

INSIGHTS INFORMING THE CONCERNS OF POST-9/11 VETERANS AND FAMILIES

Case Study:

Military Child Education Coalition



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF) HAS BEEN CONTRACTED TO SUPPORT THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE'S RESEARCH TO EFFECTIVELY SERVE AND EMPOWER OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.



GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE



MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION COALITION CASE STUDY

1. Organizational Overview

History

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is headquartered in Harker Heights, Texas, but its reach is both national and international. MCEC began 16 years ago as conversations among education and military-connected community professionals about how to better serve children impacted by a family member's service. In 1997, MCEC invited approximately 200 people from all over the nation, including from the Department of Defense (DOD) and school districts serving large numbers of military families, to discuss the needs of military children. One of the organization's earliest activities was participation in the Army's Secondary Education Transition Study on the impact of high school students' mobility.

The non-profit organization was first chartered in Texas and located within the Killeen Independent School District in Fort Hood, Texas. Although their earliest work began with Army families, the organization has grown to include children connected to members of all branches of the service, the National Guard, Reserves and veterans. It has grown from a staff of three people to over 130 full- and part-time employees in 2014.

Today, the focus of MCEC is on helping students who are impacted by school transitions, separation deployments, homecomings and reintegration of family members, or injury and loss, to make sure that school and community members are aware of the strengths and needs of their military-connected students, and how to best serve them. MCEC is unique among military service organizations in that it exists solely to serve the military child, to make sure that they thrive, and to assert that no child should suffer the consequences of a parent's decision to serve the United States. MCEC assists these children, often invisible in the public spotlight on military and veteran's affairs, through education, advocacy and emotional and social support. MCEC services are inclusive; all children (both military and civilian) are invited to participate in school-sponsored MCEC programs in order to connect children with high mobility to their peers through authentic service, education, and community-building activities.

Military children are connected with only one degree of separation to a military involved or veteran adult through birth, adoption, foster care, or in loco parentis status. This includes members of the Active Duty forces, the National Guard, the Reserves, and veterans. MCEC has also served a subset of children who are the siblings of military members. Almost all of the children served by MCEC are related to post-9/11 service members or veterans, but there have been some instances of older veterans caring for grandchildren or great-grandchildren who have also received services.

As of 2014, there are an estimated four million military-connected children from birth through the age of 23 who could potentially be impacted by MCEC's efforts in advocacy and direct services. There are approximately two million military-connected students, with 1,381,584 students between the ages of four and 18 years old. About 80% of all students, or 1,105,267, attend P-12 public schools (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2011). Every school district in the United States has military-connected children, and it is estimated that between ten to twelve percent of these students receive special education services. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center, there are 144,191 military students aged 19 to 23, and as of 2009, approximately 70% of them were enrolled in post-secondary education (Defense Manpower Data Center, DRS#5800, May 2011 table 1. Retrieved from www.militarychild.org/student-identifier).

Mission Statement

The Military Child Education Coalition's mission is to ensure inclusive, quality educational experiences for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition.

The goals of the MCEC are to:

- Provide responsive and relevant support systems, resources, and products
- Expand the MCEC's outreach through engagement, advocacy, and partnerships
- Execute a strategic communications plan
- Build a strong, sustainable, and financially sound organization

Organizational Structure

MCEC has four core constituencies that they seek to influence on behalf of the military child: educational institutions, major foundations, collective impact non-profits, and select government agencies. Acting as both a coalition and a service provider, MCEC creates impact by providing programming, building community among those who serve military children, and by leveraging advocates at the local and national levels. Dr. Keller, President and Chief Executive Officer, described the work of MCEC as follows:

This is where we hope to get...that the military connected kids and veteran's children are known on a national level, that the students thrive and succeed, that the parents are proactive and engaged, that the education professionals truly understand the needs of military and veteran connected children, and that the state and local communities are actually engaged in helping and supporting those children.

Executive and management staff members include:

- Mary M. Keller, Ed.D. President and Chief Executive Officer
- COL (Ret) John "Jack" Ballantyne, Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
- Stacey Smith, Ph.D., Director, Research and Evaluation
- Shellie Campos, PHR, Director, Human Resources
- Michael Gravens, Director, Strategic Communications and Outreach
- Cindy Simerly, Director of Marketing
- Sandy Franklin, Ed.D. Director, Curriculum Development and Professional Standards

- Stacey Parry, Director, Training and Services
- Juan Garcia, CPA, Comptroller
- Annette Farmer, J.D., Staff Counsel and Director, Contracting

These in-house staff members lead the organization, perform critical managerial duties, and meet regularly to review progress in key areas such as advocacy, outreach, marketing, membership, program development, contract fulfillment, constituent feedback and evaluation, and funding development. Their work is supported by a Board of Directors, and periodically by the combined research and advice, solicited as needed, of a distributed 21-member Science Advisory Board. Both the Board of Directors and the Science Advisory Board members serve MCEC pro bono.

The executive team members were interviewed for this report during a two-day visit to the MCEC headquarters. It was reported that ongoing planning and reporting activities usually project about one year into the future. As in many small non-profit organizations, the executive team members are rich in talent and drive to do the work, but are only one to three persons deep in any particular functional area. This may be one of the reasons that developing and working with a long-term strategic plan is seen as not possible at this point in their development.

To provide equality of educational opportunities and college and career readiness for military children, MCEC designs, evaluates, and employs a distributed workforce of trainers to implement a wide portfolio of programming for teachers, school leaders, counselors, parents, and students in school districts, and other education-related providers such as charter schools and charter school networks, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, home school networks, and after school service providers. There are materials available for students, teachers, counselors, classrooms, and homes. Anyone may sign up on the MCEC website as a member and receive information about services. Contracts with government entities such as a branch of the service, the Veterans Administration (VA), or the DoD, a school district, or corporate philanthropy pay for most of MCEC's services. A small number of school districts and individuals purchase materials and trainings directly.

The MCEC program and operations staff consists of full, part-time, and contract workers. Part-time, contract workers receive stipends to perform on-site trainings and professional development activities in school districts or on military bases as needed, where funding has allowed MCEC to provide services. Military-connected parents with experience in meeting the challenges of multiple transitions may apply for employment and if hired, they will receive the requisite training when additional trainers for the MCEC *Parent to Parent* programs as new staff are needed. There are 13 Army bases and the schools surrounding them with these programs, mostly funded by the Army, through the Department of the Army Family, Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command. The Army chooses the school districts where they fund services based on requests from Army personnel on bases. There are also arrangements that can be made with school districts to hold one-day trainings at sites (usually schools) that do not host Army or other contracted programs.

The majority of the non-contract employees work at the organization's headquarters (35 employees), with another 13 staff members who are embedded in school districts with high concentrations of military connected children and that are implementing MCEC programs, serving in a position called the Military Student Transition Consultant (MSTC), also known as "local nationalizers". According to Dr. Keller, "we

really have a guiding principle that goodness happens at the local level and that local level is as close to the child as possible.” The school districts participating with MCEC are chosen by the government entity that is funding the implementation.

