

Evaluating Military Special Education

Are Existing Supports and Standard Outcome
Measurements Effective for Military Children?



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Executive Summary

The United States education system is delivered at the state level and is therefore not built with high mobility in mind. Since military students are a unique population, the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to report the standardized testing scores of military students to ensure they receive equal access to a public education. Despite this requirement, state-level testing data available to parents is inconsistent and not centrally accessible,[i] which leaves many parents and advocates wondering what impact the highly mobile military lifestyle has on the educational outcomes of military students. Even less is known about the outcomes of military students in special education, and if and how the military lifestyle impacts the delivery of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973.[ii]

Special education law outlines the processes and procedures designed to ensure all students, regardless of disability, have access to an education by establishing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), that set individualized goals and accommodations for each student to meet their unique needs. School districts and educators deliver a FAPE through an IEP which is designed to be "appropriately ambitious...[so] every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives." [iii] Similarly, a 504 Plan outlines specific accommodations the student needs to successfully access their education.

Because so little is known about the lived experiences of military students receiving special education services, our research examined four key elements of the special education system:

- The role of IEPs in delivering a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)
- The existence of long-term educational outcome goals
- Participation in standardized testing
- Being on track to receive a standard high school diploma

We found that the special education program/plan a child is found eligible for (IEP, 504 Plan, or neither) is connected to specific educational outcomes. ([Appendix Item A](#)). Families whose children either receive accommodations under a 504 Plan (35.59%), or do not receive accommodations (30.1%), noted that their schools did not recognize the educational impact of their diagnosis or only partially recognized this impact at significantly higher rates than those receiving services under an IEP (20.66%). The perception that their child does not receive appropriate services based on their diagnosis sets families up for future disagreements with school district IEP Team members.

Our second finding found that IEP goals may not adequately support military students' long-term educational outcome goals. Furthermore, the existence of long-term educational outcome goals is related to the family's familiarity with special education law, not demographic factors, like military rank, location, or race. This confirmed our previous year's findings, reemphasizing the importance of a family's familiarity with the special education law and processes to obtain positive outcomes for their students.

More specifically, 91.3% of participants who were familiar with special education processes and laws cited having a long-term educational goal for their child compared to those who were less familiar with special education. Among this group, only 36.1% cited having a long-term educational outcome goal for their child. ([Appendix Item B](#)).

Our third finding related to a commonly cited measurement of student success, standardized testing. Although the majority (63.16%) of military children aged eight and older participated in state-wide standardized testing, this number is lower than state participation rates^[iv] and the federal alternate assessment guidelines. Therefore, it is unclear how military special education student outcomes compare to their civilian peers. More data are needed to determine if there is a relationship between high mobility, testing participation among military special education, and standardized testing results. Families who reported their child did not participate in standardized tests were also more likely to report that their child was not on track to receive a standard high school diploma (36.95%). Families whose child participated in statewide testing were less likely to report that their child was not on track to receive a standard diploma (12.85%).

This is directly related to our fourth finding, being on track to receive a “standard” high school diploma has a significant relationship with many positive educational outcomes for military special education students. Roughly 58% of parents whose children were on track to receive a standard high school diploma reported that they were also on track to achieve their #1 long-term educational outcome goal; the same could not be said for students who are NOT on track to receive a standard diploma. Only 30% of parents whose children are not on track to receive a standard diploma reported their child was also on track to achieve their educational goals.

Our last finding examined the impact the special education experience had on military families and their special education students. We found that 78.1% of families and students are stressed. Although currently serving families report that the special education system is causing them stress, their experiences do not have an impact on their family’s desire to continue to serve. This is an encouraging finding that further cements the importance of supporting military families in special education. To learn more about our data-informed solutions, read our [Recommendations to Help Improve the Outcomes of Military Special Education Students](#).

[Findings](#)

[Recommendations](#)

[Infographics](#)

Background

Partners in PROMISE was founded by four military spouses with children who receive special education services. They came together because of their shared experiences and desire to understand if their negative experiences navigating special education within the highly mobile military lifestyle were unique. But there were no data to be found. So, they conducted a simple non-scientific google survey[v] in 2019 that showed they were not alone.

Partners in PROMISE is the only organization that collects data on military students in special education. In 2020, we sought to establish a baseline of special education experiences to better understand the reasons military families filed formal or informal complaints.

In 2021, we focused on understanding why military families chose not to file formal or informal complaints while examining how these experiences may be impacted by military moves. Findings revealed that military children waited years to receive initial diagnoses and establish initial IEPs; the average wait time was 23 months.[viii] Once the initial IEP was established after a military move, families experienced significant delays in receiving special education services with the wait time averaging 5.75 months. This indicates that military families are experiencing procedural timeline violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).[ix] However, the delivery of special education supports and services, and the overall function of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), in the military special education experience was largely unknown.

In September 2022, we fielded our third annual survey that built upon data from previous surveys. We also examined the military's Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and if and how it factored into EFMP enrollee's educational experiences.[vi] Our findings were widely disseminated and ultimately cited by the White House.[vii] We learned that military families overwhelmingly chose not to file formal or informal complaints, despite having a reason to, and that EFMP was not as universally utilized as originally suspected.

The Role of IEPs in the Delivery of FAPE

Over forty years ago, Congress recognized the need to legislate the education of children with disabilities by passing the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which was subsequently renamed and reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA).[x] This legislation requires state education agencies (SEAs) to ensure local education agencies (LEAs) provide a FAPE to children with disabilities. The nearly three decades following the passage of the 1975 Act highlighted the need to enhance the policy to include improving the educational outcomes of children with disabilities.

The 2004 reauthorization aimed to improve the education of children with disabilities because, though the 1975 legislation was historic, children with disabilities were often placed in public schools but did not receive an educational benefit similar to their non-disabled peers. The IDEA instituted the use of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to establish, deliver, and measure the education of children with disabilities and, ultimately, to ensure children receive a FAPE.

According to the U.S. Supreme Court, “[t]he IEP must aim to enable the child to make progress. After all, the essential function of an IEP is to set out a plan for pursuing academic and functional advancement.”[xi]

Who Is at the IEP Table?

An essential aspect of the special education and IEP process is the formation of an “IEP Team.” The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)[xii] very clearly outlines the participating members of an “IEP Team.”[xiii] The parents of the child with a disability are listed first, which denotes the importance of the parents as instrumental members of the IEP Team.

Other members of the IEP Team consist of school and district personnel including at least one general education teacher, at least one special education teacher (or provider), a person to interpret evaluative data and provide instructional implications of the data, and a local education agency (LEA) representative. The LEA representative must know the general education curriculum and available resources and must either be qualified to supervise or provide specially designed instruction.[xiv]

The educational agency may include other individuals with knowledge of the child or individuals who provide “special expertise” such as related service providers (e.g.: speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, counselors, etc.). The parent can bring other individuals to the IEP meeting who have knowledge of the child or provide “special expertise” such as a private service provider (e.g.: behavioral therapy).

This IEP Team develops an IEP to help the student “meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.”[xv] At least one time each school year, IEP teams meet to discuss the appropriateness of a student’s IEP to determine if the student is or is not making progress towards their goals; if the goals need revision; review new evaluative data or new information from the parents; or other needs the child may have.[xvi] The school-based members of an IEP team will primarily focus on developing and measuring short-term educational goals for the student. The parents, however, will likely focus on both short- and long-term educational goals for the student.

Research shows that disagreement within an IEP Team is common and may result in “deadlock.”[xvii] According to Kolter, “too many school districts, for whatever reason – differing expectations, fiscal constraints, fungibility of children and, as an institution, not having to deal with the long-term consequences of their decisions – seek to provide the bare minimum allowed by law.”[xviii] If parents do not believe a school is providing individualized accommodations to meet the unique needs of their student, they can either work with the team to adjust the IEP or file an official complaint. Disagreement among IEP team members shifts the focus away from crafting an IEP that helps a student achieve positive short- and long-term outcomes and time is spent attempting to reach any level of agreement.

The process of formulating annual IEPs, and related goals, is not designed to connect each year’s IEP to the next; instead, it creates many individualized educational plans with only the parents and students linking them together. Parents have the daunting task of maintaining each year’s educational progress needed for their child to become independent, productive members of society.

Role of the IEP According to the IDEA

The IDEA provides requirements for developing an IEP. Requirements include explicit information regarding the child’s strengths, the educational concerns of the parents, and the “academic, developmental, and functional needs of the child.”[xix] Section 1414(d)(1)(A) of the IDEA outlines the required sections of the IEP, which essentially creates a roadmap for the student with disabilities to make academic progress.

