. 111-201, page 137, requested that the Secretary of Defense provide a report on the *Access to appropriate facilities, services, and support for military families with dependent children with special needs*. The report is to provide information to determine if the complex needs of military dependent children with special needs are being met by Department of Defense (DoD) child care and educational programs in accordance with applicable federal laws. This Report meets that requirement.

The Department of Defense consulted with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs: Monitoring & State Improvement Planning Division; the Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families; and the National Military Family Association in the preparation of this report.

OVERVIEW

The Department of Defense recognizes the importance of supporting families with children with disabilities in receiving appropriate child care and education consistent with all relevant public laws. In September 2010, the Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs was established in DoD by Section 563 of the FY 2010 National Defense Authorization Act (Pub. L. 111-84) which added Section 1781C to Title 10, United States Code. This office guides policy development and oversight in support of military families with special needs.

RESPONSE TO ITEMS OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Inspections

Both DoD child development programs and the DoD schools have statutory requirements for inspections, and are routinely inspected at varied administrative levels including the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Military Services, and the DoD Education Activity (DoDEA). The DoD child development programs are certified through an internal certification process with unannounced inspections. The special education programs of the DoD schools are inspected annually by DoDEA area and district special education personnel. In addition, the Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs staff inspects two DoD school districts per year to confirm findings of lower level inspections. There are no plans to include non-DoD entities in these processes.

While non-DoD entities are not involved in inspections, both the child development and school programs are accredited through external accreditation processes with nationally recognized professional accrediting bodies. The standards for accreditation address inclusion and appropriate programs and practices for all children, including those with special needs.

Preparation of this study/report cost the Department of Defense a total of approximately $4,977 for the 2011 Fiscal Year.
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The accreditation process includes standards that require compliance with applicable federal laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability. The external accreditation on-site visit and the internal certification on-site inspection processes ensure compliance with applicable federal laws regarding persons with disabilities.

All DoD child development programs were certified and all DoDEA schools were accredited in calendar years 2008 through 2010. As of March 1, 2011, there are no current cases being litigated in Federal court or before the Defense Office of Hearings and Appeals involving denial of DoD child care or special education services for military dependents with special needs.

Services and Resources for Military Families

DoD child care is offered to assist DoD military and civilian personnel in balancing the competing demands of family life and the accomplishment of the DoD mission, and to improve the economic viability of the family unit. DoD Child Development Programs are provided to military members and DoD civilian personnel on military installations and in other DoD Component facilities. Child care is not considered an entitlement.

Students with disabilities are provided a free, appropriate education in DoD schools where placement and service decisions are based on the individual needs of the student, in the least restrictive environment, and in accordance with the system's guiding principles. DoDEA is committed to promoting inclusive education, which is defined as the participation of all students, including those with disabilities.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs, in coordination with the Military Services, continues to expand the resources available to military families with dependent children with special needs. The following list highlights the variety of programs and services specifically serving military families with children who have special needs.

Exceptional Family Member Program/Assignment Coordination: Military members with dependent children with special needs are enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP). This enrollment allows for enhanced assignment coordination for the military member to assure that special medical and educational services are available at the assigned location. DoDEA participates in the EFMP assignment coordination process utilizing the *DoD Education Activity Directory of Special Services in Overseas Locations for Children with Disabilities,* which identifies specific levels of special education services and supports available at DoD schools outside of continental United States locations. The Directory assists assignment coordinators to identify those military communities with pre-established programs for children with special education needs.

Exceptional Family Member Program/Community Support: All military installations have community support services for military families with special needs. EFMP community support personnel serve as an 'in-person' resource to assist the military members and their families. Installation EFMP personnel provide continuing program outreach and direct assistance to families to obtain services and supports on the installation and within the larger community.

School Liaison Officer: The School Liaison Officer works in conjunction with the Child and Youth Services Division and the local school community to address educational issues involving military children. Through partnering with the local and military community, the School Liaison Officer uses a variety of resources to provide assistance with issues concerning student transition and educational needs. The School Liaison Officer acts as a communication link between the installation and the surrounding school districts. The School Liaison Officer represents military families in a variety of areas within the school system to include home school and special needs children.

