

Hearing on Military Families

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Witness:

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Testimony:

Hello. I am Willa Garrett, Fort Campbell Child and Youth Services School Liaison Officer (SLO). I feel quite honored to address you on the support services offered to families during this deployment. Along with serving as a vehicle for information for parents, students and schools, my responsibilities include collaborating with local schools and installation organizations to facilitate the education transition experience for our children. Below I provided the following information on our schools and the support offered to our families during the recent deployment.

SCHOOLS: At present, the majority of Fort Campbell married soldiers live off the installation in cities located in Kentucky and Tennessee. Consequently, more than half of Fort Campbell's school-age children (averaging 8,000) are educated in off-post schools. Currently, the installation has five Department of Defense Domestic Dependent Elementary Secondary Schools (DDESS) Schools located on the installation – five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Each year, the Fort Campbell School District serves over 4200 students that reside on the installation. Each of the schools offers a half-day 4-year old program and full day kindergarten based on National Association of Education for Young Children standards. The schools utilize the Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) curriculum that is based on national standards.

Fort Campbell Schools have received several distinguished awards such as the US Department of Education School of Excellence Award – the Blue Ribbon Award for overall achievement. Fort Campbell's Parent Partnership Program is considered one of the best in the nation, and was researched by Vanderbilt University in relation to student achievement, "March Toward Excellence: School Success and Minority Student Achievement in Department of Defense Schools", Report to the National Education Goals Panel. At the onset of the deployment, Fort Campbell Schools readily offered training for their staff and parents.

Clarksville/Montgomery County School System of Tennessee serves almost half of our school-age population. Active duty military-sponsored students comprise more than 23% of CMCSS total enrollment. The school district provides cutting edge technology for students by offering Distance Learning Labs, Video Broadcasting Classes, Mobile Technology Labs, Automated Libraries, and a Junior Technology Program. CMCSS administers the Terra Nova Test to evaluate student achievement, and has consistently scored above state and national averages in all academic areas. The school system brings business into the high school classroom to give students work experiences through internships, co-op opportunities and job shadowing. The district has received many awards. These include "Expansion Management" magazine's blue ribbon award for outstanding achievement, chosen by School Match, a service company for parenting magazines, Governor's A+ Award for three consecutive years, and recognized as best in

Tennessee for three years. Counselors conducted individual and group counseling sessions for children of deployed parents. Some schools also conducted parent workshops with free childcare to assist with the stress of the deployment.

Christian County Public Schools in Kentucky educate approximately 1100 military-sponsored students each year. There are eleven elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools in Christian County. All of the Christian County schools are accredited by the state of Kentucky and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In addition to the traditional educational settings, programs are offered at a career & technical center, a day treatment center, an alternative school, a preschool center, an optional high school, and an Adult Education Center. Christian County consistently seeks opportunities to support the military by sponsoring events such as "Salute to the Military." This past year, the School Liaison Officer served on the district's Barriers to Learning sub-committee for the Consolidated Training Plan for Teachers. As a result of the committee's commitment to children, the board voted to provide awareness training targeting the unique factors of educating military students. During the deployment, many schools made phone calls to individual families to offer support as needed.

CONTINUITY OF EDUCATION WHEN FAMILY IS TRANSFERRED:

Continuity of education for students that are transitioning to and from the Fort Campbell area has improved greatly over the past three years. Through the positive relations and communication established through the School Liaison Officer position, together with the local school districts have developed a greater understanding and sensitivity about the challenges that military-sponsored students incur as a result of transitioning from one school district to another. Fort Campbell Schools were part of the original nine school systems involved in a study commissioned by the Army and conducted by the Military Child Education Coalition Military Child Education (MCEC) Secondary Education Transition Study (SETS).

Since the initial study, the School Liaison Officer and the Fort Campbell Schools have been working with the local school districts of Clarksville-Montgomery County and Christian County to develop a local action plan that makes transitioning for all mobile students a more seamless venture for students and their families. Fort Campbell, Clarksville and Christian County Schools consistently work to ensure children who move have the same advantages and opportunities as those children who remain in one location for their entire school career. Efforts are being made to help families move with greater ease and remain in the area when it seems that the move is harmful to children.