The student’s “present levels” are an important measure included in the IEP. The IEP must include a statement indicating where the child currently stands academically and functionally, followed by the disability’s impact on the child’s ability to participate and make progress in the general education environment. Next, the IEP must include academic and functional goals appropriately individualized according to the needs of the child. IEP goals must be “measurable,” meaning educational providers must be able to capture information about the child’s progress toward their IEP goals. Also included in the IEP are accommodations and curriculum modifications, provided by the school district, that aim to help the child attain their academic and functional IEP goals. The IDEA does not set a minimum or maximum number of IEP goals per child; rather, the IEP must fully address all academic and functional needs of the child.

An LEA is required to convene the IEP Team at least annually to review the child’s IEP to determine its appropriateness and discuss whether the IEP needs revision.[xx] An IEP Team is required to revise the IEP to address new or recent evaluative data, new information from the parents, a change in the child’s needs, a lack of progress toward annual goals, or other reasons not specifically outlined in the law. A lack of measurable progress indicates the inappropriateness of the IEP, accommodations, or delivery of services.

The regulated nature of the IEP process performs many important functions:

- Regular and consistent reporting of IEP goals ensures the LEA is compliant with the legal requirements to provide the child with disabilities a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).
- The IEP allows an LEA to demonstrate to the state education agency (SEA) that it provides educational services to children with disabilities.*
- Allows parents to track their student’s educational progress over time.

*For states to receive special education funds from the federal government, the IDEA requires SEAs to submit a plan outlining policies to provide FAPE to children with disabilities. [xxi] These funds help supplement the cost of providing special education and related services to children with disabilities enrolled in public schools.

IEP as a Vehicle to Advance Educational Outcomes

Existing research examines outcomes based on countless individual disabilities; however, these findings do not have high external validity.[xxii] When examining special education outcomes, researchers disagree on the unit of measurement. Scanlon, Mellard, and others focus on standardized testing, graduation, and employment rates as the benchmarks for evaluating student success.[xxiii] Still others, like Turnbull, examine quality-of-life measurements.[xxiv] Even these quality-of-life measurements are contested with experts debating if an individual’s quality of life should be based on subjective satisfaction qualifiers or based on an individual’s expressed level of satisfaction.[xxv]

An IEP tracks student progress toward their mastery of short-term educational goals annually. However, the IEP does not have a section to specify, track, or measure long-term educational goals. Parents may include long-term educational goals in the Parent Concern section of the IEP, but only at their insistence or request.

Existing research highlights that parents’ perceptions of the appropriateness of their student’s special education services and IEP may differ from the perception of school districts and educators, despite being equal members of the IEP Team serving the same student.[xxvi] Researchers cite many reasons parents and schools may experience disagreement during the development and implementation of an IEP and IEP goals; including a lack of financial resources on the part of the schools[xxvii] which ultimately may result in placement that may not be tailored to meet the unique needs of the individual student. According to Zagona, “[W]hen parents described reaching agreement with school teams on the provision of special education services for their child, this was often due to the persistence of the parents.”[xxviii] This circumstance may not be as available to military special education parents whose military service demands a significant time commitment, which may lead to increased dependence upon military spouses to support the military-connected special education experience. This was confirmed by our 2021 survey data that revealed 46% of military spouse survey participants were not currently in the workforce. The primary reason cited for this status was educational caregiving.

There are many areas of disagreement that impact the ability of military parents and educators to accurately assess the progress of military students in special education. There is no agreement on a standard measure of successful educational outcomes within special education. Additionally, there are also many reported disagreements between members of the IEP Team, namely parents and school district representatives. These areas of disagreement make it difficult to get an unbiased assessment of the educational outcomes of military children.

Research Questions

Our 2020 and 2021 surveys established several baseline measures and show how the highly mobile military lifestyle impacts the ability to receive a FAPE guaranteed by the IDEA. We learned that despite having a cause to file due process complaints, many military families did not feel they could access recourse due to barriers presented by the highly mobile military lifestyle.[xxix] We also learned that military families had difficulty accessing IDEA protections when they moved from one state to another. In 2022, Partners in PROMISE’s research team wanted to better understand how the IDEA and The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provisions are implemented through the formation and execution of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans, and how effective these IEPs/504 Plans are in helping military students achieve positive long-term outcomes. This led us to formulate the following research questions:

1. Do military special needs parents have long-term educational outcome goals for their children?
2. Given their highly mobile lifestyle, do military parents believe their child's annual IEP goals are an effective vehicle to achieve their long-term educational outcome goals?
3. Do state-wide standardized tests capture military special education student outcomes?

Methodology

To analyze these variables, numerous Chi-Square tests were conducted via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) with a special focus placed on the relationship between the four primary dependent variables:

- Existence of Long-Term Educational Outcome Goals
- IEP Team Agreement
- Standardized Testing Results and Participation
- Students Being on Track to Receive a Standard High School Diploma

Because of the number of variables involved in researching military students in special education, correlation analysis was performed to understand the relationships between more than one variable at a time. We utilized linear regression analysis to examine the demographic characteristics of families who were “informed” on topics ranging from special education to military EFMP services. Qualitative methods of discourse analysis were used for constructing the survey and analyzing results. Discourse analysis is particularly useful for examining how people conceptualize and respond to what they perceive to be social inequalities[xxx]. Families with children who require special education must navigate at least two discourses: that of the military and that of special education.

Data Collection Instrument

Because the military population is diverse and located throughout the world, the most effective and common data collection instruments are online surveys. Due to the lack of existing secondary data on military children in special education, Partners in PROMISE created our own data collection instrument in collaboration with the Ohio State University (IRB: 2021B0171). The survey covered many topics, from medical/special education wait times, Likert scale satisfaction questions, number of military moves, demographic data about rank, and long-term educational outcome goals. Qualitative questions were interspersed throughout the survey to allow families to share the details of their special education experiences. Units of analysis included the number of military families who filed complaints with a school district and familiarity with military and civilian special education services and concepts. There are approximately 140,000 individuals enrolled in EFMP.[xxxi] The survey instrument collected 728 responses, with 514 responses from military special education and EFMP parents.

Although this research report is primarily focused on the findings reported by parents of military students within special education, we also opened our 2022 survey to a variety of stakeholders including educators, administrators, School Liaison Officers, and Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) staff and service providers. In addition to understanding their experiences, we opened our survey to adults enrolled in EFMP. The instrument consisted of 294 possible questions (191 questions were specific to military parents), which took roughly 20 minutes for parents to complete, and 5 minutes for other survey participants to complete with a 63.5% completion rate. Because the distribution strategy focused on a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling,[xxxii] which is the military family nonprofit standard, it is difficult to measure the response rate. Partners in PROMISE sent the survey via direct email campaign to 861 recipients including partner organizations who previously agreed to distribute the instrument.

Finding 1

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“School does not want to help with social-emotional [needs within the IEP], only academic, and even then, it is very cookie cutter.”

- 2022 Survey Participant



The special education program/plan a child is found eligible for is connected to specific educational outcomes.

Finding 1

IEP Team Disagreement During IEP Development

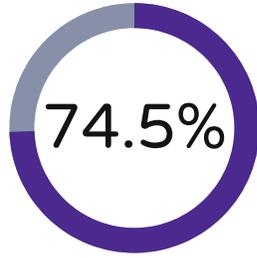
Three years of Partners in PROMISE survey data reveal many military families experience delays in establishing an IEP, encounter difficulty in developing an IEP with new school districts, and feel that accessing recourse is difficult because of the time and resources required to file a complaint. These areas of disagreement can strain the IEP Team dynamic, resulting in negative experiences for students, parents, and school administrators. One area of conflict highlighted in our 2022 survey is eligibility determinations that decide if a child's diagnosis has a significant impact on their ability to access a FAPE.

The results of these eligibility determinations are typically one of four outcomes: educational supports through IEPs, a 504 Plan, ineligibility, or tiered academic supports provided by the general education teacher in the general education setting to measure how the child responds to intervention (RTI). The majority (63.45%) of survey participants reported that their child received special education services via an IEP. Just over 13% were covered under a 504 Plan, 2.24% had both a 504 Plan and an IEP, while 21.08% reported not receiving services or accommodations under either of these plans. The primary reason cited for a child not receiving services under an IEP or 504 Plan was survey participants reported that they decided to homeschool their child (40%). This was followed by “[formulation of these plans is] in process” (14.12%), and “process is too stressful to continue” (14.12%).