It is estimated that close to 100 percent of those employed by MCEC have connections to military service through their own work, through a family member, or have served military children prior to working with MCEC. According to Dr. Keller, "This creates the DNA of the organization, a direct or personal connection with having been there, and done that. I think to a large degree it's passionate, they're driven, they really believe in what we're doing, and they want to make a difference."

The 22 member Board of Directors led by the Chairman of the Board, General (Ret) Benjamin Griffin, are not employed by MCEC and work voluntarily to provide oversight and advise as needed. Board members work together in smaller sub-committees – Executive, Finance, and Fund Development – to lend their expertise, guide the executive staff in planning and execution of programs, review evaluation data, and assist with advocacy and fund development.

MCEC also receives assistance with advocacy efforts and guidance on critical issues impacting military children from two advising bodies: their 37 member National Advisory Committee, and their 21 member Science Advisory Committee, comprised of professionals in the areas of research, education, mathematics, public policy, pediatrics, psychology, psychiatry, and with pertinent specialties such as transition, grief and loss. Members of both committees provide their services voluntarily to MCEC. The members of the Science Advisory Committee have divided themselves into four smaller sub-committees to better serve the organization efficiently when advising on scientific topics important to MCEC's mission.

Programming

Programs are delivered online, on-site, and through the distribution and use of the literature and materials written and developed by MCEC. MCEC programming is aimed at the following stakeholders:

- Students
- Parents, family members and caregivers
- School personnel such as teachers, counselors, and school administrators (including those working in charter and home-schooling communities)
- Community members and leaders (including organizations that provide support for students outside of regular school hours and programming)
- Installation representatives

Anyone interested in MCEC's online resources may register, free of charge, to participate as a member of MCEC and in their online communities, refer to materials, find out about scheduled activities around the country, post their own profile, and communicate with others to share experiences and find local resources. In school districts receiving support through government contracts (with the government entity choosing the school districts), these funds support the placement of a Military Student Transition Consultant (MSTC), an MCEC employee located in school districts, to serve as both an advocate for military children and their families and an expert in how to navigate around obstacles commonly faced as a circumstance of military service. The MSTC contributes to the following activities:

- Problem-solving and coordination of efforts related to military connections such as reintegration, moving, or deployments, multiple family members deployed, obtaining and maintaining student records, or assisting parents of students with special needs
- Facilitating student groups on campus serving as a liaison between the school, military family, and supportive services offered at a nearby military installation, base, or community organization
- Providing professional development to community leaders, school personnel, and students and families
- Creating and maintaining effective lines of communications among all members of the community serving children, raising awareness of the needs of the child, and building supportive partnerships

The MSTC is someone with pertinent experience in education, social work, or counseling, and most have a personal connection to the military as well as a professional understanding of military matters. They are selected by MCEC for employment based on their ability to generate positive interactions with others within a complex system such as school districts serving military children, partner organizations, and military bases. The MSTC must have excellent communication and problem-solving skills, as well as a passion for serving military children.

Student Programs

At the student level, MCEC programs are designed to help students help each other with critical developmental issues such as fitting in, building confidence and self-awareness, and personal empowerment through service. The programs are not intended to separate out military children or to create a new class of students, but to connect all children through service, leadership, and an awareness of the strengths found in diversity, including differing points of view and life experiences. By facilitating shared experiences in which all students participate on equal footing, advocacy for meeting the needs of the military child and communicating his or her strengths are natural by-products of the programs. Student programs are named to convey these ideals – *Student 2 Student (S2S)*, *Junior Student 2 Student (JS2S)*, and *Tell Me a Story (TMAS)* for high school, middle school, and elementary school students, respectively. MCEC updated elementary programs in 2014 to create an *Elementary Student 2 Student (ES2S)* program as well. All of the programs from pre-school and up are designed to share strengths, help students stick together to overcome obstacles, know when and how to ask for help, and recognize one’s own ability to tackle greater challenges. MCEC also produces research-based materials designed for students to help them navigate middle and high school successfully. These publications are *Life after High School – Being College Ready*, and *Roadmap to Success*, both available online.

MCEC staff trains students to be leaders – a mix of civilian and military children – directly as part of the start-up of S2S and JS2S, while they also work with the school district and the individual school to choose two adult sponsors for each S2S group. MCEC personnel train and coach the adult sponsors in how to start their own program in a way that fits their school. They receive ongoing support through the many MCEC networks; on-site professional development trainings; and materials such as the research-based modules in academics (how to understand school requirements and procedures), relationships (how to find and give acceptance and build and sustain friendships), and finding the way at school (orientation to the community, campus, school culture, rules and policies). The modules teach students how to plan effectively; use technology and other resources; and set goals and help each other meet them. Dr. Keller describes the intent behind inclusive programming:

“You’re creating a community inside of the school that supports not just military and veteran connected children, but any new student who comes into a school, because if you create a climate of 100 percent acceptance, that permeates the school culture, and what that does is that’s good for all children, but it also makes kids more accepting and open to kids who may have had a different experience in their life.”

To support excellence, MCEC sponsors distinct competitions for high school students and their adult sponsors. MCEC publicly recognizes and rewards the adult sponsors through competitions that lead to the privilege of attending The National Training Seminar. High school students participate in their own competitions, with winners earning slots in the Frances Hesselbein Student Leadership Programs held at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York and the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. These special leadership conferences allow both adults and students to receive more in-depth, specialized training and provide the opportunity to network with others from all over the country. The National Training Seminar, usually held in July each year in Washington, DC, is a premier event drawing over 700 participants to interact with experts in the fields related to the support of the military child and new research and findings on child development, health and education. The Frances Hesselbein Leadership Program is a week-long, intensive experience offered twice a year at each Academy to military and civilian student leaders involved in their high school’s S2S program. It teaches important skills that support leadership abilities such as listening, team building, how to inspire others, civic duty and pride, and tolerance. The middle and elementary school students (JS2S and ES2S) participate in a wide range of smaller, more site-specific competitions and prize opportunities since the range of grades and ages is wide and travel may not be appropriate for all of them.

In an effort to connect students across geographic boundaries and involve them in providing and receiving support through active participation, MCEC hosts *The Call for the Arts*. Students are encouraged to express themselves through poetry, drawings, and creative writing and to submit their works for publication. Student work is published periodically in *On the Move*, the official magazine of the MCEC. Since its inception, thousands of military children have shared their work with MCEC and by doing so have contributed to a better understanding of the military child. The magazine is a conduit for children to share their pride in their military family members, celebrate their strengths, and acknowledge the challenges they face. The magazine also connects adults involved with MCEC and raises awareness of important issues, offerings and events. The children’s work is a highlight of each issue and its heartfelt authenticity is a powerful communicator of their strengths and needs.

