

# Building Capacity in Military-Connected Schools

## HONORING OUR VETERANS – VETERANS DAY and HAPPY BIRTHDAY MARINES!!!

### Project Interns Receive Training on FOCUS Program

About 50 Master's level students from USC and San Diego State University (SDSU) gathered in Rancho Bernardo last month to learn how to bring elements of the FOCUS program to the schools where they are doing their internships.

**FOCUS**, which stands for Families OverComing Under Stress, is an evidence-based resiliency training program for military children and families. Participants learn practical skills to cope with the challenges of deployment and reintegration when the deployed family member comes back home. FOCUS is currently offered only on base and is available to a limited number of families. But this new "School-Based, Skill-Building" version of FOCUS will allow some of the program's most effective tools to reach more military students in the *Building Capacity* consortium. This model will also be evaluated to determine its impact in the school setting.

A central component of FOCUS is the "feeling thermometer," a visual tool that helps children identify their emotions. The green sections represent positive, happy emotions. The yellow, orange and red areas represent increasing levels of fear, anger or stress that children are experiencing.

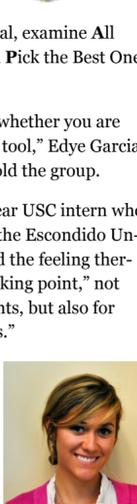
"Everything we do with FOCUS in the field can always relate to the thermometer," said Lori Serratto, a resiliency trainer based at Naval Station San Diego.

Another tool the interns learned about is the acronym **SNAP**, which gives families four steps for solving problems: **S**tate the



**P**roblem, **N**ame the Goal, examine **A**ll Possible Solutions, and **P**ick the Best One and Try it Out.

During the two-day training, interns broke into small groups with the trainers to learn and practice the specific methods that they will use in schools. Another exercise was a ring toss game, shown above, which can be used as a group warm-up activity but also illustrates to students that the closer they get to their goal, the easier it is to reach. "These are definitely tools we can implement," said Andrea Gomez (pictured right), a student at SDSU. "They are applicable to solving any kind of problem."



"Whether you are 4 or whether you are 94, this is a very useful tool," Edye Garcia, a FOCUS supervisor, told the group.

#### In this Issue:

\*FOCUS Training Held for Interns in San Diego

\*Spotlight on: Bill Billingsley, Principal of San Onofre School

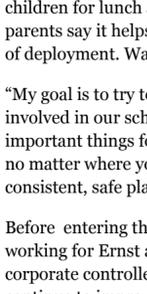
\*Featured Resource: Tutor.com

\*Dr. Astor Speaks at DODEA Meeting in Santa Monica

\*NEW! Guidebook Preview: The Welcome Packet from Virginia Beach Schools

\*What the Interstate Compact Says About: Course Placement

\*New Stories Added to the Website



### Building Capacity Guidebook Preview: Welcome Packet

As part of the *Building Capacity* project, we are creating a series of guidebooks focused on what schools can do to create environments that are more welcoming and supportive of military students. In this space, we will begin featuring excerpts from the guides in hopes of providing some suggestions that will be useful to school teachers, principals or others working in military-connected schools.



In this first preview, we highlight the Virginia Beach Public Schools' **Welcome Packet** for military families. The district serves roughly 72,000 students—20 percent of which are from military families. To make these families feel more connected to their schools and to point them to local resources, the district created a Welcome Packet, which includes a letter from the superintendent and vital information regarding registration, school locations, and curriculum.

The district intends to make sure all school counselors use the packet as a reference when they welcome new families. The packet is considered a Promising Partnership Practice by the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University.

### Spotlight On: Bill Billingsley

Bill Billingsley is the principal of San Onofre School, part of the Fallbrook Union Elementary School District. The K-8 school is located on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and serves a diverse population of military students.

Billingsley works to make sure the school's military parents always feel welcome at the school. One of the events the school hosts is a Valentine's Day lunch in which parents join their children for lunch at the school. While it's a simple gesture, parents say it helps them feel supported, especially during times of deployment. Watch this [video](#) of the event.

"My goal is to try to keep the parents and the community as involved in our school community as I possibly can," Billingsley says. "One of the most important things for military students is consistency. So no matter what is going on at home, no matter where you are in the deployment cycle, school is your bedrock. That is your consistent, safe place."

Before entering the education field as an elementary school teacher, Billingsley was a CPA, working for Ernst and Young in both Pittsburgh and San Diego. He also worked as a corporate controller for a division of Toyota. Now in his third year as principal, he wants to continue to improve educational opportunities for military-connected children.