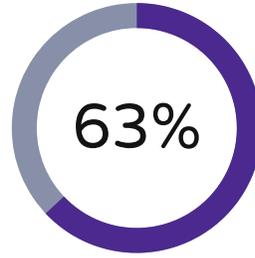
Eligibility determinations are one possible area of IEP Team disagreement. This occurs when a school district recognizes a diagnosis but does not recognize the educational impact the diagnosis has on the student's performance. Survey data confirm this disagreement, with 74.46% of families reporting their current school recognizes their child's diagnosis(es), but only 63% recognized the EDUCATIONAL IMPACT of their diagnoses. When there is a lack of shared understanding of the educational impact to determine the needs of the child, the IEP Team may have a harder time agreeing on assessing the best way to support that student's individualized progress.

Families whose children receive services under a 504 Plan (9.7%) or who did not receive services (16.3%) noted that their schools recognized the educational impact of their diagnoses at significantly ($p < .001$) lower rates than those receiving services under an IEP (74%). The primary diagnosis cited for those whose educational impact was recognized was autism spectrum disorder (55%). The primary diagnosis cited for those whose educational impact was NOT recognized was mental health disorders including anxiety (44.44%). The primary diagnosis for those whose educational impact was PARTIALLY recognized was ADHD (56.99%). Why does this matter? Because receiving supports under the appropriate special education program (IEP vs. 504 Plan) has a relationship with positive educational outcomes and the ability to be assessed alongside a student's general education peers.

FINDING 1: THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM/PLAN A CHILD IS FOUND ELIGIBLE FOR IS CONNECTED TO SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.



Of parents report their school recognizes their child's diagnosis(es)



Of parents report their school recognizes the EDUCATIONAL IMPACT of their diagnosis(es)



WHY THIS MATTERS

If a student's disability is not fully recognized, they may not receive adequate educational support.

Although not explicitly stated in the IDEA, the IEP is intended to be the vehicle schools use to deliver FAPE in a manner that partners with parents. The IEP must be reviewed on an annual basis with the understanding it can be updated as frequently as needed.

In the case of highly mobile populations, a student's IEP varies with each move. Civilian special education students are typically able to remain in the same school district where they likely retain the same school administrators and related service providers. Only grade-level educators are possibly new to the student and the IEP Team. However, with each move, military students and families meet an entirely new school district, school, IEP team, service providers, and support system.

Qualitative findings provided by parents offered detailed explanations of the obstacles they face. Several parents described being asked by a new school system to produce additional documentation of their children's medical and educational histories only to find later that the school still did not provide the accommodations their children needed.

Although not the primary focus of this paper, we collected responses from general education teachers, special education teachers, school administrators, and related services professionals which may provide additional insights. These professionals were asked about the challenges they experienced related to educating military special education students. The most common response (47.6%) was the variation in special education services that were offered by the new school as compared to the child's previous school. Further, another 25.4% reported difficulty with adequately supporting transferred IEPs/504 Plans.

Finding 2

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"Every process takes 6-12 months into a 10-24-month tour. Schools allocate 45-min to one hour for IEP meetings, including eligibility and initial IEP meetings."

-2022 Survey Participant



IEP goals may not adequately support military students' long-term educational outcome goals.

The existence of long-term educational outcome goals is related to the family's familiarity with special education laws.

Finding 2

The Existence of Long-Term Educational Outcome Goals

Because frequent military family moves disrupt military students' education, we sought to understand if these families attempted to provide additional stability by establishing long-term educational outcome goals for their child(ren) ([Research Question 1](#)). Therefore, we asked special education families, "Does your family have long-term educational outcome goals you wish your child to achieve?"

The majority of survey participants (86.02%) indicated that they have outcome goals for their children. We then asked them to rank their goals. The number one answer was to have their child "live independently 'with meaningful employment' after graduation" (24.83%), followed by "achieving outcomes set by IEP/504 plans" (18.79%). We also asked if parents believed their child was on track to achieve their #1 outcome goal. Just over 45% believed their child was on track to achieve their #1 educational outcome goal.

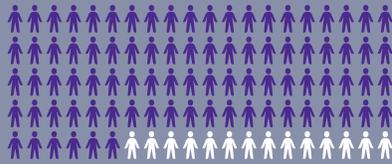
We also wanted to understand if parents believe their child's IEP/504 Plan was an appropriate vehicle to achieve these long-term educational outcome goals, thus providing stability throughout the highly mobile military lifestyle. We asked parents: "Did their IEP/504 plan for the 2021-2022 school year adequately support your family's educational outcome goal(s)? (For instance, if your goal is to have your child perform at grade level, did your IEP include measurements that helped them improve their test scores incrementally?)" ([Research Question 2](#)). Roughly 49% indicated their child's IEP/504 Plan supported their long-term educational outcome goals; 22.99% did not believe the IEP/504 Plan supported their goals; and 30.65% indicated they partially supported their goals.

FINDING 2A: IEP GOALS MAY NOT ADEQUATELY SUPPORT MILITARY STUDENTS' LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME GOALS.

Those who did not feel that their IEP goals adequately supported their long-term educational outcome goals were asked "Why do you believe they are not on track to achieve their educational outcome goal(s)?" The top answer cited was lack of services to support goal (24.21%), followed by lack of trained service providers (22.96%), staff shortages (16.35%), inadequate goals (10.69%), need more time to achieve IEP goal (9.12%), unrealistic goal (2.20%), I'm not sure (2.52%), and other (11.95%).

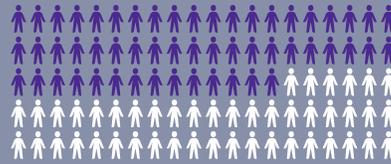
FINDING 2B: THE EXISTENCE OF LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME GOALS IS RELATED TO THE FAMILY'S FAMILIARITY WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION LAWS, NOT DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS, LIKE MILITARY RANK, LOCATION, OR RACE.

86%



of military special education families HAVE LONG-TERM EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME GOALS for their child.

54%



of military special education families report their child's IEP DID NOT SUPPORT THEIR OUTCOME GOALS



WHY THIS MATTERS
 If IEPs do not help our students achieve their outcomes, traditional special education systems may not work for military students.

Finding 2

It is important to note that the existence of long-term educational outcome goals did not have a direct relationship with other positive outcomes that could be captured by our survey. Therefore, we recommend additional study examining if setting long-term educational goals has an impact on long-term goal achievement.

There were only four variables related to the existence of long-term educational outcome goals that produced significant results:

- Being informed about special education topics,
- Filing a special education complaint,
- Receiving or not receiving services under an IEP or 504 Plan, and
- Having ever attended a DODEA school.

Most of these relationships can be attributed to a family’s experience with special education. For instance, establishing long-term educational outcome goals may be a byproduct of the process of formulating an IEP with SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals.

To determine how comfortable a family is with special education concepts and laws, we asked survey participants to rank their level of familiarity with eight different special education/EFMP-related services/concepts (e.g.: the difference between services and accommodations, the Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission, etc.). Families ranked their level of familiarity on a three-point Likert scale, choosing “not familiar,” “somewhat familiar,” or “very familiar.” Based on their responses, participants were given an overall score of being “informed” or “uninformed,” with average scores ranging from 1.00 to 3.00; 0.00 to 1.49 being “uninformed” and 1.50 to 3.00 being “informed.” We found that 91.3% of "informed" participants reported having a long-term educational outcome goal for their child, compared to 36.1% of “uninformed” participants who reported having a long-term educational goal ([Appendix Item B](#)).

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Finding 3

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There is no continuity for my children, every time we move, we start all over. Start all over fighting for services or accommodations with the school, start all over with doctors and therapists, start all over with tutors. It takes an enormous amount of time and effort to set all those things up.
- 2022 Survey Participant

Although the majority (63.16%) of military children (aged eight and older) participated in state-wide standardized testing, this number is lower than state participation rates and the federal alternate assessment guidelines.