Finally, Dr. Keller explained that advocacy is embedded in all of their programs including S2S and JS2S because of the very nature of the work in which students and their adult sponsors engage. Students learn to advocate for themselves as they discover and hone their strengths and identify their needs. Adult sponsors learn first-hand about the gifts that military children bring to a community, and the needs that they deserve to have met. On the other end of the spectrum, MCEC has a National Convening Policy and related activities such as conferences, forums, speaking engagements, etc., to support awareness, outreach, and advocacy for public policy, funding, and representation of the needs of the military child.

Programs for parents, families, and other care-givers

MCEC provides the programming, materials, and knowledge base to help parents dealing with specific needs related to transition, military service, and their children. For example, how does one advocate for

one's child who is newly arrived after the start of the school year and denied correct placement in classes because diagnostic testing has already been completed? How do parents ask the right questions or seek help during parent-teacher conferences when no one knows their child yet, or understand the transitions they have been through? How do parents navigate differences in regulations regarding age requirements, or services for special needs that exist between states? Something as simple as opening up deadlines to allow students to participate in sports or band, for example, can make a big difference to a child in transition. "Ask Aunt Peggie" is an interactive feature of the MCEC website that allows parents and educators to get answers to their questions from Peggie Watson, an experienced MCEC researcher, and former military-connected child.

Literacy workshops are particularly popular and are part of an MCEC Early Literacy Initiative that provides families with tools to help instill a love of reading in their young children. MCEC believes that early literacy skills are foundational to a healthy and successful life, and that they build early and continued academic success, connections with others, self-confidence, academic persistence and metacognition. The MCEC early learning program, *Tell Me a Story*, helps young children and parents use literature and creative storytelling to connect with difficult or complex emotional and social topics common to children impacted by separation, transition, or loss. *Growing, Learning, Understanding* kits are stand-alone literacy units that educators and care-givers can use flexibly to build reading comprehension and other literacy skills depending on a child's individual needs.

MCEC provides parents with high quality, research-based, timely and relevant programming through a series of presentations, workshops and online and/or print materials under the umbrella of the *Parent to Parent* program. MCEC's mostly part-time employees are trained to provide the *Parent to Parent* workshops on school campuses, installations and bases, or with the support of other community service providers, depending on the level of identified need, the size of the local military-connected population, and the source of the funding for the programming, and the logistics involved in providing services. These individuals often possess a special interest in this work stemming from their own military backgrounds or family connections and with training in fields that support this work (nursing, social work, education, and law). Sometimes transportation for parents may be easier if events are held on base compared to somewhere in the school district. In some cases, it is easier to reach a wider and more diverse group of parents by hosting events at the local school. The trainers are contract employees who are provided a stipend to work on-site as needed on the venues listed above in various locations around the country. *Parent to Parent* programs were first offered in 2006 and since then, as of 2014, approximately 170,000 parents have received training from MCEC. The Army provides most of the funding for the larger programs offered at 13 bases in the US and in Wiesbaden, Germany. Because military families live in every zip code in the U.S., but often in small enough numbers that there is not a full parent program available, the Army has also funded one-day trainings called *Parent to Parent Surge*, which are advertised on the MCEC website that parents, both military and in some cases (depending on available resources), non-military, can request.

Programs for school personnel and other professionals

MCEC trainers or presenters provide research-based seminars to assist professionals such as teachers, counselors, school leaders, child care providers, social workers, medical professionals, and community leaders to better understand military children through either on-line or on-site professional development. In cases where there are embedded MCEC staff members they work directly and regularly to facilitate the

ongoing professional development of educators, other professionals, and parents.

MCEC builds relationships with higher education partners to provide advocacy, resources and support for teachers, school counselors, and administrators through courses that award continuing education credits or graduate credit upon completion. Programs are described on the MCEC website and the course catalog can be viewed or downloaded. MCEC has the following accreditations to provide professional development:

- MCEC has been accredited as an Authorized Provider by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET).
- MCEC is an NBCC Approved Continuing Education Provider (ACEP) allowing them to offer NBCC approved clock hours for events that meet NBCC requirements.
- MCEC is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists.

The literacy program materials described above are rich resources for teachers of young children that can be used to forge learning partnerships between school and home. Connecting the learning activities, in which children participate during the school day, to learning and sharing opportunities at home is an effective means of connecting transitioning military families to their new school, as well as supportive for any child's literacy and learning growth. The idea of directly linking school and home learning activities goes beyond traditional homework assignments. With the nimbleness that technology can provide, this is becoming an area of interest in education research.

July 30 – 31st, 2015 marks the 17th annual National Training Seminar offered by MCEC to educators and professionals who work with military connected children. The live seminar takes place in Washington, D.C., and provides participants with resources, helping them identify initiatives, develop connections with experts and other professionals, participate in public policy discussions, and to self-assess their own practices all relative to the service of the military child. Because of MCEC's accreditations and agreements with institutions of higher education such as the University of San Diego, college credits may be awarded to participants who meet course requirements, and may be transferred to a degree program per the matriculating institution's degree requirements.

MCEC strives to inform educators who are preparing to work in the classroom along with those who are in preparation programs, and have set a goal of impacting 100,000 educators by December, 2014. In addition to programs for currently practicing educators, MCEC provides *Operation Educate the Educators*, designed in cooperation with several universities' schools of education to ensure that pre-service teacher education programs include experiences and course work that raise awareness of the needs of military children. As of 2014, 113 colleges and universities have agreed to incorporate a set of guiding principles into their curriculum as recommended by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and MCEC that describe specific goals for the education of military children, along with success for all children. MCEC has taken a leading role in conjunction with these institutions that prepare future educators to teach them how to meet the social, emotional, and learning needs of military children in a context of inclusiveness. More information on these programs is available at: <http://www.militarychild.org/educating-the-educators#sthash.t4IMjnKH.dpuf>.

Veteran Populations Served

MCEC interacts with military connected adults, including veterans, for the sole purpose of benefitting military children. They provide direct services to any active military members, veterans, their family members, and their community members to better inform and support them in efforts that advocate for, bring awareness to, or support the needs of military children. Because services are most often contracted with the DoD, the VA, government agencies, or a branch of the military services, paid programming is directed to communities of the contractors' preference, usually a school district that serves large numbers of military children and their families. The total estimated population of four million military children living in the United States and abroad is extremely large. MCEC targets most of its services at children in pre-school through young adulthood, and 75% of the students they serve are below age 12. The organization does not serve other demographics but their programs are inclusive and encourage both military and non-military children to participate in the hope that student-to-student interaction will build understanding, acceptance of diversity, self-confidence and resiliency for all children involved.

Educational challenges for military children include:

- Separations from family members
- Interruptions or changes to who is providing care
- High mobility rates
- Academic and social challenges due to frequent school changes, deployment of a loved one, return of a love one, injury or death of a loved one
- Difficulty in qualifying for school programs, special services, or extra-curricular sports and activities because of arrival times to a new school, differences in local requirements for similar programs such as Advanced Placement courses or Special Education services, or deadlines for sports try-outs.
- Adjusting to significantly different instructional environments among school systems (flipped classrooms vs. traditional lecture style, cooperative learning, leveling for reading instruction, homework policies, to name just a few variations)
- High levels of stress and a greater risk of depression due to transitions, leaving friends and joining new social groups, worry about family members in dangerous deployments, or being at a distance from a parent for long periods of time during difficult stages of development, and of course, injury or death of a loved one.

