



PTA® Military Alliance for Parents and Partners:

Helping Students Succeed and Achieve as They Learn

The **National PTA® Military Alliance for Parents and Partners** is a group of organizations that work together to provide resources to and advocate for military-connected families.

The alliance identifies and addresses the unique social and educational challenges that these families face due to issues of deployment and mobility, among others.

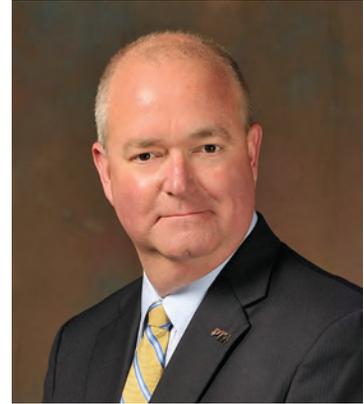
Specifically, members of the alliance work both jointly and independently with National PTA to develop a collaborative strategy to create awareness around serving military families and provide and develop resources for military families. The founding participants include:

- MCEC** - Military Children Education Coalition
- NMFA** - National Military Family Association
- MISA** - Military Impacted Schools Association
- DoDEA** - U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity

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Hail Our PTA Military Families



Ten years ago, when a military deployment took place, the communities most affected were those near military bases. Today, with the increased use of reservists and those in the National Guard for overseas duty, a military deployment affects us all in some way. Because military families are often so far from home and away from many of the services we take for granted, National PTA has raised its level of commitment of support to these members of our PTA family.

Recently, I and other PTA leaders had the opportunity to join the leadership of the Department of Defense School System at a number of school events in the Pacific and Europe. We were honored to attend a new middle-school dedication at the Oson Air Force Base near Seoul, South Korea. It was amazing to see this school's new principal—a transplant from North Carolina—start from the ground up. Her students and staff have a great opportunity for success. In addition, this military community has an ever-growing elementary school and high school. The focus of military leadership is to make this area a location of choice for servicemen and women; with that comes a series of challenges our PTA families in the States do not face, including providing a high-quality education when the pool of teachers may be smaller and access to materials may be delayed.

During a visit to the Seoul American Elementary School, we were able to share the concerns of a brand-new, first-ever PTA unit president—a military parent who stepped up to be a leader and now looks to PTA for support. Our PTAs overseas face one challenge most units may not: personnel turnover. Our PTAs in these areas may have a great board this year and nobody next year because they have been deployed to other locations.

My point is simple: we can never forget that even as our military personnel make sacrifices each day for our country, so do their families. Regardless of whether they are located overseas or at home, our military families provide a level of support that many of us may never understand, and we want to return the favor.

PTA will continue to support our Department of Defense schools with what they need when they need it. To do that, we need your support as well. For more information visit PTA.org/military.

Have a great day!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles J. Saylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles J. "Chuck" Saylor
National PTA President 2009–2011



When the New School Beckons

Military Families in Transition

Every year, many students move with their families to new communities. Some moves are to allow one or both parents to pursue a new job opportunity, or unfortunately, a move may be the result of a job layoff or divorce. Children in military families move more frequently than their civilian peers. In addition to their mobility, these children may be faced with multiple deployments of one or more parents. More National Guard and Reserve members are being called up, and many military parents are receiving back-to-back combat assignments. It is crucial for educators and school families to understand and talk about these dynamics so they can act as partners in supporting children in military families.

The first step in supporting mobile military students is understanding the normal reactions to a move. While the process can go smoothly, there can be especially trying times as well, depending on the age and developmental stage of the child. Teens tend to have an especially tough time leaving their peers; on the other hand, late elementary school students may love the adventure. Knowing the basic stages of a move can help educators and school families understand the emotions often felt by transferring students and their families—and can help them find ways to ease the transitions.

Stages of transition

Stage 1: Anticipation and notification of a move

Most military families know approximately when a new assignment is due to occur. The longer the forewarning, the easier it is for families to plan ahead. For high school students, advance warning may enable them to take classes that may not be offered at their new school. In many cases, their current school will allow them to take certain courses they might not ordinarily have been allowed to take.

Once the orders actually come, parents should be sure to alert their children's schools at least several weeks before the move is scheduled to occur to allow the schools enough time to compile a thorough cumulative folder for each student and provide exit counseling. Research on military families shows that the exit time is even more critical than the first days at the new school. The quality of the landing is largely determined by the quality of the launch.

