Building Capacity in Military-Connected Schools

Building Capacity to Create Highly Supportive Military-Connected School Districts
Annual Report-Year 2

Building Capacity to Create Highly Supportive Military-Connected School Districts
Department of Defense Education Activity, Grant #HE1254-10-1-0041
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The Building Capacity project is a consortium involving the University of Southern California and eight military-connected school districts in San Diego and Riverside counties:

- Bonsall Union School District, Superintendent Justin Cunningham
- Chula Vista Elementary School District, Superintendent Francisco Escobedo
- Escondido Union High School District, Superintendent Edward Nelson
- Escondido Union School District, Superintendent Jennifer Walters
- Fallbrook Union Elementary School District, Superintendent Candace Singh
- Fallbrook Union High School District, Superintendent Dale Mitchell
- Oceanside Unified School District, Superintendent Larry Perondi
- Temecula Valley Unified School District, Superintendent Tim Ritter

The views expressed in this report are those of the Building Capacity research team based at the University of Southern California and do not necessarily represent the views of the Consortium school districts and schools, collaborating agencies, and the Department of Defense Education Activity.

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This Year 2 report was written by Linda Jacobson, editor and writer for the “Building Capacity” project in close collaboration with the PI, CO-PI’s and the Building Capacity USC Team. Two USC MSW students interning in military-connected schools created the flag featured in the cover photo.
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Executive Summary

Building Capacity to Create Highly Supportive Military-Connected School Districts (Building Capacity) is a partnership between the University of Southern California and eight civilian school districts in San Diego and Riverside counties. The project is housed in the Hamovitch Center for Science in the Human Services within the School of Social Work at USC.

The Consortium of eight districts, supported by a four-year, $7.6 million grant from the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), seeks to improve school environments for children from military families. The grant (#HE1254-10-1-0041) is part of DoDEA’s initiative to better support military children attending public schools.

The districts in the Consortium are Bonsall Union, Chula Vista Elementary, Escondido Union Elementary, Escondido Union High, Fallbrook Union Elementary, Fallbrook Union High, Oceanside Unified, and Temecula Valley Unified. Within these districts are a total of 140 schools serving roughly 117,000 students. Overall, about 10 percent of the students in these districts are military children. But the proportion of military children ranges from less than 10 percent at some schools to nearly 100 percent at schools located on the military installation, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have created unprecedented burdens on military families through long and repeated deployments. With the Iraq war now over and the gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, hundreds of thousands of soldiers are returning home, which can create additional challenges as they reintegrate into their families, transition into civilian careers, or prepare for new assignments in the military.
The Building Capacity Consortium works to raise awareness among public school educators regarding the educational and social-emotional needs of military children as well as to equip educators and other practitioners working in schools with the knowledge and resources necessary to support these students. Multiple school changes, parents on deployment and high stress levels in the home are a few of the obstacles that can stand in the way of military students being successful in school. But many of these students are also examples of strength, resilience and persistence—qualities that allow them to overcome these barriers.

This report on Year 2 of Building Capacity highlights our ongoing efforts to train educators recognize military students’ unique needs and foster their positive attributes. We have included major events and accomplishments, which demonstrate that the influence of our project has extended well beyond the eight Consortium districts. We also call attention to some of the lessons we are learning along the way.

This executive summary provides a brief overview of the multiple components of our project.

Graduate-Level Interns in Military-Connected Schools

One of Building Capacity’s primary missions is to train future school social workers, counselors and school psychologists to recognize the unique educational challenges facing military children and to give them the skills to respond to these students’ needs in a public school setting. This is accomplished by placing graduate-level students as interns in our Consortium schools.
During Year 2, we responded to the school districts’ requests for more interns by partnering with the School of Social Work and the College of Education’s Department of Counseling and School Psychology at San Diego State University (SDSU).

With the additional interns, we were able to provide the schools with approximately 20,000 hours of service, doubling the contact our students had with Consortium schools and students in Year 1. The internship experience, combined with the model of supervision we have developed, provides other universities with a strong template for designing training programs for school professionals.

**Building Evidence**

This section focuses our increased efforts to evaluate the services and programs that have been provided to the schools as part of our project. The evaluations highlighted Partners at Learning, a school-based Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS) program, the Family Readiness Express, and Learning Together. Overall, the programs have been successful at providing additional academic and social-emotional support to students in military-connected schools, and in giving our interns additional skills to contribute to the schools where they are placed.

This section also explains our efforts to further expand these particular programs. These were chosen specifically because they were already effective but also demonstrated potential to reach many more students and to address the particular needs of military-connected children.
This section of the report also discusses further explorations related to the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), which is administered by the California Department of Education (CDE) in each school every other year. It was given during the first year of our project. While the survey was not given in schools during Year 2, the results from Spring 2011 were a central focus of our conversations and work with interns, school officials and other partners in the Consortium. The survey data allow professionals to make informed decisions about the needs of military students in their schools and choose appropriate programs. The results were delivered to each district and school, reflecting their specific results. School officials and interns attending seminars on topics such as bullying, school safety and threat assessment were also able to view their unique results as part of these workshops.

**Building Awareness**

A significant accomplishment in Year 2 was the completion and publication of our four guidebooks for educators and parents. The books were co-published by Teachers College Press at Columbia University and the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). The books are a compilation of effective strategies that schools can use to create more military-friendly environments and support students through school changes, parental deployments and other stressful periods. Many of the ideas are drawn directly from the schools in our Consortium. Individual books were created for teachers, principals, pupil personnel and parents because of the belief that each group plays a specific role in supporting military students.

The books have been well received and endorsed by leading experts. These include Mary M. Keller, the president and CEO of MCEC, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher
Education, the Navy School Liaison Officers, William G. Tierney, a professor of higher education at USC as well as current president of the American Educational Research Association, and Dorothy L. Espelage, a professor of child development at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. We intend to monitor and conduct an evaluation of how the books will be used over the remaining years of the Building Capacity project.

In addition to publishing the books, we continued in Year 2 to use a variety of methods to communicate what is happening in our Consortium schools as well as to inform a range of audiences of the issues related to serving military children in public schools. These audiences include community organizations, faculty at USC, other university training programs, policymakers, the scientific community, teachers, parents, school administrators, and community and military organizations.