These challenges for students mean that educators also face challenges such as:

- A lack of awareness of the experiences of the military child and their strengths and needs
- Identifying who is a military child who is experiencing stress or other transition problems
- Accessing resources and training to help them meet the social and emotional needs of their students
- Knowing how to build on the strengths of military children
- What procedures and rules can be waived for a transitioning military child

Funding Sources and Strategies

MCEC has four main contracts, i.e., shared services agreements, with the Army, Navy, Air Force and the

United States Army Reserve. They also have contracts with the DoD, the largest purchaser of MCEC services, and with the VA. Contracts may pay to support the materials available for simple sign-in memberships that are free of charge for anyone interested in accessing materials and joining the online communities offered by MCEC or for the on-site trainings and an MSTC. Historically the DoD has been MCEC's biggest customer, accounting for approximately 70 percent of income at its peak; however, income from the DoD has been steadily dropping. As military activities around the world ebb and flow and federal budgets for military spending react to this and other budgetary pressures, working mostly with the DoD may not continue to be a viable option for MCEC. Of note, contracts with the DoD are sole-source, thereby eliminating competition from other bidders. Most of the contracts with the military are for an indefinite quantity of services and materials, and paid for with set-aside, but non-budgeted funds. Over the course of the contract, the military branch will communicate what they need MCEC to provide. Therefore, it is imperative that MCEC keep open communications including frequent and substantiated feedback from users with their contractors to assure that all set-aside funding is used.

Army contracts are estimated to number approximately 600 classes, Navy 700, Air Force 500, and Army Reserve 700. Cumulatively, these contracts amounted to about \$2.5 million in mission "reach" or revenue dollars. As previously stated, federal dollars continue to decrease, and this trend is projected to continue into FY2015. MCEC has articulated the need to increase revenue from either donations or grants. To date, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the GE Foundation provide the largest grants for MCEC, and USAA was the organization's first and longest corporate donor. Most non-federal grants are directed (and therefore restrict funding use), such as those from the Bob Woodruff Foundation, the GE Foundation, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Going forward, MCEC has solicited assistance from both Deloitte and The Richards Group to support the development of a set of fundraising strategies, branding and marketing support, and strategic reviews of programming to ensure continued alignment with the needs of children, families, and professionals as the military service environment evolves.

2. Measurement and Data Supporting Effectiveness & Impact

Types of Data Routinely Collected

MCEC collects marketing, effectiveness, and fulfillment data. First, marketing data is collected using metrics and analytics from their social platforms and their e-newsletter. This provides information about the number of direct "touches", or people reached first-hand by MCEC who responded with a Tweet, a post, or a 'Like'. "Reaches" refer to the number of people that MCEC reached indirectly; people who direct touches are likely to share information with. For example, a school counselor posts that she is sharing information from MCEC with her school district's cohort of guidance counselors at their next professional meeting. Early estimates for the first half of 2014 indicated about 1.4 million touches and reaches had taken place.

Next, there are three lines of operations at MCEC involving three initiative groups for whom MCEC collects effectiveness data. These are the students who receive services, the parents who receive services, and the professionals, such as educators, counselors, administrators, and health professionals who they reach. MCEC measures both the output to these constituents (for example, the number of educators in a training class), and the outcomes of those outputs. Outcomes include demonstrable impacts or differences for the students, parents or professionals receiving services. MCEC is using surveys of participants after trainings,

convening events, or other engagements, to track outcomes. Vice President and COO Jack Ballantyne explained:

“For all of our service delivery, we do a survey afterwards of those that we trained or those that participated, so we’re always trying to get feedback, and we use that feedback to inform quick turns on fixing ROI (return on investment) or how we’re going to do a convening or an engagement, whether we had the right desired outcomes picked or not.

So we use that for quick turn, but we also use that to find out if there was any value at all to that stakeholder group and whether we ought to continue the program. Anything that you decide to continue, you’ve got to fund, so that drives allocation of funds and...what programs are going to receive priority for funding and sustainment, so we do use a lot of our surveys to inform those kinds of decisions.”

MCEC produces training reports twice per year for each session delivered in order to monitor and analyze survey data related to any significant learning reported by participants, the reach and influence of the sessions, numbers of participants disaggregated by profession and/or role, and impact on professional and personal growth.

Finally, the fulfillment of contracted services is measured. The COO reported that MCEC has contracts with four service branches, the DoD, and the VA. Most of these contracts are indefinite delivery or quantity contracts. This means that there are set-aside, non-appropriated funds for MCEC services that are requested as needed at the discretion of the contractor over a stated period of time. This kind of arrangement highlights the importance of availability of data regarding how, when, where, and how many participants receive MCEC services. Aside from reporting to contractors, fulfillment data is also important in terms of budgeting, projecting and recording costs associated with materials and service delivery, and hours worked by contracted employees.

Dr. Franklin and Dr. Parry discussed the need for measuring implementation fidelity and the quality of training services. They use checklists, survey data, and feedback offered by participants to evaluate the quality of the training provided by MCEC trainers, the perceived usefulness of the programs’ strategies and materials, and the coaching and support offered by MCEC staff after the initial training.

Data Analysis and Reporting

MCEC uses a suite of data management packages compiled by each department for monitoring program outcomes, outreach, and finances, including inventory control and direct sales. Several staff members reported that the lack of one integrated system tailored specifically to their needs has presented an ongoing challenge for timely data analysis. For example, the management of donations is a time consuming process, currently handled using the software application Avectra. Incoming revenue from PayPal is incorporated using another system. The accounting and budgeting processes remain manual, using Excel spreadsheets and QuickBooks. Aging of accounts receivables and inventory control for materials shipped from headquarters is also a manual process that ties up much-needed human capital, impedes cash flow, and slows down the process of analyzing trends. Personalized, business-specific software packages are expensive and at this time, may be out of reach for an organization that is concerned with returning as many dollars as possible directly to meet the needs of the clients they serve.