Finding 3

Standardized Testing May Miss Military Special Ed Students

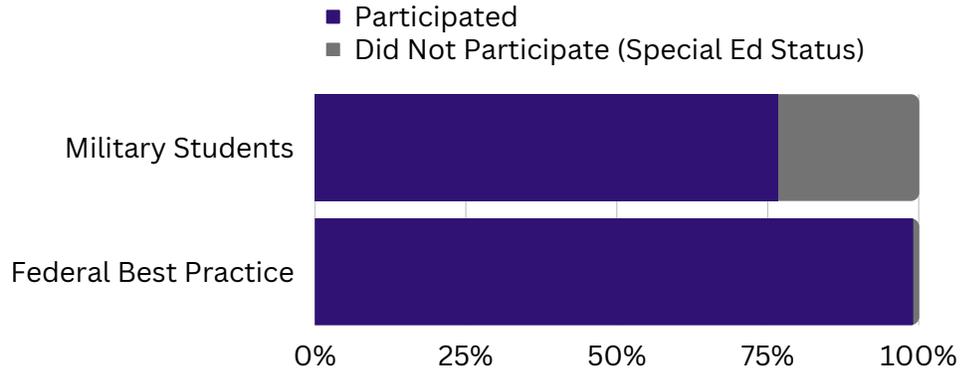
The “Military Student Identifier” (MSI) is a data point established with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015^[xxxiii] that requires reporting student testing scores based on the student’s military connection. The ESSA’s statement of purpose is to “provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.”^[xxxiv] Military students were identified as a vulnerable segment of the U.S. population due to the challenges they face, such as disrupted learning and social-emotional struggles as a result of frequent moves. This MSI data relies upon military-connected families to annually self-report military service directly to their schools. The purpose of the MSI is to “provide local educators with quality, actionable data concerning their military-connected students.”^[xxxv] Report cards detailing military-connected student outcomes are collected at the state level.^[xxxvi]

Current federal, state, and local report cards highlight student outcomes in a variety of subject areas. While data on other vulnerable populations are reported, covering gender, racial and economic-based gaps, military data is often omitted from state websites. Additionally, because the report cards are “non-regulatory,” states are not mandated to follow a specific reporting formula, making the data inconsistent. It is entirely possible, due to PCS rotations, that a single military student may never be included in reported data. However, even with these gaps, the standardized testing data collected on the vulnerable military student population could be used to measure and improve outcomes.

Standardized testing is a common educational outcome measurement tool, but because military students move on average every two to three years and states do not follow the same testing schedules,^[xxxvii] military students may miss standardized testing windows more frequently than their civilian counterparts. Students with significant cognitive disabilities may be offered alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS). The total number of students assessed using AA-AAAS cannot be greater than one percent (1%) of the total student population.^[xxxviii] Despite this restriction, special education researchers believe that participation in AA-AAAS may be a red flag. “Growth in the percentage of students assigned to AA-AAAS over time suggests that school staff are looking to these assessments as a way to avoid holding students with disabilities to the same performance standards as students without disabilities.”^[xxxix] ^[xl] A reason cited is to avoid having special education student test scores pulling down a district’s overall rating.

Standardized Testing Participation

23% of families indicated their child was not eligible to participate in standardized testing due to their child's special education status.



WHY THIS MATTERS

If students' participation is not tracked and reported, military special education students may be falling through the cracks.

Because of the lack of data collected on military special education standardized testing participation, we asked “Did your child participate in state-wide standardized testing during the 2021-2022 school year?” ([Research Question 3](#)). Nearly equal numbers of our survey participants reported that their students had (47.35%) and had not (47.65%) participated in standardized testing, and 5% were not sure if their child participated.

Reasons that they did not participate varied, with the most common answers indicating their child was not old enough for testing (36.42%), or that testing was not offered by the school at their grade level (22.54%). Most surprising was the third most common response, that 19.65% of those who did not participate in standardized testing cited they were “not eligible due to their education status.” Furthermore, when we examined standardized testing participation by special education eligibility (IEP, 504 plan, or neither), we learned that 6.47% of military families with IEPs are unsure if their children participated. Although the decision to assess students under alternate academic achievement standards must be documented in a student’s IEP as a requirement of IDEA,^[xli] it is unclear if their lack of participation is due to being offered alternate assessments.

When we removed responses from parents with children younger than eight years old (3rd grade is when most states are required to conduct standardized testing), 63.16% of students aged eight and older participated in standardized testing; 33.77% did not participate; and 3.07% did not know if their child participated in standardized testing. Families could choose from a list of reasons their child did not participate in state standardized testing. Responses include: Not eligible - special education status; Not offered by their school for their grade level; Not old enough/too old for testing; Homeschooling; Our school encouraged our family to “opt-out” of testing; Chose to opt-out; Attending a private school; and Moved in the middle of testing.

Finding 3

[Jump to Table of Contents](#)

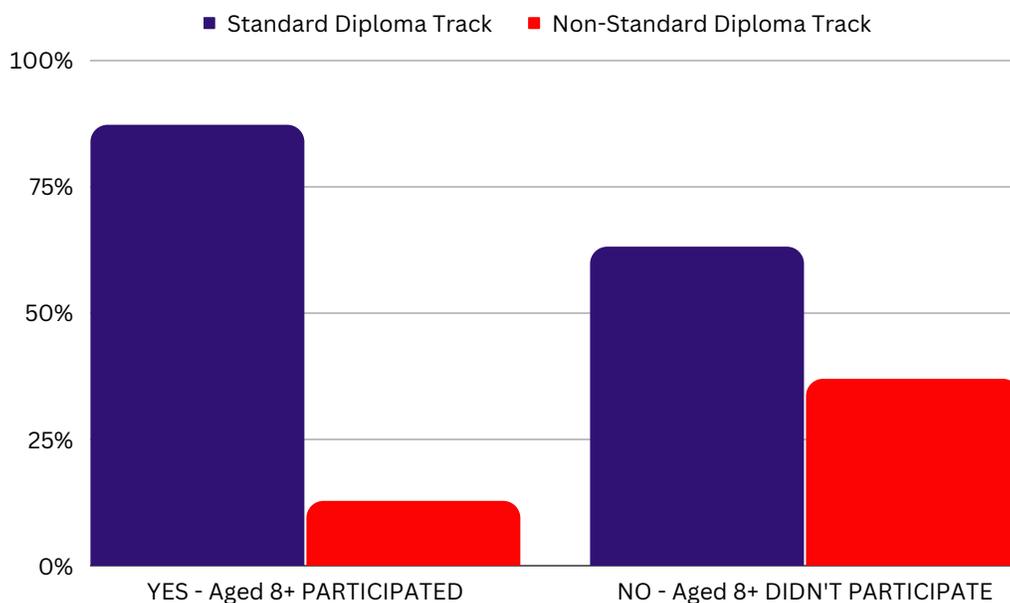
The most common response raised a red flag. Of all surveyed families whose child did not participate in testing, 23.8% indicated that this was due to their special education status, implying that their child may be offered an alternate assessment. This figure is far higher than the 1% maximum alternate assessment participation mandated by law[xliii].

FINDING 3: ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY (63.16%) OF MILITARY CHILDREN AGED EIGHT AND OLDER PARTICIPATED IN STATE-WIDE STANDARDIZED TESTING, THIS NUMBER IS LOWER THAN STATE PARTICIPATION RATES[XLIII] AND THE FEDERAL ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES.

It is unclear how military special education student outcomes compare to their civilian peers or if they are being offered alternate assessments at higher rates. More data are needed to determine if there is a relationship between high mobility, testing participation, and testing results. It is also important to note that according to the IDEA, participation in standardized testing may be a predictor for the type of diploma (or certificate of completion) a student is awarded upon completing high school,[xliv] a related outcome measurement.

Finding 3

Did your child participate in state-wide standardized testing during the 2021-2022 school year?



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Finding 4

"

"I could write a book on how day and night it is between different school districts. Some have been AMAZING, others are breaking laws and nobody is actually enforcing anything."

-2022 Survey Participant

Being on track to receive a “standard” high school diploma has a significant connection to many positive educational outcomes for military special education students.



Finding 4

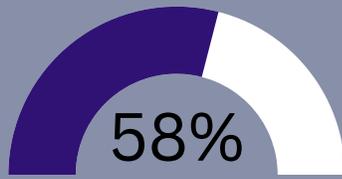
Graduating with a Standard High School Diploma & Outcomes

Another common metric used by school systems to measure general education student achievement and outcomes is graduation rates. Receiving a high school diploma or an equivalent GED is essential for students to transition to pursue higher education or enter the workforce to find meaningful and gainful employment post-graduation. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 73% of available jobs require a high school diploma or higher.[xlv] The Department of Defense has even more rigorous standards, with only .1% of enlisted personnel reporting not having a high school diploma or GED.[xlvi] The pursuit of a high school diploma is an essential step for both general and special education students to prepare for post-secondary educational opportunities[xlvii]. However, this outcome measure may not be as standardized for special education students who may not be on track to receive a standard high school diploma.