Our monthly newsletter remains our primary vehicle for highlighting developments in our project, tracking important news stories and announcing upcoming local events our Consortium partners might find of interest. Other components of our communication strategy include face-to-face meetings, phone calls, e-mails, our website, a series of YouTube videos that serve as companions to the guidebooks, social media, training workshops and opinion articles.

**Scaling Up**

Many of our plans for further expansion of programs such as the school-based FOCUS program, PAL and Learning Together are noted in the Building Evidence section. However, there are also additional efforts underway to bring more services and resources to our military-connected schools and to have our model serve as an example to other universities and school districts.
In this section, we also talk about additional grant projects and proposals that are related to Building Capacity.

**Working Toward Sustainability**

During Year 2, we began to focus on the types of changes that will need to occur in our university, in our partner universities and in our Consortium school districts in order for the accomplishments brought about through Building Capacity to be sustained once the grant expires. It is important for the Consortium districts and schools to hire school social workers, counselors, psychologists, or other student support staff if the progress that has occurred in our project is to continue. Ensuring that military culture continues to be integrated into university training programs is another aspect of sustainability. We believe it is necessary for future school professionals to learn about the needs of military students as well as effective strategies for supporting these students so they will go into their careers with this awareness. We are beginning to see these developments take place and we will look for additional opportunities in Years 3 and 4.

**Publications**

Year 2 was an extremely productive year in terms of writing, publishing and presenting work from our project. Building Capacity is releasing papers while the project is still unfolding.

In addition to once again highlighting the completion of our guidebooks, this section focuses on the numerous intellectual products—such as academic articles, conference presentations and
commentaries—that have been published during Year 2, as well as the articles that are in progress.

These products contribute to science and educational practice, while also serving as ongoing records of what is being accomplished in the Consortium schools as a result of the grant.

**State and National Policy Efforts**

One goal of Building Capacity has always been to influence policymakers and education officials in both California and at the national level to adopt practices that create more military-friendly public schools. Our work attracted attention from the White House this year with a visit from Dr. Jill Biden, the wife of Vice President Joe Biden and a leader of the Joining Forces effort along with First Lady Michelle Obama. We have also had ongoing interaction with DoDEA, members of Congress, and officials with the U.S. Departments of Education and Veterans Affairs, giving us additional opportunities to present lessons learned from our project and push for policies that can improve educational experiences for all military students in public schools.

Our project also partnered with the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) to organize and host the California Public Engagement, an event that draws together representatives from across seven sectors in society to draft action plans for supporting the education of military children. The seven sectors represented were: business, community leaders, education, faith-based groups, health services, service providers, and service clubs and organizations.
Appendix

In the appendix following the report, we provide greater detail on the extensive collection of intellectual products that have been completed or were in progress during Year 2. In addition, our evaluation team has prepared a separate technical report, which includes both quantitative and qualitative findings on the various components in our project.
Graduate-Level Students in Military-Connected Schools

Following our first year, it became quite apparent through face-to-face meetings as well as through our data collection efforts that the internship aspect of our project is extremely popular among the principals of our Consortium schools. In response to the numerous requests for more interns following Year 1, we worked to increase the number of students assigned to schools by expanding outside of USC to SDSU.

In Year 2, a total of 53 interns were placed in the eight districts. Thirty-five were MSW students from USC and six were MSW students from SDSU. The school counseling and school psychology programs at SDSU also placed a total of 12 interns. First-year MSW students were in the schools two days a week and second-year students spent three days a week in the schools during the academic year.

Involving graduate students from SDSU in school counseling and school psychology provided the Consortium schools with interns having different, but complementary skills. Many school districts also already have a staff member who could supervise these new students. This made the expansion sustainable since there were no supervision costs for these students. This increases the chances that the districts will continue to use interns to support students in their schools when the grant funds are no longer available.

More interns also meant that some schools—particularly those with high needs or high percentages of military students—were able to have two interns, allowing schools to serve even more faculty, students, and families.
Following on the success of the first year, the interns continued to work on an individual basis with students, with groups of students, to present at staff training sessions, and to coordinate resources on school grounds. They also designed creative programs and events to recognize military families and support them through school transitions, deployments and other stressful periods.

We again used Qualtrics, a customizable online survey tool similar to Survey Monkey, to gather data on how many students, staff and parents were engaged by these interns and how many hours were devoted to each of the different activities and areas of professional practice.

*Student Activity*

Survey responses showed that they worked close to 14,700 hours, but we consider this an underestimate considering not all of the interns responded to the survey. In addition, school counseling students at SDSU did not start their internships until Spring 2012. In total, we estimate the number of hours, based on the hours they were required to be in their placements, to be closer to 20,000. This is double the 10,000 hours spent in the schools during Year 1. Together, over Years 1 and 2, graduate student hours are approaching 30,000 hours.

Below we provide more detail on the work of our interns in the schools. Table 1 provides a comparison between Years 1 and 2 of the number of hours our interns spent in contact with students, families, and other groups, as well as the types of professional services they provided.
Table 1: Number of hours spent engaged in professional practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>Total Number of Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meet with Individual Students</td>
<td>5272</td>
<td>7745</td>
<td>13017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with Student Groups</td>
<td>1785</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>3627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Behavioral Assessment</td>
<td>919</td>
<td>1582</td>
<td>2501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Development</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>1392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with Families</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Meetings</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>729</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and Conducting School Events</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Service Training</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>657</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP and Special Education Meetings</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHKS-Related Activities</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with Groups of Families</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Visits</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>9909</td>
<td>14697</td>
<td>24606</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intern activities, as shown in Table 1, ranged from attending to the needs of individual students and families to providing in-service staff training, conducting home visits and facilitating student groups.

Most of the interns’ time was dedicated to working with individual students, followed by working with groups, conducting social and behavioral assessments and home visits. By far, students’ academic struggles occupied most of the interns’ time, as seen in Table 2, below. The interns also focused on issues of attendance and truancy, school climate and connectedness.
Table 2: Interns’ Areas of Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>2010-2011 Hours</th>
<th>2011-2012 Hours</th>
<th>Total Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Struggles</td>
<td>1043</td>
<td>2993</td>
<td>4036</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>866</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Supports</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>1065</td>
<td>1617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/Truancy</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>1408</td>
<td>1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Connectedness/Climate</td>
<td>442</td>
<td>1143</td>
<td>1585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Issues</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>647</td>
<td>1035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspension/Expulsion</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Supports</td>
<td>349</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>1020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative School Programs</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>1274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After School Supports</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Abuse/Neglect</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTSD/Depression</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/Diversity Education</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SED or EI Related</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination/Prejudice</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Use Related</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

School Administrators Feedback

Feedback on interns’ performance was also gathered from principals and other school-level administrators. Overall, their comments on having the interns in their schools were positive in regards to working with students, integrating into the school and affecting the school climate in a positive way.