The area schools have implemented some of the following measures to ensure a smoother transition of students into the area: 1) Enrollment information is available on district web sites; 2) Enrollment information is available on the local TV station and in the newspaper during the summer; 3) Student Ambassadors assigned to new students once school starts; 4) If a student transfers as a senior, counselors work with the new school to ensure graduation without delay. 5) Schools provide transitioning student with an unofficial copy of their transcripts to allow for immediate placement upon arrival at the new school. At the installation, soldiers in-process through the School Liaison Office to receive first-hand information about area schools and child care and youth programs. Soldiers also out-process through the School Liaison Office to ensure local school clearance. Also,

many soldiers have requested and received approval for stabilization for their high school junior or senior to allow graduation with local class.

To prevent loss of credit and access to opportunities, many transition efforts have been considered and implemented in each of our school districts. Fort Campbell Schools have incorporated many programs to ease the transition of students. To name a few: 1) Implementation of the Chart Your Course Program to assist students who are transitioning to high school; 2) Summer enrollment counselor works June and August as well as being available two days a week in July to help new students in their class selection; 3) A transition lab established to help new students catch up in classes in which they may be behind or need to earn credit; 4) All grades are given both as number grades and as letter grades; 5) The Interactive Counseling Center (ICC) is becoming a great tool for assisting with tryouts, interviews, and record reviews; 6) Stabilization letters are written in support of parents who have juniors/seniors that are nearing high school completion.

WHEN THERE IS A TRAGEDY IN A CHILD'S LIFE, ARE THE TEACHERS EQUIPPED TO DEAL WITH IT? In support of the recent deployment, the Fort Campbell Schools did an excellent job of providing training for their counselors and those of a neighboring school district. The School Liaison Officer (SLO) partnered with post hospital's Chief of Psychology and the psychologist for the Soldier/Family Health Readiness Program to offer coping strategies to the counselors, teachers and administrators of the off-post school district. The ultimate goal was to furnish the educational staff with information needed to fully support our children during such a critical time.

Half day training sessions were conducted and specifically addressed the following:

- Information about services provided by the Family Assistance Center (FAC)
- Presentation on 'Deployment, Stress, Families and School' that addressed identifying stress in adults and children, as well as ways to assist children in dealing with such frustrations.
- Suggestions for dealing with the reunion cycle of the deployment, as well as what to expect during this phase.
- Current childcare opportunities and youth activities sponsored by Child and Youth Services, along with many other support services on the installation such as the YMCA Coop Nursery and the Chaplains Operation Helping Hand.
- Recommended hands-on activities for children.
- Information/recommendations were also offered on developing emergency contingency plans.

During this most recent deployment, it has been quite obvious that each of our Secondary Education Transition Memorandum of Agreement Signatories are serious about their commitment to our children. Superintendents, principals and counselors welcomed information about how to work with our children during this time. Teachers and counselors were extremely positive and demonstrated a genuine interest in the well being of our military-sponsored children.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: Fort Campbell, Clarksville and Christian County Schools offer periodic parent sessions and family involvement opportunities throughout the school year. Military parents are invited to participate in local Parent Teacher

Organizations, as well as site based council meetings to assist in making meaningful decisions about how their schools are run.

Child and Youth Services staff coordinate briefings for parents on child development (age and stages) and stress management. Parent advisory groups for full day and preschool enrolled children have quarterly meetings to look at program improvements and share information. Training opportunities and family oriented activities are frequently communicated to each school district.

The School Liaison Officer serves on the Family Resource Youth Service Center advisory board for a Christian County school that has a predominantly military enrollment. The Family Resource Center is designed to promote the flow of resources and support to families in ways to strengthen their functioning of individual members and family unit. The center's focus is on education to enhance parenting skills, education for preschool parents and their children, health services or referral to health services, GED (for adults) and literacy based programs for students and adults and programs promoting family activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of our children and schools. Fort Campbell continues to provide excellent support services to the families of our deployed soldiers. The teamwork displayed by each one of our support agencies was definitely commendable, and was what I consider to be a demonstration of true dedication and commitment. I am most grateful to be a part of the Fort Campbell family, as it has afforded the opportunity to make a difference in the educational experience of our children and support mission readiness.