A transferring student's parents and current school counselor should communicate with the new school to share information about the student's special needs and achievements and to ensure proper placement. If the family has been active in PTA, the PTA president at the family's current school should offer to alert the PTA president at the new school of the family's impending arrival. The PTA at the new school will be able to ease the family's transition by helping the family get acquainted with the school, the community, and other PTA families.

Stage 2: The actual move

The actual move is a period of high tension in most families. Parents who make an honest attempt to listen to their children's concerns can help their children cope by recognizing their sacrifices and courage. Parents also can help their children understand the duty and commitment of their military parent(s) that makes the move necessary.

Stage 3: Making it home

Moving requires families to reestablish order out of chaos. Boxes must be unpacked, and bedrooms and living areas must be set up. Parents can help their children attain a feeling of control by letting them make decisions about which room is theirs and where their pictures, stuffed animals, books, and other personal items will be placed.

Stage 4: Getting to know the new school

The real adventure for transferring students begins when they enter their new school. New students get a school handbook, school map, and course schedule to add to any information they gathered before the move. The PTA and the school counselor should ensure that the school provides an ambassador or student guide to help introduce new students to the school—especially the lunchroom, which can be the most intimidating place in the school for new arrivals.

The parents of new students should be contacted by the PTA with a personal invitation to attend the next PTA meeting.

Stage 5: Self-discovery

Students will spend the next two to four months forming stronger connections to their new environment. They will be selective about their acquaintances and activities and may assess themselves and others in an uncomfortably intense way. Younger children usually skate through most of this stage. Students will need to exercise care as they navigate the choices available. The “fringe groups” are always looking for new members, but the other groups tend to take a while to open up. If counselors, teachers, and families are supportive during this time, mobile students will emerge with a strong sense of themselves and a purposeful commitment to their new school and community. Students

may connect to a school community more quickly if they join a school group, such as band or a sports team.

Stage 6: Turning point—recognition and acceptance

Something happens about six months after a move that lets students know they have arrived. They know how to solve a complex problem; they become the “go-to person” because others recognize their special skills or talents, such as their problem-solving ability. And, most of all, people know them and like them.

A healthy new start

While military families are never the same after a relocation or deployment cycle, they can achieve successful transitions. And PTA can help. PTA has a network of local units that serve military children, parents, and educators in various parts of the world. Involvement in PTA enables parents to function in a familiar group setting and connect with their new community through their children’s educational activities.

Military families bring a richness of experience to their schools, their communities, and their PTA units. We owe it to them and to ourselves to help them make their frequent but necessary transitions as painless and successful as possible.

PTA Keeps Military Families Involved

For military families, it is our children who suffer the most from frequent moves and forced acclimation into new schools. Getting connected to our children’s schools as early as possible is even more urgent.

Two years ago, I deployed to Iraq and missed almost all of my oldest child’s kindergarten year. When I returned, I had the proud and amazing honor of having this 5-year old girl read to me from a book completely on her own. My wife attributed most of this accomplishment to our daughter’s kindergarten teacher at Greenbrier Primary School in Chesapeake, Virginia. While there is no doubt that Mrs. Snyder was an amazing teacher, it was equally important that my wife emphasized the importance of school work.

Although I live with my family, I have been both literally and figuratively absent from our children’s lives. I found myself thinking about ways to be less absent, particularly

with regard to education. The first thought that came to mind is obvious: taking an active interest in homework and inquiring about what my daughter, my only school-age child, learned that day. The moment I walk in the door after work, I make it a point to ask my daughter if her homework is completed. I also ask to review it, despite the fact that my wife has already done so. I have found that simple words of interest and encouragement go a long way.

I also believe it is my responsibility to find ways to support the school. Joining PTA and attending various events with our children to support their new school can go a long way in fighting the hurdles associated with frequent uprooting.

The PTA at our school has a core group of volunteers that seems to take on all of the events. However, there are many one-time events that working parents can assist with.

My wife “volun-told” me to chair an event this year to assist the school. At first, I was very reluctant and frankly annoyed by the idea of taking on another project. I attended the PTA planning meeting over the summer and quickly realized that there is practically no father involvement in planning any event—or even simply attending PTA meetings.

It also is important to bolster the fine work of teachers and administrators, especially in light of the relatively modest incomes they receive. Finding creative ways to encourage, praise, and support our teachers should be on our minds as parents, whether it is through recognition ceremonies at the end of the year, simple notes of gratitude, or recognizing their work in a public forum.

Originally appeared in *Our Children* February/March 2010, written by Lt. Matt Hamel

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