The vast majority of the administrators told us that based on their experiences with having interns working in their schools, they would be very interested in having interns in the future.
Over 78 percent expressed an interest in social work interns, more than 82 percent said they wanted school counseling interns, and more than 72 percent said they would be interested in having school psychology interns.

An analysis of the administrators’ comments revealed several themes, such as interns offering support to more students, assisting the school staff, and improving connections between the school and the family.

Some of the comments gathered from the administrators through Qualtrics included:

• “I think that having an intern provides the school with the ability to reach more students through the counseling groups.”

• “[The intern] was a wonderful resource for our students and teachers.”

• “[The intern] was hands on, willing to initiate and support the students in military families.”

While the survey responses were overwhelmingly positive, a small number of administrators also expressed concerns, such as wishing the interns could spend more time in the schools, and requesting more clarity regarding the role of the interns in the schools.

*The Supervisory Structure*

To support them in their placements, our interns are assigned preceptors, who are school staff members that the graduate students with integrating into the school community, getting referrals for counseling and assessing the needs of the school. The preceptors’ duties include
orienting the interns to school policies, communicating with the external field instructor (EFI) and being available to assist the interns.

The EFI is the clinical supervisor of the interns and a seasoned masters-level social worker. The EFI provides 2.5 hours of clinical supervision per week for each intern at the school site and completes two field evaluations per year. The EFI also reviews weekly notes on cases with interns and assists them with practical skills and other competencies.

We also have gathered feedback from the preceptors to get a better sense of how the interns are performing in their schools. First, we provided the supervisors with training at the beginning of Year 2 so they could understand their role and ask any questions about school social work in general. The preceptors rated the training high and chose the option “to a large extent” for statements such as whether the session “motivated me to share my knowledge about the program with others” and “was relevant to my professional needs.”

We have also compared the interns’ perceptions of their work with those of their external field instructors. Overall, the instructors rated the interns’ competencies quite high. The skills assessed include areas such as: “Assesses the school climate as it relates to military students and their families” and “Demonstrates the ability to critically appraise the impact of the school social environment on the overall well-being of military students and their families.” The supervisors saw significant growth in the interns’ skills and professionalism as the year progressed.

In their self-assessment, the interns tended to rate themselves just slightly lower than did the field instructors. Of those who felt they could assess the quality of their own work, almost 60
percent said they were satisfied or very satisfied with how they worked with groups of students. They were less satisfied in the areas such as in-service training, planning and conducting school events and working with groups of families.

Examples of Interns’ Work

In addition to using the Qualtrics instrument for evaluating the students’ impact and experiences, we also continued to gather many accounts from interns, principals and USC staff in San Diego about how the university interns benefitted the schools they worked in as well as military students specifically.

At one school, for example, an intern led the development of a “newcomer’s garden,” which was used as part of a four-session program to support new students entering a military-connected school. At the completion of the four sessions, students were able to plant a flower in the garden as a symbol of their growth and connection to the school. This initiative was featured in one of the videos our project has created in collaboration with Command Media, a nonprofit organization that teaches wounded warriors how to create short documentaries using the latest digital technology. (http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/friendship-garden.html)

Another intern worked with school staff to organize a Military Child Appreciation Assembly as part of April’s Month of the Military Child. Activities surrounding the event included a student essay contest. At a third school, an MSW intern created a program in which military students in the school’s “duty patrol” welcome new students, give them tours of the building and serve as
peer mentors during the incoming students’ first few days of school. The effort was featured in our newsletter. ([http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/BC%20Newsletter%20April-2012.pdf](http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/BC%20Newsletter%20April-2012.pdf))

There were many more inspiring stories captured and later shared with other schools, in videos, and in our guides. Collecting examples of programs developed by our interns and school staff is particularly important since most of the interventions are inexpensive and are something that any school could implement without complex planning or costs. Educators and the general public are often more moved and motivated to adopt practices if they can see or hear about a real place that has implemented that program successfully.

*Reflections and Lessons Learned*

By working with SDSU, we learned that we could share our experiences and what has worked for us, but that every university has its own structure and will integrate this graduate training program in its own way. For instance, supervision structures are different between universities and university departments, and multiple formats may exist within the same district and even with the same schools. This variability may cause confusion sometimes and more mutual learning is needed to accommodate the differences.

The internship component of our program, however, has provided a template for universities to follow in their master’s level programs in school social work, school counseling and school psychology.
Building Evidence

The CHKS was not administered in our Consortium schools during 2012, because it is only given every other year. It was administered during 2011, in the first year of our project, with a newly created Military-Connected School Module, which, for the first time, allowed the responses of military-connected students to be compared to those of non-military students. A particular development regarding the CHKS that occurred in Year 2 is worth highlighting, however.

In the spring of 2012, CDE and WestEd, which administers the CHKS, took the next step beyond making the Military-Connected School Module available to schools as a supplement. A question was added to the core survey, which now asks all students whether they have a father, mother or caretaker currently in the military. This addition allows schools throughout California, and the state as a whole, to have better information on the proportion of their students who are military dependents and how their needs and experiences might differ from non-military students.

Using the Data

It’s important to mention that even though the CHKS was not administered in Year 2, the results from the previous year were used extensively in our work with the interns, local principals and district leaders. At all our workshops, which will be further discussed in the Building Awareness section, attendees were presented with data on their individual school and district. Whenever a topic was discussed—whether, for example, it was bullying, depression or drug use—the attendees could examine the information gathered from their own school.
Having this critical information available has helped school and district officials reach consensus on where to focus their efforts and to determine which services might be lacking in their schools.

It is also important for researchers, policymakers, and educators—both connected with our project as well as across the state and nation—to identify trends over time in areas such as school climate, academic achievement and transition issues. That is why our research team is also deeply involved in creating a large-scale, statewide database that includes the CHKS data and school-level information from the CDE. The CDE data include variables such as academic achievement, socioeconomic status and other school demographics.