QuestionPro, a software platform, is used to collect survey data and training feedback, translating this data into charts for additional trend analysis. MCEC uses surveys to determine the degree to which participants in their programs believe that they are better prepared to serve military children; that their knowledge about the topic of the program has increased and to what degree; their estimate of how many others their new knowledge will reach or influence; and finally, how likely participants are to implement change as a result of their participation. Given the large quantity of qualitative data derived from surveys of students, parents and professionals, managing these data and extracting meaningful trends is a big job for a small department. Efforts are underway, according to Stacey Smith, MCEC's Director of Research & Evaluation, to standardize their evaluative processes in order to better understand and communicate program effectiveness. Dr. Smith and her colleagues have been leading an initiative to carefully examine the data derived from each training program, and to report it in a standard format that includes both qualitative and quantitative information with the objective of making feedback from clients more reliable and useful for program development and refinement. In the first half of 2012 the first program review was completed for the S2S program and they expect to review the P2P program next. Dr. Smith hypothesized that the P2P review will be easier to complete now that they have worked through their first review, and because the P2P program is more structured than the S2S programming. Dr. Smith described the research process as follows:

1. Collect and clean extant data, such as structured interviews (conducted by an external evaluator at Texas A&M) and stories
2. Examine data for central themes and trends; collect additional data including lessons learned as needed from school liaisons
3. Write a description for the program; determine which elements of the program are flexible and which are non-negotiable
4. Build a logic model

How data are used for getting to impact

It is difficult for several reasons for MCEC to measure the impact of their programs on student academic achievement, graduation rates, or other school-related outcomes. To determine if MCEC's programs are having a significant impact on student outcomes, it would be necessary to identify and follow military children who are receiving MCEC services and compare them to children who are not, but are otherwise demographically similar, facing similar challenges, and going to closely-matched schools. First, military connected children are not identified as a sub-group or as connected to the military in their school records. Asking students to self-identify for the purposes of research may not produce accurate enough information to form a treatment and control group for study. The very nature of the challenges facing military children involve multiple transitions and assimilations into new schools, school systems, states, and even into new countries. It would be very difficult for researchers to obtain all of the necessary permissions, data sets, and Internal Review Board (IRB) approvals to work across so many different systems even if students could be identified. Further, MCEC executive staff voiced concerns about the ethics of running randomized controlled trials within a school in which some children might not receive services that could benefit them in a timely fashion. The costs of this kind of high-quality research are high and would require additional, substantial funding from some of the same sources that are already stretching to support services.

High-quality, qualitative research is an option for learning more about the impact of MCEC programs and advocacy. The MCEC staff collects data to quantify the number of students, family members, educators and other professionals who are reached by their programs, then use survey style instruments to assess the perceptions of participants regarding the impact of the programs on their own learning, skills and strategies, and the likelihood that the training will change their behavior related to educating and supporting military children. The research, training, and development staff at MCEC use this data to determine which programs attract the most participants, and which attributes of their programs are producing the greatest perceived results. Feedback about the delivery of the programs, the style of the presenter, and their satisfaction with the support they received is used to revise trainings and to better prepare the trainers who deliver them. It is important to note that advocacy for and awareness of the unique needs of military children is a desired outcome of MCEC and is measured through their statistics regarding direct and indirect reach. This information is used to determine the best use of their networks, partners, and the time of their executive staff who engage in outreach and advocacy.

Finally, reviewing the rate at which installations or school districts request programs and trainings, and the number of participants involved in each event allows the marketing staff to draw conclusions about market saturation, how needs are evolving, and basic supply and demand responses to prices and other costs involved in program participation. All of this data is used to guide the organization's planning.

Formal Evaluation Activities (internal and external)

The standardization of programs and the collection of evaluative data has been an ongoing effort for MCEC. A systematic approach to the interpretation, collection and distribution of data has included stakeholder surveys with superintendents, principals, community members, parents, teachers and students. Over the past year, both Texas A&M and Penn State University, as external evaluators, have been engaged to determine the effectiveness of the organization's *Student 2 Student* program. Plans are underway to conduct a similar study of the *Parent 2 Parent* program. Evaluations are also regularly conducted for professional development programs and the National Training Seminar (NTS). From this effort, a "Thought Leaders" group has emerged to further assist in identifying program areas for improvement, how to improve implementation fidelity, and how to better measure efficacy.

Formal staff evaluation and feedback systems were reported to be inconsistently applied. Not all staff members were involved in a formal review or evaluation process, and feedback was offered regularly related to execution of duties, but not in the context of annual employer and employee goal setting or plans for professional growth for all employees.

3. Strategic Themes

Social Connectedness

In essence, bridging the civilian-military divide is a core element of this organization's mission, as MCEC is dedicated to creating a community of "100 percent acceptance" within schools that support military and veteran-connected children. MCEC recognizes that students who are connected with their peers, schools, and communities, have higher graduation rates, higher academic attainment and lower deterring incidences during their school age years – such that bridging the civilian military divide is not just about creating cultural unity but rather about facilitating the academic success of military children as well. The organization does not promote the categorization of military children; they do not believe that any

children affected by transition, mobility, or loss should to be served as a segregated population, but that students are best served by a combination of adult supporters and their peers, recognizing that in a diverse population there is great strength and common understanding.

The *Educating the Educators* initiative is a perfect example of how MCEC plays a pivotal role in bridging the civilian – military divide. By producing a high quality, accredited program of coursework for in-service and practicing teachers at colleges and universities across the country, teachers will be better prepared in how to recognize students’ needs, ameliorate difficulties, and support connections for children in transition. By spreading the word that military children are an asset to a school community, and when new families are warmly received and accepted, the idea that all children deserve the best we have to offer is supported.

Additionally, when MCEC develops partnerships with other non-profit and service organizations such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the military child becomes more easily integrated into a new community. When staff members at such community service organizations are aware that military families are part of their community, they can better help everyone connect and thrive.

The development of an online community for students is currently underway based upon student feedback expressing the sentiments, “We want a place where we can stay connected, share ideas”. In response to this feedback, MCEC has launched a "Homeroom Hub" for students and families in November, 2014, to serve as a central, organizing environment for all reference materials, communications and sharing among stakeholders, and activities and events related to MCEC and the military child. Clearly, it is the MCEC’s objective to be responsive to the community and to funnel resources towards those activities that enhance the lives of both military-connected students and any student impacted by transitions, frequent moves, or family separations. By involving all students, MCEC hopes to shine a spotlight on the strengths that every child brings in the support of their peers. Reducing the differences between students of different backgrounds and creating an open and accepting culture and climate in schools and communities underlie all of MCEC’s services and programs.

Employment and Education

As the name of the organization infers, the education, college readiness, and ultimately the meaningful employment of military children as they become adults are outcomes at the heart of the MCEC mission. By raising the awareness of civilian educators, training caregiving professionals, and supporting the parents of military children, the commitment to serve military connected children so that they will thrive in school underlies all MCEC programming and services. As stated by Jack Ballantyne, MCEC Senior VP and COO,

“This organization, I think, exists purely to make sure that all of the military connected kids have a full college and career-ready opportunity in that they're not disadvantaged because of the circumstances that they were born into.”

The *Student 2 Student* program is a student-led, adult-sponsored program, training both military and civilian boys and girls to be student leaders and to promote acceptance of diversity and the development of caring connections. The primary goal of this program is that military and veteran children are not seen as separate, but as students who bring great strengths and talents to their school community if they are

welcomed and assimilated. Recently, MCEC has also introduced programs for elementary schools. Through the *Parent 2 Parent* program, almost 170,000 parents have been trained to be better advocates for their children. MCEC has contracted with 13 *Parent 2 Parent* teams, consisting of 3-4 part-time staff located in the vicinity of a military installation, to provide training delivery to parents. Military spouses are often hired, some of whom are veterans themselves, with backgrounds in education, social work, nursing, and law. Through the literacy and early learning initiatives, young military parents and their children have research-based programs and materials to help them connect with each other and with the education community while they weather difficult transitions. It is important that parents have assistance so they can concentrate on parenting and maintaining an optimal learning environment for their children.