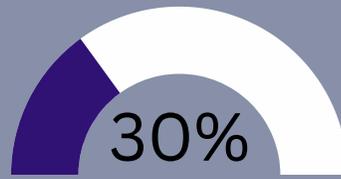
This is one reason that the United States Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services has issued guidance reminding State Education Agencies “the standards [for alternate assessments] must be clearly related to grade-level content” and these alternate assessments should only be granted to a “very small number of children with the most significant cognitive disabilities.”[xlvii] This alternate assessment path may be a parent’s first indication that their student is not on track to receive a standard high school diploma, and due to frequent moves, this may not be effectively communicated to parents or students. The intent of DOE’s guidance and IDEA law that mandates maximum participation in standardized testing and assessments[xlix] is to enable students enrolled in special education to “prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living”.[l]

Overall, 79.43% of survey participants indicated their child is on track to receive a standard high school diploma. Nationally, the 2019-2020 average graduation rate was 70.6%[li]. This rate captured the percentage of students with disabilities who graduated within four years with their original 9th-grade cohort who received a standard diploma. Survey participants whose children had an autism diagnosis (33%) were significantly more likely to report that their child was not on track to receive a standard diploma compared to those whose children did not have this diagnosis (5.9%), $p < .001$; $n = 204$. In addition to determining who might be more likely not to be on track to graduate with a standard diploma, we wanted to better understand how diploma status may impact other areas of a military student’s special education experience.

PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHO ARE ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE THEIR EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME GOALS



STANDARD DIPLOMA



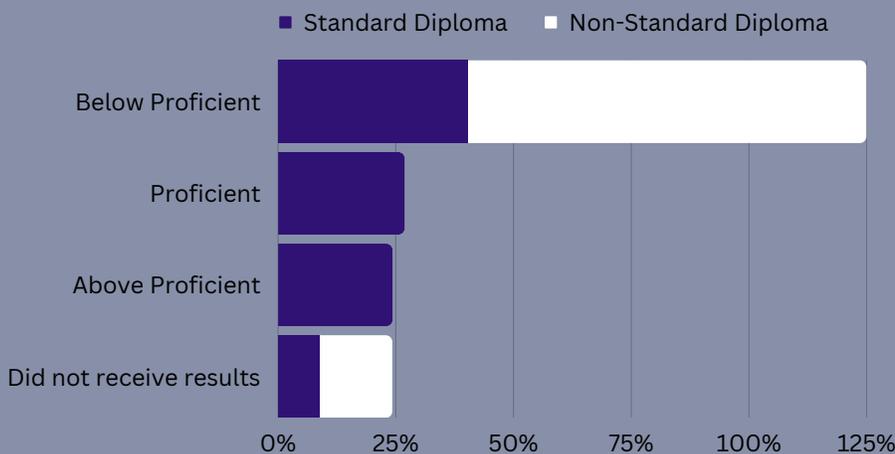
NON-STANDARD DIPLOMA

WHY THIS MATTERS

If IEPs do not help our students achieve their outcomes, traditional special education systems may not work for military students.

We asked families, “Do you believe your child is on track to achieve their #1 long-term educational outcome goal?” Although 45% responded their child was on track to achieve their outcome goal, this figure changed when we examined the differences based on diploma status. Roughly 58% of parents whose children were on track to receive a standard high school diploma reported they were on track to achieve their #1 long-term educational outcome goal; the same could not be said for students on a non-standard diploma track (30%). This was a significant finding ($p < .001$). We also found students who were on track to receive a standard diploma (86.3%) were significantly more likely to report being educated in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) alongside their general education peers, than those who were not on track to receive a standard diploma (69.9%); $p = .035/n = 209$. The IDEA states that students should be educated in the LRE “to the maximum extent possible” [lii].

FINDING 4: BEING ON TRACK TO RECEIVE A “STANDARD” HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA HAS A SIGNIFICANT CONNECTION TO MANY POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR MILITARY SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS.



Average Standardized Testing Scores by Diploma Status

Finding 5

”

“We will continue to serve. My attitude is that I will sacrifice my career desires to ensure my children get what they need when the school or Tricare can't help.” -
2022 Survey participant

Although the majority (78.1%) of parents & students express being stressed by the special education system, their experiences do not have a significant impact on their family’s desire to continue serving.



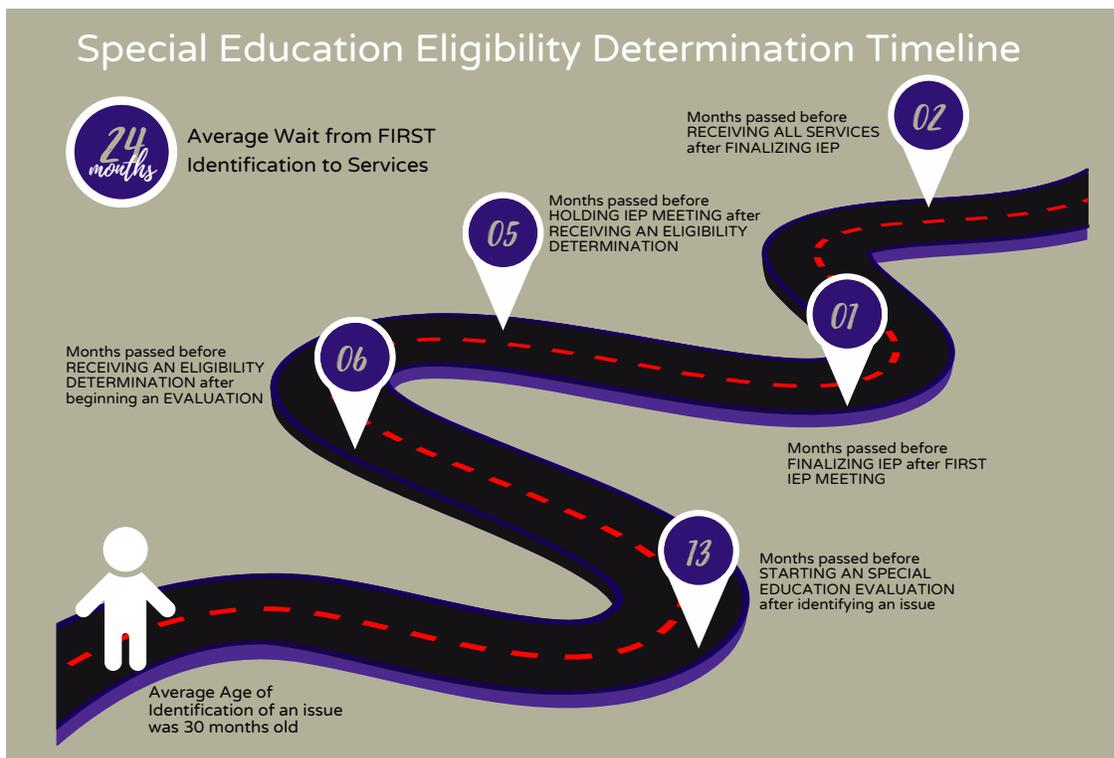
Finding 5

How Special Education & EFMP Impact Military Families

The special needs journey begins upon the suspicion or identification of a disability and/or the receipt of a diagnosis. Parents are at the helm of this journey from the start, with 57.59% reporting being the first to identify their child’s developmental or learning disability. After families receive a diagnosis, parents begin the process of determining eligibility for special education supports and services. This process can take significant time for military families. The average time that passed from first identification of an issue to the receipt of special education services was 23.83 months, roughly the same length of time reported by 2021 survey participants[liv]. In 2022, we broke down our timeline questions to better understand when delays may occur. We asked:

- How much time passed after receiving an eligibility determination and holding an initial IEP meeting?
- How much time passed after holding an initial IEP meeting before finalizing the IEP?
- How much time passed after finalizing the IEP and receiving all services outlined in the IEP?

In 2022 families reported experiencing longer waits between eligibility determination and receiving services, but not an overall longer wait. Because military special education family experiences vary, this difference is not unexpected.



65.93% of families reported experiencing a delay that amounted to a procedural timeline violation of IDEA.

After military students have finished waiting and begin receiving special education services, they can anticipate restarting this same cycle after every military move. The average number of moves survey participants reported their child had experienced was 3.23 (mean number of moves = 4.31). Nearly 34% of all survey participants reported that their child waited roughly 4.25 months for special education services after a military PCS move. Furthermore, 68% reported waiting an average of 4.72 months for medical services after their most recent PCS move. While not the subject of this paper, adults enrolled in EFMP also experienced significant wait times after PCS moves. The longest wait times of 6.17 months were reported by 78% of those with mental health diagnoses.