This rich database will also allow researchers and educators to better understand how a supportive school climate can influence a school’s academic performance as well as how transition can affect both school climate and student achievement. The longitudinal nature of the database will assist researchers and educators in understanding whether there are increases or decreases over time in positive school climate, academic performance and student social and behavior outcomes. This knowledge will be useful in understanding the contexts of military-connected schools and schools in general throughout California. This also lays a foundation for including military-connected students as a subgroup in No Child Left Behind or similar accountability systems in the future.

*Evaluating Our Impact*

In Year 2, we also dramatically increased our efforts to evaluate the impact of the various training opportunities and intervention programs that have been requested and implemented
in the districts. We were instrumental in identifying the need for these services, providing resources and then helping to implement these programs. These evaluations allow us to continue to tailor workshops and adapt programs and services to specifically meet the needs of our interns, school district personnel and military children and parents.

It is important to evaluate these activities for a few reasons. First, we are encouraging universities to see military children as a diversity group in our K-12 schools so that future professionals will be more competent and proficient in meeting the needs and of military children and their families. Documenting the effectiveness of intervention programs and services designed for this group is necessary so that universities both regionally and across the country can have models to follow. Below, we describe the programs we evaluated and summarize the findings of the evaluations.

*Partners at Learning*

**Partners at Learning** (PAL): A service-learning program at University of California San Diego (UCSD), PAL trains undergraduate students to work as tutors and mentors for under-served students in pre-K through 12th grade. The college students also earn course credit. We were interested in connecting PAL with our Consortium schools because military students are sometimes in need of academic assistance due to moving between schools. UCSD is also in an ideal position to focus on the needs of military families since it is located in a region with several military installations. In partnership with USC, UCSD began offering PAL participants a course on military culture so they could better understand the challenges military students are facing.
In the 2011-2012 school year, 18 PAL tutors provided tutoring services in six Consortium schools, with most of them working directly with military-connected students. The students had a variety of academic interests at UCSD. The majors represented were political science, psychology, economics, ethnic studies, sociology, biology, theatre, environmental studies, linguistics, international studies, history and visual arts. In general, the students said they had a positive experience and gained an awareness of the issues affecting military children. The tutors said the experience led to improvement in their own communication, interpersonal and critical thinking skills. And most of the tutors said they saw improvements in their students’ math skills, reading, writing and in their level of motivation toward school.

As part of PAL, the tutors keep journals on their experiences working in the schools. Many of their entries focused on their deeper awareness of the needs of military children, their desire to pursue careers in education and their feelings of being welcomed by the school.

One tutor wrote: "When I first came to the school, I was just a UCSD PAL student. On Thursday I left the school as ‘Mr. D,’ as a part of the school family and [with] a new appreciation towards the challenges that military-connected students face."

PAL tutors also complete final projects as part of the course. One tutor created a Deployment Board—an
enlarged map of the world that allowed students to tack up photos of themselves and their deployed parents. Other projects included making postcards for deployed parents and writing poems. One of our Command Media videos features PAL students discussing their work in the schools. (http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/partners-at-learning-pal-tutoring-and-mentoring-program.html)

Finally, the evaluation showed that the teachers hosting the PAL tutors thought that discipline improved among most or all of their students. Approximately half of the host teachers saw improvements in academic performance and attendance.

UCSD began in Year 2 to adapt its PAL service-learning program to focus on the academic and social needs of military children by adding a separate class on this topic. But with this approach, only the undergraduate students who took that class would gain the knowledge they needed to support military children. While this class was a good first step—and will continue to be offered—UCSD is now revamping its course for all PAL students to include an emphasis on the educational challenges facing military children. This means that UCSD will potentially have up to 500 undergraduate tutors and mentors in Year 3 who recognize the unique circumstances of military children. This figure also includes undergraduate students from the arts, sciences, humanities, and professional schools. PAL also serves as a model to other university service-learning programs in that it is recognizing military children as a diversity group in schools.

Working with UCSD, we also began the process of designing a randomized control study of the PAL program. This proposal will be submitted to the U.S. Department of Education and would
examine the impact of the program on both the mentors and the students they are mentoring. This proposal is also part of our efforts to test promising practices so they can be adopted on a broader scale.

**FOCUS**

**School-Based FOCUS:** FOCUS, which stands for Families OverComing Under Stress, was developed is based at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and provides research-based resiliency training to military families. In our Year 1 report, we discussed our interest in making the program available in a modified way to children in a school setting. Previously, FOCUS was only available on military bases and to a limited numbers of families and students. By working with the developers of the training, we arranged for our interns and other school district personnel to receive training on a new school-based, skill-building version of the FOCUS program. This model could be replicated in all military-connected schools.

In a two-day training session—our interns learned how to help children cope with the challenges of deployment and reintegration when a deployed family member returns home. During the 2011-2012 school year, 26 interns used the modified version of the program in the schools where they were placed. Most of the students started FOCUS groups in their schools. Our evaluation showed most of the interns did see improvements in emotional regulation and more willingness among students to discuss their feelings and show support to their peers.
A few interns, however, did note several challenges related to starting FOCUS groups, finding time in the school schedule for group sessions, identifying which students were military-connected, and obtaining parental permission for the students to participate.

Still, the interns found that the program had a positive impact on their students, was easy to teach, and would benefit a wide range of students—in each school. FOCUS was also the subject of one of our Command Media videos. ([http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/families-overcoming-under-stress-focus.html](http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/families-overcoming-under-stress-focus.html)). Table 3 below displays how the interns felt that FOCUS benefitted the students. The highest percentages of interns responded that the students they worked with demonstrated some or significant progress in developing coping skills and improved emotional regulation.

Table 3: Interns’ assessment of how FOCUS program benefits students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Very Little</th>
<th>Some Progress</th>
<th>Significant Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved emotional regulation</td>
<td>0 (.0)</td>
<td>5 (22.7)</td>
<td>12 (54.5)</td>
<td>5 (22.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced anxiety</td>
<td>1 (4.5)</td>
<td>9 (40.9)</td>
<td>8 (36.4)</td>
<td>4 (18.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved social relationships</td>
<td>2 (9.1)</td>
<td>6 (27.3)</td>
<td>9 (40.9)</td>
<td>5 (22.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased hope</td>
<td>0 (.0)</td>
<td>8 (36.4)</td>
<td>11 (50.0)</td>
<td>3 (13.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased academic outcomes</td>
<td>7 (31.8)</td>
<td>8 (36.4)</td>
<td>5 (22.7)</td>
<td>2 (9.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved coping skills</td>
<td>0 (.0)</td>
<td>6 (27.3)</td>
<td>14 (63.6)</td>
<td>2 (9.1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interns did express that they wished they had received the FOCUS training earlier in the school year so they could begin using those strategies right away. So at the beginning of Year 3, we shifted the training several weeks earlier.