Most recently, MCEC achieved an important milestone with Operation Educate the Educators. The goal of this program is to enlist colleges and universities across the nation to "modify the curriculum to focus on military connected kids." To date, over 100 educational institutions have signed up with a target goal to reach 100,000. Finally, MCEC's National Training Seminar (NTS) is a globally recognized, premier training event for those interested in serving and supporting military-connected children. This professional development event provides a unique opportunity for more than 700 attendees to engage with senior military and education leaders. Focused on academics, service, and wellness, the seminar provides insight and perspective on current issues affecting military-connected children. The seminar also recognizes communities, high schools, middle schools, elementary schools and higher education institutions that work with the military installations to help students.

Each of these unique programs, tailored to work as part of a holistic system designed to facilitate an educational experience for military connected children, fosters career-readiness despite the inherent challenges facing the military child.

Veteran Programming Differentiation

MCEC programming is diverse and specific to many challenges that participants may face or help others overcome at any given time during their military experiences. The strength of their programming lies in the fact that participants grow and learn by both receiving assistance and by providing assistance to others. Participation in their wide range of offerings is voluntary and chosen by the participants. MCEC is dedicated to serving military- and veteran-connected children no matter what their circumstances, so that, as Dr. Keller explained,

“...students thrive and succeed, that the parents are proactive and engaged, that the education professionals truly understand the needs of military and veteran connected children, and that state and local communities are actually engaged in helping and supporting those children.”

MCEC offers a wide range of programming for military parents both online and on-site in order to reach parents who are with their children, those who are not, and those who may be preparing for separation or reintegration, as each of these groups has different concerns and potentially needs programming delivered in different formats. These programs can be used flexibly depending on the circumstances of the children and their families. MCEC programs do not differ based on whether a child's family member(s) are Active Duty, National Guard members, Reservists, or veterans, but solely on the needs of the child. MCEC develops programming that addresses specific needs, such as the course, *Supporting Children of*

the National Guard and Reserve Institute, but makes sure that this is offered as part of a contiguous program of support.

Aside from giving up daily routines and friends, military-connected students must deal with other frustrations as they move across state lines and into new schools. These children can also suffer from one or both of their parents being deployed and other disruptions to family life. All of the S2S and JS2S programs are designed to provide immediate peer interaction, community building, and credibility, positive peer relationships and to build prosocial skills in both military and non-military children, and finally to provide important school and community specific information to allow new students to connect with others by integrating into existing structures smoothly.

MCEC also takes into consideration the unique developmental needs of children with special needs. The program, *Supporting Children with Special Needs*, focuses on children and families who may need extra support as they transition from school to school.

Therefore, MCEC offers all-inclusive, wide ranging programs that can be delivered in a variety of ways. Rather than categorizing those they serve, MCEC is flexible in how they reach them, and provides comprehensive and inclusive programming.

Women Veteran Efforts

Challenges exist for women in the military who are serving far away from their children. Military spouses, especially new parents, may be overwhelmed by the multiple adjustments to having both a deployed spouse and to caring for one or more children alone. The parent programs offered by MCEC engage parents with military knowledge and experiences as an authentic and personal support system for new parents or parents newly separated by deployment.

It is important to note that even young spouses and parents involved directly or by marriage to the military have chosen voluntary service and bring their own unique strengths, commitments to family and country, and education and skills to bear on this new family order. MCEC does not choose to focus on deficits but to build on the strengths of the children and families they serve. Every parent or care-giver is encouraged to both support others and to receive services themselves. In this participatory model, individuals find empowerment, efficacy and support. MCEC adds to this by providing high-quality, well-researched strategies and information on a wide variety of topics both through on-site programming and online.

Transition to Civilian Life

Although not enough is known about the impact of service on the military child, it is well documented that military children will be more likely to endure separations from loved ones and interruptions and disruptions during their academic careers. Military children generally move 6-9 times during their K-12 school years. MCEC, through their close interactions with this community, has found that there is one more disruption which may be disconcerting and difficult for military children. What happens to them when their family member(s) leave military service and reintegrate into the family and the community? MCEC shared essays and feedback from children who asked this very question – my parent is now a veteran, but where do I stand? As children learn to cope and build the resiliency necessary to be a military child, they also build an identity as a military child. Children asked MCEC staff members working in their communities, “This is who I am - won’t I always be a military child?”

Because they serve the needs of the child, first and foremost, MCEC has established the policy that every child regardless of their family's military status, is welcome to participate in MCEC programs and to consider themselves part of the military community. MCEC developed a course specific to reintegration, available to professionals both online and face-to-face: *The Journey from "Welcome Home" to Now: Reunion, Reconnecting, Routine*, and a course to help with difficult changes that injuries, loss, or other traumatic events may cause: *Living in the New Normal: Helping Children Thrive through Good and Challenging Times*. These courses are developed using high-quality research and advice from the experts on the Science Advisory Board, and with feedback from the field.

Reintegration with Family

Because MCEC is solely committed to the wellbeing and success of military children, they must also understand the reintegration process and how it impacts the entire family. MCEC reports that there is a lack of quantitative research related to the specific health or educational outcomes for military families, as well as the long term effects of extended periods of war, multiple deployments and separations, and stresses related to transition, worry, and loss on children. They also believe that there is insufficient knowledge about the impact of being separated from a mother rather than a father, or having both parents deployed – and that even less is known about the impact of reintegration on family members.

As described above, MCEC has developed specific professional development for professionals working with families going through reintegration, such as *The Journey from "Welcome Home" to Now: Reunion, Reconnecting, Routine* and *Living in the New Normal: Helping Children Thrive through Good and Challenging Times*. MCEC also uses case studies, anecdotes, testimonials, and feedback from users to refine their supportive services and approaches for supporting children through the reintegration of a family member. The S2S and P2P programs serve as venues for flexible support from peers who understand first-hand what families are experiencing and who can share effective coping strategies, share resources that work, and sometimes just listen and empathize.

The Science Advisory Committee and the research staff at MCEC provide expert advice to inform MCEC's efforts to understand and communicate to others the unique needs of the military family, the many transitions faced by its members, and the best tools and strategies that a school community can use to support them. MCEC provides programs and, in some cases, the MSTC, to build the capacity of school personnel to help students through transitions. They provide a two-day accredited interactive professional development institute called, *Supporting Military Children through School Transitions Social/Emotional Training* for community professionals caring for the military child. A one day training for the same audience, *Helping Military Children Discover their S.P.A.R.C: Strength, Potential, Aspirations, Resourcefulness, Confidence* teaches how to assist students to develop a growth mindset, identify their personal resources, strengths and interests, and learn new strategies to help them help themselves through challenging situations.

