



## Why does my kid's school need to know we are military?

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Every year my kid's school asks me – multiple times – if we are military. It doesn't matter where we live, they always want to know ... during registration, enrollment, and mid-semester! Why do they care? Why does it matter? Should I tell them? For the longest time, I answered "No," because I figured it was none of their business. It turns out I was WRONG! There are at least three reasons why schools ask for military affiliation.

First, teachers want to know. Most are genuinely concerned about their students. They want to understand the children, so they can support them better. Military students are considered "highly mobile," meaning they move every few years. According to the [Department of Defense Education Activity](#), "The average military family will move six to nine times during a school career. That's...three times more frequently than non-military families." Teachers who know some of their students in their class are military kids can help ease their transition into the new school.

Second is money. President Truman established the Federal Impact Aid program in 1950 to reimburse school districts for the lost revenue and additional costs associated with nontaxable Federal properties, like a base or a VA facility. According to the [National Association of Federally Impacted Schools](#), most public school districts are funded primarily through local taxes and fees. When you live in military housing, shop at the Exchange, or fill up your gas tank on base, you aren't paying local taxes or fees, reducing funding for the community's schools. The Federal Impact Aid program offsets this lost revenue, but school districts can only apply if enough families disclose their military affiliation, each fall.

Third is the Military Student Identifier. The Federal Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 established the MSI. The ESSA sought to improve academic achievement for vulnerable sub-populations. Military children are included because of their frequent moves. Most military families have their own tale of how PCSing has disrupted their children's learning. Your child started studying French? Great, except the new school only offers Spanish. Your child excels in math? Congratulations, but the new school does not offer accelerated math courses for their grade level. Your child struggles with a learning disability and you finally have a good support system in place? Get ready to start all over again, because you are moving to a new state with different policies and a new school with different programs.

Frequent moves can also present military children with emotional challenges. How often has your child been the "new kid"? Sometimes little things, like finding kids to eat lunch with, can be an issue. Some military children thrive on being the "new student", but others struggle with it. The MSI may sound abstract, but it can help monitor the performance of military students as a group, without identifying them individually. When problems or trends appear for "MSI students," schools or the installation can establish programs designed just for military kids. But this is only possible if enough military families disclose their military affiliation.

Disclosing your military affiliation to your children's school will not solve all of your family's educational challenges, but it will help. The school and teachers will know more about their students and be better prepared to address their needs. Additional money will be available from Federal Impact Aid to help local schools support your children's education. Finally, more accurate implementation of the MSI will help identify and address challenges faced specifically by military students. So, next time your children's school asks "Are you affiliated with the military?" respond "Yes, I am!" every time.

Lt. Col. Karvwnaris is the lead action officer for the K-12 Public Education Working Group at Air University. The working group focuses on improving options for military-affiliated children in the region surrounding Maxwell Air Force Base and Gunter Annex, Alabama. The working group has found success in engaging local school districts and expanding options for military-affiliated children.

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