We also believe the FOCUS program can benefit students on a school-wide basis. Working with the FOCUS staff at the UCLA, we have submitted a proposal for a U.S. Department of Education grant that would evaluate the impact of the School-Based FOCUS model in the Chula Vista Elementary School District, one of our Consortium districts. The randomized control study would be conducted in six schools in the district and would examine the impact of the intervention on social, emotional and academic outcomes among military-connected children, as well on the overall climate of the schools.

*Family Readiness Express*

**The Family Readiness Express** (FRE), operated by the U.S. Navy’s Fleet and Family Support Centers, is a one-of-a-kind RV that provides counseling, employment, housing and other resources to military families. The vehicle used to stop only at military family housing developments throughout San Diego. During our first year, we worked with the staff to schedule visits to schools in our consortium, with the idea that scheduling stops at schools provides another way for families to access the services and raises awareness among teachers and other school staff about the needs of military children. Again, this approach shifts the service from being available only to a limited number of families to benefitting an entire school
community. Not every family can make time to visit resource centers in their community, but families interact with their children’s schools on a daily basis.

During Year 2, the FRE visited four schools and often stayed for a couple of days to provide tours and resources to students, school staff members and parents. In all, the FRE was on site at schools for a total of 7.5 days. Coordinating the visits, considering the school schedules, as well as those of Building Capacity and FRE staff, did pose some challenges, however.

Services provided by the FRE staff included resume-writing workshops for parents and one-on-one resume consultation. In all, roughly 950 visitors toured the FRE during this round of visits. Our evaluation of the FRE visits showed that there was significant interest in the resources from school staff. Representatives from other organizations, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Exceptional Family Member Program, also stopped by the schools during the FRE visits to provide additional resources.

The school administrators and staff in our Consortium have enthusiastically received the FRE vehicle. By the beginning of Year 3, we had several requests from schools for the vehicle and visits were already scheduled.

We learned that it makes sense to schedule the FRE visits in connection with other school events. Our evaluation also recommends that we do more to promote the FRE visits within the community in order to make other military parents aware that it will be in their area—even if their children don’t attend that particular school. While this depends on whether the schools are willing to open the FRE visits to parents from other schools, this change could allow the FRE to provide services and information to many more parents. We also learned that the visits are
more successful if the FRE staff is enthusiastic about bringing the vehicle to schools and connecting with military children.

**Learning Together**

**Learning Together**: Based on a program that originated in Israel and has been in use for decades there, Learning Together trains students to tutor struggling peers who are two grade levels below them. But instead of being the top achievers in their class, the tutors are typically those who are below proficient and might even exhibit behavior problems in the classroom. The concept is that in teaching material to younger students, the skills of the older tutors improve along with those of the younger tutees.

During the 2011-12 school year, Fallbrook Elementary School District administrators, with a sub-grant from the Consortium, asked San Onofre School to pilot the program. The math version was used with 5th grade tutors and 3rd grade tutees during the spring. There is also a reading version of the program. While Learning Together can work in any school,

Principal Julie Hong and Assistant Principal Christie Kay said they believe the program is well suited to military-connected students because it helps them form stronger relationships with peers and take on responsibility and a sense of community toward their school—qualities
that might not be very strong in students who change schools frequently.

Our preliminary evaluation showed that even with the short time frame, there was enough evidence “to suggest that the school could move to the next step and implement a program that will include more students and last longer.”

After a short, but successful pilot phase, the Fallbrook Elementary School District is expanding the Learning Together peer-tutoring program to additional schools. In Year 3, the program will be used at San Onofre School, Mary Fay Pendleton School—both on Camp Pendleton—Potter Junior High and possibly one or more elementary school sites. At San Onofre, for example, the program is also shifting so that middle school students will be the tutors, with the idea that students in this age group are most in need of developing a sense of responsibility and greater connections toward their school.

Meeting Schools’ Needs

We also used Qualtrics to collect specific responses from the school leaders on which programs and practices they believe to be most effective, as well as their ideas for how to expand our work. By far, the administrators were most interested in students receiving academic tutoring through the PAL program. Others expressed interest in having a school safety and psychological first aid workshop and training in the school-based version of FOCUS. Their responses are included in Table 4.
Table 4: Interest of Respondents in Programs and Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Description</th>
<th>1 Not at all</th>
<th>2 To a little extent</th>
<th>3 To some extent</th>
<th>4 To a large extent</th>
<th>5 Not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Academic tutoring for students (PAL program offered by UCSD)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. School-Based FOCUS training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Parent- PTA summit and conference</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. School safety and psychological first aid workshop</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A threat assessment seminar</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 'Resource Vans'- Mobile resource centers for military students and families</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = Number of respondents; % = Percentage of respondents.
Building Awareness

We continued in Year 2 to refine and expand the various ways we communicate with members of our Consortium, additional partners, community organizations, faculty at USC and other universities and policymakers. The many audiences we reach include other university training programs, the scientific community, teachers, parents, school administrators, and community and military organizations.

Our primary communication strategy is having face-to-face meetings with members of our Consortium, as well as with other researchers, education officials and policymakers. Frequent e-mails and phone calls also help us keep connected with those interested in our project. We also maintain a variety of other methods, described here.

Newsletter

Our newsletter, published from August through May, is one of our most successful means of communicating with all of the audiences mentioned above. It is a vehicle for sharing best practices being used in the schools, communicating with the White House about model programs and creating interest in the scientific community about issues surrounding military children. It also contributes to a virtual sense of community among our Consortium districts and other partners.

Throughout the second year, we used our newsletter to share stories of our interns’ work, introduce readers to key individuals connected to our project and announce upcoming events focusing on military children and families. We published a total of 11 issues, which included a
special edition in October 2011, featuring the visit of the FRE vehicle to a school in the Oceanside district.

During the second year, we also shifted to using a web-based program for creating and delivering the newsletter. This allows last-minute changes or additions to be made to the document from anywhere and gives us the ability to make sure the newsletters are being received. A PDF version of the newsletter is also uploaded to our website and available for printing copies.