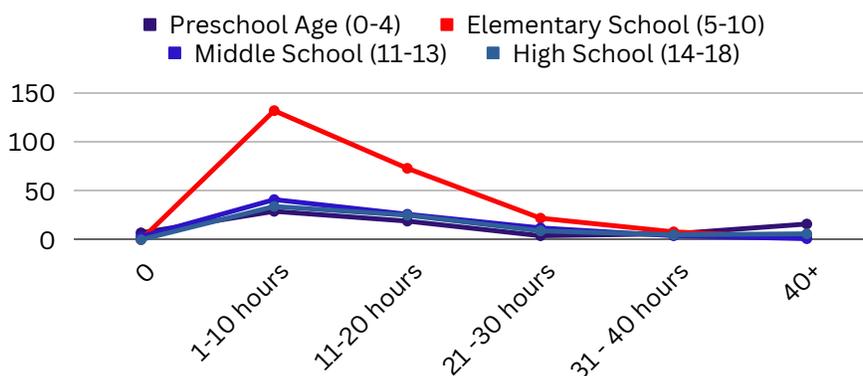
The Impact of EFMP Caregiving

Navigating the special education process is time-consuming, requiring educational caregivers to learn special education law, attend IEP meetings, communicate with school representatives, coordinate health care regulations with Tricare, and attend medical assessments and appointments.

To understand the amount of time parents spend caregiving, we asked the non-military parent “During the academic school year I spend roughly _____ hours per week assisting my child(ren) with special needs with their educational or medical needs (e.g., attending therapy, advocating at school, doctor visits, personal care, etc.).”

The average amount of time spent on caregiving was 16.9 hours per week. A total of 24.42% reported spending over 20 hours a week assisting their child with educational or medical needs (n=434). This time commitment may impact active-duty service members' readiness and strain military spouse schedules disproportionately during military deployments. These same spouses reported being out of the workforce with a total of 52.23% reporting they were not currently in the workforce. The primary reasons cited were “caring for my children’s educational needs” (22.17%), followed by “caring for my child’s medical needs” (18.77%), and “chose to be a stay-at-home parent” (15.37%). It is important to note that other “select all” options included common military spouse employment circumstances, “have to move too frequently”, “couldn’t maintain career progression due to frequent moves”, “no available jobs in my field”, and “rural locations, no employment options.” Therefore, EFMP/special education parents may not feel as though both parents being in the workforce is a realistic option due to the demands of their caregiving roles.

Time Spent Caregiving



Stress, Retention & Readiness

The impact special education has on military families is largely speculative. The stressors of the military lifestyle are widely studied, with mental health and stress putting a significant strain on both servicemembers and families. The special education system also has heavy demands on parents who must understand and enforce complex and variable state laws by negotiating with school districts on behalf of their children. Studies examining the cortisol levels of mothers serving as caregivers of children with autism spectrum disorder, the most common diagnosis cited by survey participants, relate the sustained stress experienced as biologically similar to that experienced by “combat soldiers, Holocaust survivors, and individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.”^[iv] This stress takes a toll.

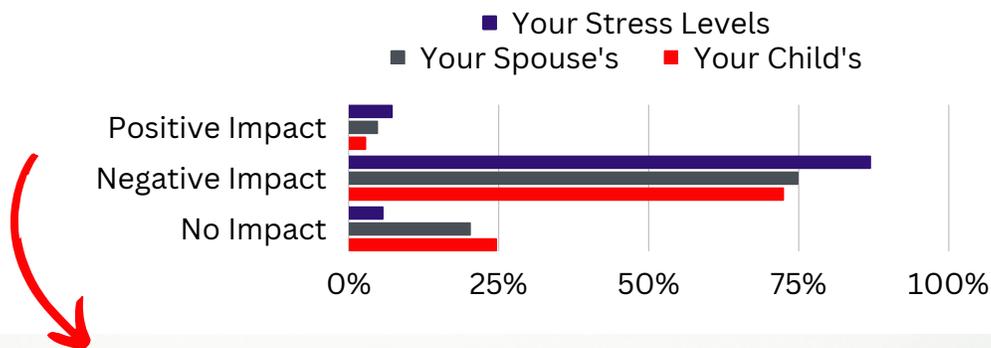
Because of this, we asked parents a series of questions to assess if their experiences with special education and EFMP impact their family’s (servicemember, spouse, and student - special education only) stress levels. We found that 93.25% of those who answered any of the stressor questions (n=317) indicated their experiences had a moderate to extremely negative impact on themselves, their spouse, and/or child. We then determined if the survey participant’s family unit was under stress due to their special education or EFMP status with stressed families being given a score of (1) and families who reported that special education/EFMP did not impact their stress levels were assigned a zero (0). We then ran tests to determine what aspects of their special education or EFMP experiences were connected to higher levels of reported stress.

We found that when a school district did not recognize a student’s diagnosis(es), 100% of those parents reported moderate to extreme stress (p=.033 / n=316). Stress levels for the other categories were not significantly lower, with 87.3% of those whose schools recognized their diagnosis or 96.7% whose school partially recognized their diagnosis. Stress levels were not much better for those whose schools did not recognize the EDUCATIONAL IMPACT of their diagnosis with stress being reported in those whose schools recognized (84.8%), did not recognize (96.6%), or partially recognized (97.5%) the impact (p=.004 / n=286).

Overall, the special education experience had a greater impact on the reported stress levels of military students and families than their experiences with EFMP. While special education caused more stress than the EFMP, with 78.1% reporting special education negatively impacted their family stress levels, it is important to note that the majority of survey participants indicated EFMP did not alleviate stress but rather amplified it. Nearly 65% reported the EFMP negatively impacted their stress levels. Because of the various sources of stress impacting military families, it is difficult to pinpoint a specific causal factor. However, military special education families are stressed, and the systems tasked with helping them and their children do not appear to be helping.

We wanted to understand how this stress impacted families and their propensity to continue serving in the armed forces. We asked currently serving families, both active-duty spouses and service members, “Considering your experience with __ (Special education / EFMP) __ how likely is your family to continue serving in the military?” For those who were considering their special education experience, roughly 34% reported being “likely” to continue serving in the military. Roughly 25% said they were “unlikely” to continue serving, 25% were “neutral” and 16% reported that it was “not applicable” to their decision to continue serving.

What type of impact has your experience navigating the Special Education System had on _____ stress levels?



WHY THIS MATTERS

Special education parents want to serve and need help to reduce the stresses caused by navigating the special education world in order to be able to do so.

The most common response provided by survey participants who were asked about how EFMP impacted their likelihood of continuing to serve, was “not applicable” with 27.54% of responses, followed by “likely” (25.13%) and “neutral” and “unlikely” both receiving 23.67%. Despite not finding a significant relationship between the stress families experience and their desire to serve does not mean that families do not struggle with balancing the military lifestyle and the demands of educational and medical caregiving.

Several parents reported that although they plan to continue to serve in the military, relocation poses a significant challenge to finding educational resources for children with special needs. Some military spouses report that they will curtail some of their career plans if necessary to procure the services their children need. Others report that their military service provides the secure employment they need to pay for additional services for their children not provided by the schools. Many describe the lack of continuity from one assignment to another and the subsequent consequences for children who experience a significant lack of services. They describe enormous efforts needed to “Start all over fighting for services or accommodations with the school, start all over with doctors and therapists, start all over with tutors. It takes an enormous amount of time and effort to set all those things up.” Although some parents expressed gratitude for excellent teachers who provided continuity for their children, most anticipated a military move would bring disruption ranging from a delay in receiving services to several unnecessary and even discriminatory obstacles, including requests for additional paperwork and denial of a student’s diagnosis.

FINDING 5: ALTHOUGH THE VAST MAJORITY (78.1%) OF MILITARY SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENTS AND STUDENTS EXPRESS BEING STRESSED BY THE SPECIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM, THEIR EXPERIENCES DO NOT HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THEIR FAMILY’S DESIRE TO CONTINUE SERVING ON ACTIVE DUTY.

Conclusion

Military parents report that their school districts may recognize their child’s diagnosis, but they do not always recognize the educational impact of their diagnosis. The result is a fundamental disagreement within the IEP Team. This disagreement can appear early in the process, during the school district’s initial IEP meeting, or later in the school year when services are established but the student is not properly progressing toward long-term educational goals. The lack of agreement can lead to an inaccurate assessment of needs and under-supporting special education students. If the fissure becomes too great, all members of the IEP team will feel the strain. However, military parents and students may feel this stress more acutely as they live with the perceived negative impacts on the student’s educational progress once they PCS; educators do not.