Kids Included Together: Kids Included Together (KIT), a non-profit program funded by the Department of Defense, provides training, technical assistance and resources to DoD child development centers and DoD-funded child care programs to support inclusion and accommodations of children with special needs. This program supports parents, child care staff, EFMP and medical personnel, and other community support providers. KIT is available and utilized by all of the Military Services.

MilitaryHOMEFRONT Website: http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil The Department's website provides official quality of life program information, as well as policy and guidance for service members, their families, leaders, and service providers. The website has a comprehensive section specifically for military families with special needs. Families can search for Special Needs Child Care and be directed to a web page with descriptions of potential child care options that are available both on and off military installations. Additional special needs sections of the website include:

- The *DoD Special Needs Parent Toolkit*: Comprehensive information geared towards helping military families with special needs children, from birth through adulthood, navigate the maze of medical and special education services, community support, benefits and entitlements. The accompanying *Facilitator's Guide for the DoD Special Needs Parent Toolkit* gives service providers the tools to teach each of the modules contained in the *Parent Toolkit*. It also contains a brief for military leadership that describes the challenges military families with special needs face and provides details about military programs, such as EFMP, and other resources.

- *Plan My Move* and *MilitaryINSTALLATIONS*: Automated relocation information to military personnel and their families. Information can be found on over 360 large and small installations worldwide. Specialized content helps families with special needs find relevant information about their new installation and coordinate their move.

- *HOMEFRONTConnections*: Social networking community for parents of children with special needs. The site provides families with the opportunity to connect and communicate directly with other families via discussion forums, private messaging, or email.

Military OneSource Website: www.militaryonesource.com Service members and their family members can access extensive on-line information specific to special needs. The website

contains information related to special needs services and programs, to include child care, available in any particular community. Families can search the website for child care and special needs and find extensive information, program descriptions, and links for members of all services. Additionally, there is the opportunity to contact and talk directly to a Special Needs Specialty Consultant to answer specific questions and concerns. Families can obtain up to 12 one hour consultations per year.

DoDEA Special Education Webpage: http://dodea.edu/curriculum/specialEduc.cfm
Comprehensive resources for educational services are available to military families with students with disabilities. Readily accessible materials include the Autism and Assistive Technology WebPages, the *Parent Handbook on Special Education*, the *Parent Rights and Responsibilities* pamphlet available in nine languages, as well as Relocation Information.

Medications

Both DoD Child Development Programs and DoD schools have clearly established policies regarding the administration of medication. The administration and management of medication is coordinated with designated medical professionals at each Installation.

Challenges

The Department faces some challenges in providing child care and special education for those children with significant needs or low incidence disabilities. DoD child development programs provide child care in group settings. DoD child care is not funded to provide one to one child care or treatments and interventions that require care by a licensed nurse or other medical provider. The recruitment of school personnel to provide specially designed instruction for children with low incidence disabilities is an ongoing challenge. Similar to many state school systems, personnel shortages are not uncommon in special education programs serving children with low incidence disabilities.

While all families face transitions as they establish residence in a new community, these families may have distinct issues as they try to establish new child care arrangements or educational programs and supports. Parental preferences, or expectations for a particular type of child care or special education services, can pose a challenge for those families with children with significant needs. Enrolling in the EFMP and working with EFMP community support personnel may lessen many of the challenges related to raising a child with special needs as well as those associated with frequent military relocations. DoD resolves these challenges to ensure that qualifying children receive a Free Appropriate Public Education as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), as amended, and DoD Instruction 1342.12, which implements the IDEA within DoD.

SUMMARY

The Office of the Secretary of Defense recognizes the importance of assuring that the complex issues of military dependent children with special needs are being met by DoD child care and educational programs in accordance with applicable federal laws. The scope and diversity of

new and existing programs and services demonstrates that the Department of Defense is able to meet the needs of these military families.