Independent Sector Involvement

MCEC leaders shared that they believe it is an important part of their responsibility to network with potential supporters and donors and get to know which organizations and individuals are like-minded in their support of the military child, to inform others about the need to support the child, and to investigate

and find the most efficient and productive partnerships between MCEC and others. To this end, MCEC collaborates with numerous organizations throughout the nation to further its strategic mission and organizational reach. Many of these are professional institutions and experts in their respective fields whether it is early childhood education, medicine, or child psychology. The explicit goal is to form strategic alliances to bring knowledge and understanding into MCEC for the betterment of the children. For example, the executives of many organizations designed to serve children may not know much about the needs of the military child. Because military families move often and because the children are not identified in school, it is unlikely that other organizations know when they are serving them, and with the dearth of research about the impact of long deployments on children and families, they may not have plans to meet their needs.

MCEC has intentionally built a vast network of collaborative partners in the academic arena including a strong alliance with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the University of San Diego, and researchers at Pennsylvania State University, Tufts University, Southern Methodist University, Texas A&M, and the University of Southern California, in order to better inform the public about military children and MCEC.

In the arena of early childhood, MCEC partners with ZERO TO THREE initiative, along with Sesame Workshop. Sesame has since included the military child as a core constituent in their programming. In an effort to certify staff for after school programs in schools that have military veteran populations, MCEC has established partnerships the Boys & Girls Club of America.

MCEC is supported by a large number of corporations and their philanthropic foundations with donations of money and in-kind services of expert personnel. Deloitte has donated thousands of person-hours for projects such as brand analysis, consulting on operational systems, and communication and outreach. Other notable examples include Cisco and Wal-Mart who have supported local programs with volunteers.

Individuals and community organizations also support MCEC. As many as 3,300 student volunteers have donated over 218,000 hours of their time serving the organization by planning and working at events, raising funds, and advocating.

MCEC's Science Advisory Committee and National Advisory Committee, discussed earlier in this report, offer guidance and up-to-date interpretations of pertinent research to support MCEC in their efforts to translate high quality research into replicable, scalable practice with high levels of implementation fidelity, and the flexibility to make it work in different contexts. These two groups, comprised of professionals in the areas of research, education, mathematics, public policy, pediatrics, psychology, psychiatry, leverage their public, private, and independent sector expertise on behalf of MCEC's mission.

Community Connectedness

Collaboration around the use of well-defined, well-researched, supportive practices, worthy of replication, best describes the way that MCEC connects within communities. MCEC provides materials, professional development, workshops and complete articulated programs to serve their constituents and, most importantly, they use multiple pathways to reach out to the community to make sure they are available to those who need support the most. MCEC must raise awareness of several important issues: (1) the needs of the military child and why they need support, (2) the programs and services that MCEC

has to offer and the quality of the research behind them, (3) how to fund and implement MCEC programs effectively, (4) how to contribute to the success of the military child by collaborating with MCEC.

MCEC executives network strategically with community partners, advocates for the military child, the DoD, VA, the Armed Services, other local and national government officials, and philanthropic entities to spread information about how MCEC works and how it can be funded and delivered to school districts and local service providers such as the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, for example.

Once programs are adopted, the Military Student Transition Consultant (MSTC) plays an important role in this process for school districts in which they operate. For example, MCEC contracts directly with school districts to provide the MSTC and programs for school districts serving large numbers of military children. In two of these cases, the school district was given Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) funds through a grant, which MCEC helped the school district to write.

In districts that do not have MSTCs, MCEC contracts workers to provide trainings, professional development, and supportive services. They also use local volunteers, school district personnel, and the participants themselves in the S2S or Parent programs.

Launching the recently released elementary S2S program necessitated strong collaboration with numerous schools across the country. In addition, the launch of a new MCEC parent advocacy program promoting college and career readiness, involved about 50 volunteers across 21 states to inform school districts about what is available online and through targeted funding. MCEC holds regular, well publicized public engagements and the National Training Seminars in Washington, D.C. with the intent of bringing a cross section of people together for the sake of the military child. Companies such as Deloitte have contributed over 900 person hours of advisory work, while Walmart has provided volunteers to work directly with students. Students in S2S and JS2S programs have volunteered their time to update information on Pinterest, to organize books, and load data for event planning. MCEC has also recognized over 2,000 volunteers from places such as Old Dominion University, the University of Southern California, Easter Seals' Dixon Center, Blue Star Families, and Southern Methodist University's engineering program, among others.

Dr. Keller also noted that MCEC has been in discussions with key Department of Education and White House officials such as First Lady Michelle Obama's Executive Director of her Reach Higher initiative, Eric Waldo, who is working to inspire and empower every student to complete post-secondary education or training. His work cuts across policy, advocacy and engagement in education matters. James Shelton, III, is the deputy secretary at the U.S. Department of Education and oversees a wide range of policy, management, and program functions. MCEC has worked with both of these influential officials to broaden awareness about the military child and to plan events to spotlight their work at a national level.

Media

The primary purpose for MCEC interactions with the media is to tell the story of the military child. Public interest in the welfare of the active military and veteran communities grows and wanes, but stories told by the media about their children are infrequent; when they do cover military children, members of the media often focus on the negative impacts of military connections on children. MCEC is working with others such as National Geographic and the Public Broadcasting Service to tell positive, strength-based

stories about these children rather than presenting them as hopelessly damaged and traumatized.

MCEC leverages media relationships by associating with leaders in the field of advocacy for children and families. First Lady Laura Bush asked Dr. Keller to accompany her during a speech to governors' spouses in 2005. The Pentagon channel sends information out to 70 other outlets when they covered the MCEC Training Seminar in Washington, DC. Michael Gravens, Director, Strategic Communications and Outreach, makes frequent visits to Capitol Hill to carry out advocacy and free strategic communication opportunities to increase awareness of MCEC's work, and to track and analyze trends in services provided for military families and government funding.

MCEC programs involving students, parents and professionals all play a critical role in informing more people about the military child. Eighty percent of MCEC'S reach is indirect, or what they call a soft reach – one person telling others about them and their work. MCEC is working to master strategic communications such as marketing with social networks, You-tube, e-newsletters, agreements with other service providers, and using the news media. For example, the Pentagon Channel covers MCEC's National Training Seminar, and they are in discussions with *National Geographic*, and the Public Radio Newswire for coverage of their work.

Effectively reaching the parent market is of significant interest to MCEC as well. MCEC cannot serve families and educators who do not know about their services. Dr. Keller's extensive background in public education has been invaluable to the organization in raising its profile among educators. Guidance in how to connect with the education community is important to MCEC's sustained growth – as an interviewee commented, educators trust other educators and are rightfully careful about vetting outside groups that solicit access to their students – they prefer to work with others who they know well. Establishing a clear and accurate message about the benefits for students that derive from working with MCEC is important in education circles.