Furthermore, because the special education system relies upon a level of familiarity with special education law, parents may not always know their rights. Parents may not be aware that their child is not on track to receive a standard diploma, and by the time parents and high school students begin their IEP transition planning, it may be too late. Students in some restrictive placements, or who have not participated in standardized testing, are not likely on track to receive the credits necessary for graduation. Furthermore, our data show that not all military special education student outcomes are captured by standardized testing scores, making their outcomes even more uncertain.

Partners in PROMISE’s annual survey helped reveal answers to many questions about military special education student outcomes. More research is needed to better understand if and how existing special education laws protect military special education students.

Recommendations

to Help Improve the Outcomes of Military Special Education Students

These stories of military students in special education arm us with the data we need to help mitigate the complications presented by the military lifestyle. Because education is a collective community effort, we have formulated recommendations for those directly impacted by the military lifestyle and special education, as well as allies of both groups including parents, DOD leadership and programming, policymakers, school educators and administrators, the military family community, and our PIP Team.

For Parents

- Equip your child and yourself by being informed and organized. Being able to identify appropriate IEP goals and accommodations will enhance your ability to advocate and work with the IEP team to ultimately create an effective IEP that meets the unique needs of your child. (Findings [1](#), [2](#) & [4](#))
- Request an end-of-year IEP meeting annually to capture progress. Hold final IEP meeting before PCS moves. ([Finding 1](#))
- Ask your child's current teacher(s) to write a letter of introduction to their new school. The letter should describe your child, their strengths and weaknesses, and successful strategies of working with them to help the student access the curriculum. Provide your new school with an All About Me packet.
- Clearly share your family's long-term educational outcome goals with every new school and special education team. Parents should request to add their goals to the Parent Concerns section of the IEP or, in the case of students with 504 plans, request a letter outlining the goals be placed in the educational record. ([Finding 2](#))
- Regularly confirm with your current and any future school districts that your child is on track to receive a standard high school diploma. It should be the goal of every military child to graduate with a standard diploma. Although alternative diplomas and certificates exist for students with specific academic needs or who may have severe cognitive disabilities, all students should be pursuing a standard diploma track well before transition planning at age 16 to provide them with the greatest opportunity to pursue education and employment after high school, and to be independent, productive members of society. ([Finding 4](#))
- Find support to avoid educational caregiver burnout. The stress that a military family endures compounds when IEP team collaborations are strained, and disagreements occur. Bring a trusted friend or ask if the local installation has a SLO/EFMP case manager who can attend a meeting with you to help shoulder the stress and avoid the perceived power struggle. You are your child's best advocate. ([Finding 5](#))

For DOD/EFMP

Exceptional military families’ touchpoints frequently include medical providers and EFMP staff. Standardized procedures and training are essential for those professionals to identify and assist potential EFMP enrollees and special education families. Currently, families are identifying their child as having an exceptional need and data show civilian doctors’ rate of EFMP referral is lower than that of military doctors or parents. [lvi]

- Create training checklists highlighting key outcome milestones:
 - Kindergarten – Early identification and goal setting
 - 3rd grade – Is the child slated to participate in standardized testing?
 - Entering middle school – Is the child on track to receive a standard high school diploma?
- Aggregate and report MSI student outcome data on MilitaryOneSource so families can make informed decisions about what schools can best support their students.
- Support families by providing IEP advocates and special education training to create effective IEPs.
- Educate existing care providers (medical, EFMP, chaplains, mental health support, etc.) about the stressors facing military special education families.
- Provide EFMP and special education identification checklist for Tricare in- and out-of-network providers so families know whom to contact if they receive a diagnosis.

For State/Federal Policy Makers

- Consider allowing military-dependent children to maintain IEPs at a new duty station after a PCS for up to six months to add stability and give them confidence as they join a new IEP Team.
- Consider mirroring existing state legislation that considers military-connected family members a protected group similar to the protections currently extended to homeless students.[lvii][lviii]
- Make AA-AAAS data publicly available, adding an indicator if these students are military-connected.
- Amend ESSA to include an additional data point for military children in special education. Suggestion: Military Student Identifier in Special Education (MSI-SPED).

For Educators

- Identify and prioritize transferring military children in special education during registration.
- Highlight outcome milestones when meeting with military parents:
 - Kindergarten – Early identification and goal setting
 - 3rd grade – Is the student slated to participate in standardized testing?
 - Entering middle school – Is the student on track to receive a standard high school diploma?
- Consider the recommendations included in [this DOE letter](#)
- Research and implement your state’s [advanced enrollment laws](#). If none exist, enlist support for advanced enrollment legislation through your State Board of Education and Defense State Liaison Office.

For Partners in PROMISE

Survey participants indicate they are very in tune with what school resources are available, but are less aware of available DOD resources. Additionally, qualitative answers indicated that parents still think an IEP expires and will no longer be in effect after one year. This is not true, an IEP never expires. The IDEA states a child can only be removed from special education services when a parent withdraws their child from special education services in writing, or when a student is reevaluated and found ineligible by the IEP Team[[ix]]. Military families are still unfamiliar with Federal and state-level protections and policies.

- Equip families by educating them about the importance of obtaining a standard high school diploma, setting appropriate goals, and ensuring appropriate placement, where appropriate.
- Create resources that teach families how to educate themselves on topics like special education law and protections.

Demographics & Limitations

Survey participants constituted a representative sampling of the overall military population across all service branches. The majority of participants were enlisted personnel or the spouse/partner of an enlisted service member (51.05%), with the highest responses from E4-E6 (26.39%) and E7-E9 (24.31%). Mid-rank officers also responded in higher numbers with 37.50% of responses coming from O4-O6 and 6.94% from O1-O3 level officers. This phenomenon of lower-than-representative response rates from younger members of the military population has been studied by Miller et. al.[ix] and is common within military surveys. Participants were aged 21 - 25 (1.56%), 26 - 30 (5.84%), 31 - 35 (23.35%), 36 - 40 (32.30%), 41 - 45 (25.68%), 46 - 50 (8.17%), 51 - 55 (1.56%), 56 - 60 (1.17%) and 60+ (0.39%). This is in line with our previous year's findings and aligns with the ages of parents with children in special education.

Roughly 80% of survey participants identified as white or Caucasian, 5% as black/African American, and 8% as Hispanic or Latino origin. Ninety-four percent of participants identified as female, five percent 5% as male, and .6% were non-binary or intersex. Seventy-one percent of participants identified as a military spouse (active-duty, veteran, Reserve Component, National Guard, and/or surviving spouse), with 21% indicating they were a servicemember themselves (active duty, veteran, Reserve Component, National Guard). The majority (89.35%) were located within the Continental United States (CONUS) while 10.65% reside Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS). Service branch representation of the service branch size[xi]. Army-connected families responded at the highest rate, 36.25%, followed by 31.12% from the Navy, 24.17% from the Air Force, 4.23% from the Marine Corps, 1.5% from the Space Force, 1.2% from the Coast Guard and 1.5% from the Department of Defense.

The most surprising demographic captured by our 2022 survey was related to the gender of the special education students represented, with 66% of children identifying as male. Although this is not representative of the overall population, it is a figure that has been identified in special education research[xii].

The primary challenge to validity that was encountered was construct validity in the survey design. The primary focus of the design was to determine what aspects of the IEP may or may not advance military students' overall educational outcomes. However, because our survey instrument is a point-in-time survey and not a longitudinal study, it is largely based on the perceptions of survey participants and is not able to capture actual testing scores or actual goal achievement over time. Other validity limitations include the construct's predictive ability. While some patterns emerged, it is hard to tell if the findings are reliable because student outcomes vary greatly. External validity was limited by the lack of representative responses from enlisted service members. While enlisted families comprised the majority of responses, they did not mirror the 4:1 enlisted-to-officer ratio. This may have been related to the data collection strategy, which relied upon a snowball method of distribution which is the military family nonprofit standard. This distribution method opens the results to nonresponse bias as well as voluntary response bias. Additionally, surveys that combine qualitative and quantitative data collection are open to the introduction of processing errors during the data cleaning process as well as in the formation of the data collection instrument itself.