Our growing mailing list now has over 1,300 e-mail addresses. Our database allows us to organize the e-mail addresses by different categories, such as interns, consultants, superintendents and other partners, and to quickly send specific messages with important announcements or relevant resources.

**Website**

Our website ([http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/](http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/)) is a tool for communicating our projects and accomplishments, pointing readers to relevant news about military students, and maintaining a chronicle of our work. The website continued to evolve throughout Year 2 to make the site easier for visitors to navigate and to keep the material as up to date as possible.

The categories on the site were reorganized to make it clearer for visitors to distinguish between our work—publications, presentations and activities—and outside programs and resources for families and educators. We also added a “Media Room” category for press releases, photos and any news articles that reference our project.
For much of the year, the opening text on the homepage provided highlights of our work with other university partners. Then, in the summer of 2012, we prominently displayed our four guidebooks, with links to ordering information.

*Guidebooks and Videos*

Again, one of the highlights of Year 2 was the completion and publication of our four guidebooks, co-published by Teachers College Press at Columbia University and the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). We received several endorsements from prominent researchers and key organizations including the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), the Navy school liaison officers and MCEC President Mary Keller.

All of the royalties from the sale of the books are being donated to military children’s educational causes. Our project is distributing 5,000 free copies to administrators, pupil personnel staff, teachers and families throughout the Consortium. We have always considered these guides—which feature the best known practices for supporting military children—to be an intervention on their own, and we have begun to measure the impact of the books among the professionals and parents involved in our project. (More on this in Next Steps.) The release of the books also attracted attention from Time.com. A Q&A featuring the three primary authors appeared online a few weeks after the release.

[http://nation.time.com/2012/10/18/building-better-schools-for-troops-kids/]
As mentioned, we have also invested in the creation of videos to complement our books. The videos were created by Command Media, a nonprofit organization that teaches wounded warriors how to create short documentaries using the latest digital technology. As our video library has grown, it has become even more of a visual demonstration of the practices that are described and encouraged in our guidebooks. These videos feature projects in our schools that are improving school climate for military students, tell viewers about some of the challenges that military children face in public schools and describe specific strategies that the interns and others in the schools have used to create a more military-friendly environment. They are strong examples of what our project is trying to accomplish. Our intention is for the videos to be used not just for sharing information but also for training purposes along with the guides. These allow future teachers, pupil personnel and others to hear directly from the parents and school staff members who see military children and families as important members of the school community.

Scene from “Friendship Garden” video
Command Media Videos

“Children of the Deployed”

“Connections Corner-Dewey”
http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/connection-corners-dewey.html

“Friendship Garden”
http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/friendship-garden.html

“San Onofre-Valentine’s Day”
http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/valentines-day--bring-you-parent-to-lunch-event.html

“Jefferson-Recognizing the Military Student”
http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/jefferson-recognizing-the-military-student.html

“Temecula Military Appreciation Day Celebration”
http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/temecula-military-appreciation-day-celebration.html

“Partners at Learning”
http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/partners-at-learning-pal-tutoring-and-mentoring-program.html

“Families OverComing Under Stress”
http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/families-overcoming-under-stress-focus.html

“Eagle’s Nest”
http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/command-media-videos/eagles-nest.html
**Social Media**

We increased our efforts in Year 2 to communicate about our project through our Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/pages/Building-Capacity-in-Military-Connected-Schools/) and Twitter (twitter.com/USC_BuildingCap) pages, especially in regard to the release of the guidebooks. Our newsletters also automatically link to these social media tools.

In another development, we now use Tumblr (http://buildingcapacityusc.tumblr.com) to archive the news stories we post on our homepage. A link to the Tumblr archive, which provides additional storage, is available directly from our website.

**Workshops**

Held locally, the workshops are one way to have face-to-face interaction with the members of our Consortium. As Year 2 began, we wanted to ensure that both our interns and personnel in our Consortium schools would be equipped with accurate information about student needs in their schools. The workshops presented strategies for preventing violence and bullying among students and helping to build their resilience. These workshops, attended by almost 400 school officials, staff members and interns, ensure that the interns are aware of the issues they might be working on in the schools. They also help to raise awareness and skills among school staff to ensure long-term sustainability.

We held three regional school safety workshops featuring Dr. Ron Astor, who leads the *Building Capacity* project, and Dr. Marleen Wong, a co-principal investigator on the project. As
mentioned earlier, teams from the schools were able to examine school safety data based on the results of the 2011 CHKS and discuss ways to address the issues raised by the survey.

The sessions were widely attended and attendees said the information was helpful and informative. Randel Gibson, then the director of student services and special education for the Oceanside district, was quoted in our newsletter, saying, the “in-depth research data presented gave site teams a more comprehensive understanding of risk factors.”

(http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/BC%20Newsletter%20October-2011.pdf)

A second series of workshops held in the fall of Year 2 featured J. Kevin Cameron, an expert on traumatic stress from the Canadian Center for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response. His sessions focused on violence risk assessment, which combines school shooting prevention with the practice of general risk assessment relating to other forms of violence. Again, the attendees were able to examine the data on their individual schools. Our evaluations indicate that these workshops were received very positively and participants felt that it helped them in their efforts to prevent serious safety issues.

At the beginning of Year 3, Cameron returned to the San Diego Academic Center for a more intensive session, following his introductory presentation in Year 2. Again, this is in response to requests from our principals, demonstrating how important it is to continually gather feedback from them on the needs in their schools.
Op-Eds

Op-Eds are an avenue for attracting national attention to important policy issues. As we did in the first year, we were again able to place commentaries in the Huffington Post on issues related to military children. The first one focused on the need for Congress to address issues affecting military children in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-avi-astor/military-children-education_b_1386074.html?ref=education&ir=Education). The piece was meant to generate discussion and point attention toward education policies that could improve public schools for military students.

The second commentary emphasized the need for colleges and universities to play a central role in supporting members of the military by preparing future teachers and other school professionals to recognize the educational challenges faced by military children and giving them strategies to support children’s learning. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-avi-astor/veterans-college-education-_b_1958796.html

After Year 2 closed, Dr. Astor was able to get another Op-Ed placed on CNN.com, urging the Presidential candidates to make explicit their plans for supporting services for military children and families. Interestingly, the Op-Ed appeared on the day of the first debate between President Obama and Gov. Mitt Romney. (http://www.cnn.com/2012/10/03/opinion/astor-vets-candidates/index.html?hpt=op_t1)
Additional Coverage

The Time.com Q&A article, mentioned earlier, was another opportunity for us to promote the books and encourage universities and society in general to support military families as well as the children of service members who are transitioning to civilian lives.