Finally, in order to collect data about how MCEC resources are accessed and what people know about the organization, MCEC has partnered with The Richards Group to engage in an independent assessment of their branding efforts. Using this information, The Richards Group prepared an advisory report for MCEC about how to increase their reach to additional families, funders, and the community at large.

4. Key Learnings and Reflections

Catalysts of Impact

MCEC exists to ensure that military-connected children are not disadvantaged because of the circumstances into which they were born. It is also the goal that these children have an equal opportunity to experience academic success and college readiness. MCEC believes it is different from other organizations that serve children and families as a part of their mission, asserting that it is the only organization that focuses solely on the military child. Research conducted by The Richards Group found that there are 19,000 organizations that offer services for the military child in one capacity or another, but only MCEC focuses all of their resources and activities exclusively on benefiting the children who serve.

MCEC possesses numerous strengths in carrying out its mission on behalf of the military child. First, MCEC believes in the power of local action combined with high quality support, development, and research, to

help bring out the innate strengths of military connected children. MCEC carefully chooses employees who have both the knowledge and credentials to do the work, but also who have a personal connection to the experiences of the military family.

Next, MCEC advocates for the military child without exploiting their challenges. They do not portray children as victims of circumstance, but as individuals who have powerful experiences that they can use to help others, and to make their schools and communities better. MCEC turns a spotlight on a national resource – the children nurtured by families who chose to serve their country, and who are more likely than anyone else to do so as adults. MCEC concentrates their efforts on connecting people of all ages to build stronger communities in which military children can thrive.

MCEC works side-by-side with schools and communities to build their capacity to serve all of their children and families. The professional development and programs they design are high-quality and promote prosocial behavior, literacy, academic goal-setting and self-knowledge, and provide a roadmap for all schools to prepare career- and college-ready students. All of their programs have been vetted by experts in the fields of education, child development, and medicine.

MCEC's impact and visibility is growing due to their efforts to network and partner with other organizations. This work has the potential to help them widen their scope of funding sources. It will also raise awareness of the need for the military child identifier to be instituted nationwide in order to better track progress and measure success.

Barriers to Impact

MCEC is challenged to accomplish its objectives given the scarcity of available resources, a common problem for many non-profits, but especially for a military connected organization at a time of troop drawdowns. Fundraising was cited as one of the most pressing issues facing the organization, with the need to shift its considerable reliance on government grants to other funding sources and donations. Working within new budgetary constraints within school districts as a result of the recent economic recession and fiscal challenges facing federal, state, and local governments presents another barrier to growth for MCEC. School districts do not always have the funding to hire substitutes and release teachers, counselors, and administrators from their duties to attend professional development, even if the professional development is funded.

Strategic planning is desirable but has been difficult for MCEC beyond a year or two into the future because of limited staffing. The employees at MCEC are professionals dedicated to the organization's mission, but the budget does not allow for any one department to be more than a few people deep. The organization could use help with data collection and management so that they can look for areas of program saturation, understand changing trends, and respond to requests for new programming. If a government contract does not get used completely, it is important for MCEC to understand why: Are the programs not appropriate for the intended community, do they need more on-site help supporting the programs in the schools, or is the messaging simply missing the mark?

An additional area of concern for the organization is the lack of quantitative research specifically regarding health and educational outcomes for military children. The effects of war on children with parents who are deployed over long periods of time or for multiple deployments over much of a child's lifetime are still

not fully understood. Issues of privacy and tracking military children who move frequently add further complications to an already complex situation. Consequently, MCEC is dependent upon qualitative data, such as case studies and surveys, as opposed to a mixed methods approach including academic achievement, graduation rates, and other indicators of academic success to inform programming and service delivery.

Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Impact

There are three major areas of ongoing efforts at MCEC to enhance impact. First, data collection methods using results from user surveys and social media platform analytics are being improved and streamlined for use across the organization. MCEC directors are working to improve how they share the data they collect internally to make timely, strategic decisions to better the organization's reach, streamline processes such as program development and the updating and rotation of offerings, and track the outcomes of their work in communities.

Second, MCEC has been aggressively advocating for the national use of a military student identifier on public school student transcripts and as a regular part every school's data collection system. These efforts are paying off as the notion is gaining momentum and attention. MCEC and their partners expect that the ability to identify and track the progress of military children will be instrumental in improving their impact data collection and will make high quality research designs possible. Currently, public school systems identify students who belong to sub-groups of students in order to track their progress in academic achievement, behavior, attendance, and the need for special services. Sub-groups are defined by the No Child Left Behind legislation and include race, English language proficiency, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged or students from low income families. These sub-groups are tracked for federal and state school accountability efforts. Similar methods could be used to identify military students, with the data used to inform school personnel that there are military children in the school, to identify them for additional supports, and for research purposes. If MCEC knows where military children are enrolled, how they are performing, and when they move, it may be possible to design experiments to more conclusively determine the impact of MCEC programs by comparing students and families who receive them and those who do not. MCEC would like to be able to determine graduation rates for military children, the rate at which they choose higher education, the workforce, or the military, and how they perform on important indicators of success such as college admissions testing, state proficiency testing, and course-taking patterns and grades.

Finally, MCEC is working to decrease the organization's financial dependency on government contracts and to increase support from philanthropy. They have joined the Combined Federal Campaign which allows all federal government workers located anywhere in the world to donate to their charity of choice through one-time or on-going payroll deductions. The executive team networks with foundations and other non-profits to share information about the strengths and needs of MCEC's constituents and to discuss how working together may produce much greater impacts compared to working alone.

Appendix - MCEC Partners as of November, 2014

Achieve
Agile Mind
Alabama GRIT
America's Promise
Alliance Air Force Association (ASA)
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)
Armed Forces Services Corporation
Aspen Institute Franklin Project
Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA)
Be the Change, Inc.
Blue Star Families
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Bob Woodruff Foundation
Collaborative For Student Success
Core Knowledge
DELL
Deloitte Consulting LLP
Elizabeth Dole Foundation
Expect More, Achieve More
From the Top
Gallup
Gallup Student Poll
Got Your Six
Henry M. Jackson Foundation
The Hunt Institute
Leader to Leader Institute
Learning Ally
Military Impacted Schools Association
Military Kids Connect
Military Officers Association of America
Mission: Readiness
National Math and Science Initiative
Navy League of the United States
Operation Home Front
Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
Pre-K Now
Points of Light
Samueli Foundation
School Tools TV
Sesame Workshop
Sid W. Richardson Foundation
State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE)

Texas A&M of Central Texas
Texas Elementary Principals & Supervisors Association
The Army Marathon
The Future of Children
The USAA Educational Foundation
Tufts University
Tutor.com
United Through Reading
University of Southern California
U.S. Air Force U.S. Air Force Academy
U.S. Army U.S. Coast Guard
U.S. Department of Defense
U.S. Marine Corps
U.S. Military Academy at West Point (USMA)
U.S. National Guard
U.S. Navy
USO
White House Joining Forces
ZERO TO THREE