Appendix

Appendix Item A

Dependent Variable: IEP vs. 504 Plan vs. Neither

Variable	Chi Square	P Value	Significant?	N
Informed	12.767	0.002	Yes	300
IDEA Violation	0.47	0.791	No	316
Experienced 5+ moves	7.297	0.026	Yes	317
Filed a complaint	10.257	0.006	Yes	330
Least Restrictive Environment	13.518	0.009	Yes	341
Stressed	5.561	0.062	No	314
Recognizes Educational Impact	27.568	<.001	Yes	364
Participated in testing?	16.4	0.003	Yes	336
On track to achieve #1 Goal?	19.709	0.003	Yes	298
IEP Supports Goal	3.046	0.218	No	257

Informed - Those who did not have an IEP or 504 plan were significantly less likely to be informed about special education.

Experienced 5+ moves - Families whose children have 504 plans experienced more frequent moves than those with an IEP or who were not covered under either an IEP or 504 plan.

Filed a complaint - Families whose children with an IEP were more likely to file a complaint.

Least Restrictive Environment - Families whose children did not receive special education services reported that their children were not educated in the LRE or that they didn't know if their children were educated in the LRE at higher rates than anticipated.

Recognizes Educational Impact - Families whose children receive accommodations under a 504 plan or who did not receive services noted that their schools didn't recognize the educational impact of their diagnosis or only partially recognized this impact at higher rates than those with an IEP. The primary diagnosis cited for those whose educational impact was recognized was autism spectrum disorder. The primary diagnosis cited for those whose educational impact was NOT recognized was mental health disorders including anxiety. The primary diagnosis for those whose educational impact was PARTIALLY impacted was ADHD.

Participate in standardized testing? - 504 families were more likely to note that their child participated in standardized testing. Those who did not receive services were also less likely to participate in testing, possibly due to the age of their children as qualitative answers indicate that many may not have been old enough to participate.

On track to achieve #1 Goal? - IEP families were less likely to report that their children were on track. While those who did not receive services reported their child was on track at higher rates than anticipated.

Appendix Item B

Dependent Variable: Existence of Long-Term Educational Outcome Goals

Variable	Chi Square	P Value	Significant?	N
Informed	9.17	0.002	Yes	304
School filed complaint?	1.77	0.18	No	334
Family filed complaint?	4.86	0.03	Yes	334
LRE	5.56	0.062	No	345
IDEA Violation	0.399	0.527	No	309
IEP vs. 504 vs. Neither	6.995	0.03	Yes	368
Overall School Type	14.772	0.064	No	369
Special Ed - Private	0.367	0.544	No	372
Special Ed - Public	0.192	0.661	No	372
Public School	2.963	0.085	No	372
Private	0.506	0.477	No	372
Charter	0.209	0.648	No	372
Homeschool	0.079	0.778	No	372
DODEA	6.23	0.013	Yes	372

Informed - Those who were informed were more likely to report having an educational outcome goal for their child.

Filed a complaint? - Those who filed were significantly more likely to have an educational outcome goal for their child.

IEP vs. 504 vs. Neither - Families with a student on an IEP were significantly more likely to report having a long-term educational goal for their child.

DODEA - DODEA schools were the only type of school with a significant difference. If a family had ever attended a DODEA school, they were more likely to have a long-term educational goal for their child.

Appendix Item C

Because the MSI data is not readily available, we wanted to understand what, if anything, had a significant relationship with student achievement. While some of the findings below are significant, the Partners in PROMISE research team does not believe these data provide true predictive value as there are too many variables to fully explain the findings. These data should be viewed as preliminary findings requiring additional data to draw valid conclusions about what factors may contribute to military special education students' standardized testing outcomes.

My student is on track to receive a standard diploma upon graduation from high school:			
Reading Scores	Yes	No	Anticipated Breakdown
Below Basic	24.70%	69.20%	30.00%
At Basic	15.50%	15.40%	15.50%
Proficient	27.80%	0%	24.50%
Advanced	23.70%	0%	20.90%
Didn't Receive Results	8.20%	15.40%	9.10%
Math	Yes	No	Anticipated Breakdown
Below Basic	26.80%	53.80%	30%
At Basic	13.40%	30.80%	15.50%
Proficient	25.80%	0%	22.70%
Advanced	24.70%	0%	21.80%
Didn't Receive Results	9.30%	15.40%	10%

Did their IEP/504 Plan for the 2021-2022 school year adequately support your family's educational outcome goal(s)?				
Reading Scores	Yes	No	Partially	Anticipated Breakdown
Below Basic	37%	50%	30.60%	38.70%
At Basic	13%	11.80%	16.70%	13.70%
Proficient	31.50%	2.90%	16.70%	19.40%
Advanced	13%	11.80%	27.80%	16.90%
Didn't Receive Results	5.60%	23.50%	8.30%	11.30%
Math	Yes	No	Partially	Anticipated Breakdown
Below Basic	27.80%	38.20%	36.10%	33.10%
At Basic	16.70%	17.60%	13.90%	16.10%
Proficient	31.50%	8.80%	19.40%	21.80%
Advanced	16.70%	11.80%	22.20%	16.90%
Didn't Receive Results	7.40%	23.50%	8.30%	12.10%

During the 2021-2022 school year, my child received special education services under:				
Reading Scores	IEP	504 Plan	Neither	Anticipated Breakdown
Below Basic	44.10%	13.30%	6.30%	34.40%
At Basic	11.70%	20%	18.80%	14%
Proficient	17.10%	30%	25.00%	20.40%
Advanced	14.40%	26.70%	37.50%	19.10%
Didn't Receive Results	12.60%	10%	12.50%	12.10%
Math	IEP	504 Plan	Neither	Anticipated Breakdown
Below Basic	33.30%	30%	12.50%	30.60%
At Basic	16.20%	10%	18.80%	15.30%
Proficient	21.60%	26.70%	18.80%	22.30%
Advanced	16.20%	23.30%	37.50%	19.70%
Didn't Receive Results	12.60%	10%	12.50%	12.10%

Appendix Item D

Dependent Variable - Experienced Increased Stress Due to Special Education/EFMP

Variable	Chi Square	P Value	Significant?	N
Recognizing Educational Impact of Diagnosis	11.01	0.004	Yes	286
Recognizing Diagnosis	6.84	0.033	Yes	316
Autism	1.77	0.18	No	294
ADHD	6.72	0.01	Yes	294
Dyslexia	3.77	0.052	Yes	294
Mental Health	4.79	0.29	Yes	294
Speech	0.093	0.761	No	294
Filed a complaint	1.58	0.21	No	317
W/o Special Ed after PCS	5.79	0.016	Yes	212
Informed	3.41	0.07	No	304
IDEA Violation	10.21	0.001	Yes	267
Goal Alignment	7.84	0.02	Yes	271

Dependent Variable - Experienced Stress Related to EFMP

Stressed by Special Ed	13.85	<.001	Yes	312
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Recognizing Educational Impact of Diagnosis - Families whose schools did not recognize their diagnosis or who partially recognized their diagnosis were significantly more likely to report stress.

Recognizing Diagnosis - Those who reported that their child's school did not recognize their child's diagnosis had statistically higher than anticipated levels of stress.

ADHD - Parents with children who are diagnosed with ADHD cited higher levels of stress than those who did not cite this disorder.

Went without Special Ed Services after PCS - Those who went without services were more likely to report stress.

IDEA Violation - Those who did not experience an IDEA procedural violation (e.g.: timeline delays during initial screening) reported lower levels of stress than anticipated.

IEP Team Disagreement - Families who agreed with their schools reported lower levels of stress than anticipated. Those who disagreed with their school had higher levels of stress than anticipated.

Appendix Item E

Dependent Variable: Existence of Long-Term Educational Outcome Goals

Variable	Chi Square	P Value	Significant?	N
Informed	9.17	0.002	Yes	304
School filed complaint?	1.77	0.18	No	334
Family filed complaint?	4.86	0.03	Yes	334
LRE	5.56	0.062	No	345
IDEA Violation	0.399	0.527	No	309
IEP vs. 504 vs. Neither	6.995	0.03	Yes	368
Overall School Type	14.772	0.064	No	369
Special Ed - Private	0.367	0.544	No	372
Special Ed - Public	0.192	0.661	No	372
Public School	2.963	0.085	No	372
Private	0.506	0.477	No	372
Charter	0.209	0.648	No	372
Homeschool	0.079	0.778	No	372
DODEA	6.23	0.013	Yes	372

Informed - Those who were informed were more likely to report having an educational outcome goal for their child.

Filed a complaint? - Those who filed were significantly more likely to have an educational outcome goal for their child.

IEP vs. 504 vs. Neither - Families with a student on an IEP were significantly more likely to report having a long-term educational goal for their child.

DODEA - DODEA schools were the only type of school with a significant difference. If a family had ever attended a DODEA school, they were more likely to have a long-term educational goal for their child.

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