At the beginning of Year 3, a National Public Radio reporter also aired and published a package of stories that featured our guidebooks as well as some of the Consortium schools highlighted in the books. (http://www.scpr.org/blogs/education/2012/11/13/11053/social-work-interns-help-military-family-students/) Military.com, which is a central online source for military families, was also preparing to promote our books as well as many of the practices we described.
Scaling Up

Most of our plans for further expansion of programs, such as PAL and FOCUS, are described above in the section on Building Evidence. But we have some additional words about other efforts that were under way in Year 2 and extending into Year 3. Some of these efforts have focused on the growth of programs that were not originally designed to focus on the needs of military children, as well as those that were intended to support military children, but were not widely available. While some programs have expanded beyond our expectations, others will take more time.

One example is our effort to get schools to open “transition” rooms to proactively address the needs and questions of both the incoming and outgoing military students. In Year 3, we are continuing to work with our school liaison officers on this effort and would like to see district-level transition rooms as well as rooms opened at specific schools with high percentages of military students and high turnover. Meanwhile, we featured successful transition rooms in two of our Command Media videos, further demonstrating how these services can benefit new families. Our guidebooks also feature model transition rooms and describe the essential components for successful implementation and sustainability.

Also during Year 2, members of our team began attending meetings of the San Diego Military Family Collaborative, which includes representatives of roughly 50 organizations working to support military families and children. This connection has better informed us of the resources available in the region, strengthens our efforts to make those services and programs available
to schools and provides us with further opportunities to introduce our project to other districts.

The Collaborative was featured in one of our monthly newsletters.

http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/BC%20Newsletter%20May%202012.pdf

Finally, we have also explored a range of substance abuse prevention and suicide prevention programs with various partners. These are issues we continue to hear about as Year 3 begins.

**Additional Grants**

Another way in which our program will have a broader reach is through additional grants that also address issues related to military children. The PAL and FOCUS grant proposals to the U.S. Department of Education were described earlier. Some others are described here.

- At the beginning of Year 3, Dr. Tamika Gilreath, one of the members of our research team, and Dr. Astor wrote a proposal seeking to develop a screening instrument targeting stressors and perceptions of stress for the adolescent children of veteran and military service personnel. The proposal was submitted to the National Institutes of Health. The instrument would be used to learn more about which periods in the deployment cycle create the most stress for adolescents. It could be implemented in diverse settings and is intended to serve as a non-clinical assessment for screening, evaluation, and monitoring purposes for individuals, schools, and communities. The instrument would become part of the CHKS.
• As part of National Institute of Mental Health grant, Dr. Astor is serving as a sponsor to researcher Aubrey Rodriguez on a project, which focuses on parental deployment and adolescent mental health and behavior.

• Dr. Astor worked with researchers at the RAND Corporation on a grant proposal to the Department of Defense for a whole-school intervention program that would focus on activities to strengthen students’ resilience. The program would enhance students’ social and emotional competence and help to relieve some of the stress among parents that is associated with being a military family.

• Based on work done in the Building Capacity project. Dr. Astor and co-principal investigator Dr. Rami Benbenishty are consultants to the Center for Advanced Research in Education in Chile on the design of school climate monitoring system.

• Based on the methods and lessons learned from Building Capacity, Drs. Astor and Benbenishty are also consultants to the Ministry of Education in France on school climate and safety monitoring initiatives.

• Dr. Julie Cederbaum, also a member of our research team, and Dr. Astor submitted a proposal to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, which would look at the differing ways families experience deployment and reintegration and to understand the role ethnicity plays in how families are affected by these events.

Reflections and Lessons Learned

• As in the example of transition rooms, some programs take longer than a year to expand or adapt, especially when schools are facing budget cuts and juggling competing priorities. Sometimes additional groundwork needs to be done, and it’s also important
for schools to make sure they have the staff and support necessary to add another intervention or program before they begin implementation.

• The overwhelming reception the FRE has received from the schools in our Consortium demonstrates that it is important to share resources and information with both military and non-military students, families and school staff. Students and teachers with no military connection become more aware of the unique military lifestyle children experience when they grow up in the military and gain knowledge of the organizations and programs available to support these families. Educators are also beginning to see common threads between military and civilian cultures, especially in the area of transition and changing schools.

• Programs need to be carefully matched to the needs and desires of each district and each school within the district. For example, many administrators in our Consortium did not think the UCLA online tutoring program in STEM subject areas would meet their needs. Instead, Learning Together, which is expanding in one district, is addressing students’ math skills, and the PAL tutors in multiple schools also provide one-on-one support in math, science and other subjects. In the end, the UCLA STEM tutoring program was implemented in the San Diego Unified School District, which already offers online courses. The program was a better fit for that district.
Working Toward Sustainability

The overall intent of our project is to change the climate within schools to welcome and support military children and their families. This won’t happen if the programs and practices that have been initiated as part of our involvement in the Consortium schools end when the four-year grant expires.

That’s why in Year 2, we shifted our attention toward encouraging the schools and districts to build an infrastructure that will allow for long-lasting change. Several developments toward this goal are worth noting.

• First, we are urging San Diego-area universities to provide their students with more internship opportunities because these K-12 schools are part of their community and have a large representation of military-connected students. We served in a bit of a matchmaker role in connecting SDSU with the schools in our Consortium. Internship programs are inexpensive and can be sustained over time without further costs, yet they provide significant benefits to the schools, districts, families, and university students.

• Several districts in our Consortium have added staff members at the central office level who are supportive of our work and have the skills to supervise social workers and other pupil personnel at the school sites. These additional administrative positions are important for delivering staff development and sending a unified message to schools about practices and policies related to military children.
• In the beginning of Year 2, only USC and SDSU interns received training in the modified, skill-building version of the FOCUS project. But for Year 3, both interns and school personnel received the training. Again, this prepares district staff to provide supervision of this program when grant funding is no longer available.

• During Year 1 and 2, USC MSW students interning in our schools attended twice-a-month seminars that covered research related to military children as well as skills needed among school social workers in military-connected schools. But now, in Year 3, every MSW student with a concentration in Family and Children will have this training as part of the required Social Work Practice in School Settings (614) course. This is another step toward ensuring that when the grant expires, future MSW students at USC will begin their careers with an awareness of the needs of military children and of the strategies that can benefit these students in public schools. The course will continue after the grant funds have expired and will become part of the ongoing training of MSW students trained in military social work.