The *Building Capacity* project, he says, has brought in social work interns to improve conditions for learning. Carolina Miranda, this year's USC intern, "has immersed herself in the San Onofre School military community and quickly established herself as a reliable, hard-working asset to our students, teachers and parents."



### Featured Resource: Tutor.com

Frequently changing schools can sometimes result in military students falling behind in school or missing important content in certain subjects. [Tutor.com](#) is an online site that provides free tutoring for children from military families. The service is funded by the Department of Defense's Morale, Welfare and Recreation Library Program.



Tutors are available 24 hours a day and are qualified to provide homework assistance at all grade levels, from elementary school through introductory college courses.

Tutoring is available in 16 academic subjects, including algebra, chemistry, calculus and physics.

The service is interactive, allowing students and tutors to work together in a secure virtual "classroom," draw on a shared whiteboard, upload files and browse websites.

Services are also available for adult learners for those returning to school or changing jobs.

Visit the website to watch a video about this resource or to sign up.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

The **Family Readiness Express** is scheduled for another school visit before the holiday break. (See our [August issue](#) for information on this remarkable vehicle.)

Dec. 1-2: Chula Vista Elementary School District (specific locations to be announced)

Two **free training** opportunities for MSWs and school district personnel remain. (Check the [August issue](#) for more detailed information on this workshop.)

#### Threat Assessment:

Dec. 5: San Diego Academic Center in Rancho Bernardo

Dec. 6: Oceanside High School

For questions, email Diana Pineda at [dianapin@usc.edu](mailto:dianapin@usc.edu).

### Dr. Astor Speaks at DODEA Conference

Dr. Ron Astor, *Building Capacity* principal investigator, gathered with the newest Department of Defense Building Activity grantees last month to share what he has learned so far about working with public schools to support military children.

It's important, he said, for schools to be sharing the practices and programs they are using in order to build greater awareness about the needs of military students and what schools can do to create more welcoming environments.

"This is not Las Vegas. What happens here should not stay here," he told the attendees at the conference, which was held at the Sheraton Delfina in Santa Monica.

In his presentation, he highlighted major components of the project, including the training of MSW students, results of the California Healthy Kids Survey, and some of the events schools have held to honor and welcome military parents.

Also on the panel were James Calaway, the science curriculum director from the Lawton Public Schools in Oklahoma, where military students are invited to take a summer fishing trip every year, and Mary Beth Stapleton, the director of grants for the Hartford Public Schools in Maryland. She discussed her district's practice of identifying military students as part of the system-wide database. This has allowed both district and local school leaders to better understand how military students are achieving, she said.



### What the Interstate Compact Says About: Course Placement

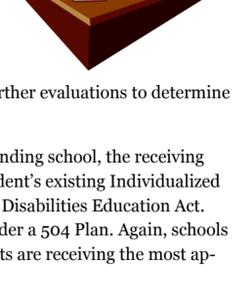
When military students move, they should be able to pick up in their education exactly where they left off at their previous school. The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children provides guidance to schools regarding course placement, and states that receiving schools should honor whatever course in which the student was enrolled in the sending school.

This includes honors classes, International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement courses, and vocational, technical and career pathways courses. Assessments taken in the previous school to determine placement should also be honored, according to the Compact.

These same principals should be followed in regards to gifted and talented programs and English-as-a-Second Language programs. Receiving schools, however, can conduct further evaluations to determine whether the student is properly placed.

If a student was receiving special education services in the sending school, the receiving school should provide comparable services, based on the student's existing Individualized Education Program, in compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The same applies for students requiring accommodations under a 504 Plan. Again, schools can give follow-up assessments to determine whether students are receiving the most appropriate services.

For more information on specific topics addressed by the Compact, visit [Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission](#).



### News and Resources on Our Website

We regularly feature important articles on schools and programs serving military students on our website. Check the [site](#) often to stay informed.

-This [story](#) from Camp Pendleton PATCH features Operation Bigs, the mentoring initiative of Big Brothers Big Sisters that is designed specifically for military children.

-The *Washington Post* featured a new [study](#) from Washington state showing that when parents are deployed in the military, their children—both boys and girls—are more than twice as likely to carry a weapon, join a gang or be involved in fights.

Questions, comments or to unsubscribe, E-mail us at [raastor@usc.edu](mailto:raastor@usc.edu)