As mentioned, systemic changes will need to be made in order for the positive impact that our project has had on military-connected schools to be sustained. This is already happening at SDSU, where the Military-Connected Schools Seminar (CSP 740) has been created. SDSU is
also looking for sources of funding to support and possibly expand its work in area schools, considering partnerships with specific districts and planning to grow the program by possibly involving graduate students in more departments.

On a final note, even though school districts and universities express a desire to enrich their programs by increasing their attention to the educational needs of military children and families, it is possible that some of these gains could be threatened by ongoing education budget reductions in the state. Districts continue to be forced to make tough personnel choices and do more with less. We hope they do not retreat from the progress they have made once the Building Capacity project ends. Further, we hope that with increased awareness to the challenges faced by military families and students, more funding will become available to support stable structures and programs designed to address the needs of military-connected students.
Publications

Our team—which represents the disciplines of social work, education, mental health and psychology—was prolific in Year 2 in terms of publishing products that both contribute to science and educational practice, while also serving as ongoing records of what is being accomplished in the Consortium schools as a result of the grant.

Instead of waiting until the project is complete—and then publishing work on the final results—we are writing about our findings as the project is still unfolding. These efforts are driven, in part, by our intention to provide the Consortium schools with useful data on the military children in their schools as soon as it is available. But we also believe we can contribute to improving school experiences for all military students in the nation by sharing what we have learned on a broader level, both in California and nationally.

While the extensive list of intellectual products are displayed in detail in the Appendix, the graphic below provides a sense of the high volume of materials completed and in progress. We also discuss some highlights here.
Guidebooks

Our four guidebooks for school administrators, teachers, pupil personnel and parents bear mentioning again. The books are written directly to those specific audiences, and all of the royalties are being donated to military children’s educational causes. They are filled with resources, policy issues relating to military children and examples of promising and effective practices—many of which were inspired directly by the USC and SDSU interns and the UCSD undergraduate students working in Consortium schools.
Having the guidebooks published by TCP ensures that they will be used by universities training future teachers, administrators, and school social workers, psychologists and counselors—but will also be useful to existing educators already in schools serving military students. These books will also inform education researchers about the themes and questions regarding military children that they should be considering in their work.

To assist TCP in marketing the books, we created flyers—one describing each book—to be distributed at educational conferences and other events involving K-12 and university professionals. We also worked with TCP to look for other opportunities to promote the books. MCEC is also distributing the guides.

Initial work also continued on another book—written in the same style as the guides—that will focus on monitoring and mapping strategies that help educators better understand how the use of time and space on their school campuses is either contributing or taking away from a positive and healthy environment for students.

**Academic Articles**

A comprehensive review of the literature on the educational needs of military children, written by members of the research team, became the first academic paper on the topic to be accepted by a major educational journal. “The Children of Military Service Members: Challenges, Supports, and Future Educational Research” appeared in the December 2011 issue of *Review of Educational Research*.
A second paper, “A Call to Duty: Educational Policy and School Reform: Addressing the Needs of Children From Military Families,” ran in the March 2012 issue of Educational Researcher, also a top-rated education research journal. This article examined the role of the Interstate Compact on the Education of Military Children and the challenges involved in implementing it at the state and local levels. Other educational policies, such as No Child Left Behind, were also addressed. Both of these are included in the Appendix.

At the beginning of Year 3, a third paper, “Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use Among Military and Non-Military Connected Youth in the California Healthy Kids Survey,” was also accepted for publication in the American Journal of Preventative Medicine. The article is slated to run in the February 2013 issue.

Several additional papers were also in the process of being written and accepted to journals at the beginning of Year 3. Work was also being conducted during Year 2 on two special journal issues on challenges facing military children—one for Children & Schools, published by the National Association of Social Workers, and another for the Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review.
Presentations

Members of the Building Capacity team participated in and made presentations at several conferences in Year 2. These presentations are listed in the Appendix. We also upload all PowerPoint documents and related articles to our website so they are available to researchers, education professionals and others interested in our project. Members of our team presented at the following conferences and other gatherings:

- American Public Health Association, October 2011, San Francisco (three presentations)
• Department of Defense Education Activity conference for new grantees, October 2011, Santa Monica, Calif. (one presentation)
• Society for Social Work and Research, January 2012, Washington (four presentations)
• USC School of Social Work, Families and Children Concentration meeting, April 2012 (one presentation)
• American Educational Research Association, April 2012, Vancouver, B.C. (two presentations)
• Military Child Education Coalition, Scientific Advisory Board, June 2012, Dallas (one presentation)
• California Association of School Social Workers, Board of Directors meeting, June 2012, San Diego (one presentation)
• National Academies, Institute of Medicine, July 2012, Irvine, Calif. (one presentation)
• Veterans Administration Roundtable, September 2012, Washington (one presentation)
• USC Town and Gown luncheon, attended by over 300 USC field instructors (one presentation)
• National Joint Conference with Chilean Minister of Education Representatives, Heads of City Education Unions, and five Chilean universities, May 2012, Santiago, Chile
• Ministry of Education, Educational Statistics Authority, Bar Ilan University, Israel
Reflections and Lessons Learned

- In preparing for the publication of our guidebooks, we learned that we needed to be deeply involved in planning for how they would be marketed throughout the field, including making professional and military associations aware of their release.

- Because several of the journal articles written by members of our research team were initially rejected, it became even clearer to us that we need to continue to build a case for focusing on needs and outcomes among military-connected students in academic literature.

- Our academic work as part of this project suggests strongly the importance of the interaction between academic enquiry and program development and implementation. The in-depth study of the data has been very helpful in developing insights relevant to the tasks of the Building Capacity Consortium. At the same time, our intensive collaborative work with Consortium districts and schools has contributed to our academic study of the needs and challenges of military schools and students.
State and National Policy Efforts

Our first annual report included a section on our work to share information with policymakers, professional organizations and other leaders on ways to improve schools and teacher education programs to benefit military children. In Year 2, those efforts expanded and became even more visible on a national level.

In January—as part of the Obama Administration’s Joining Forces campaign—Dr. Jill Biden, the wife of Vice President Joe Biden, visited USC for a roundtable discussion on the variety of ways schools in the Building Capacity consortium are welcoming and supporting military children and their parents.

"One of the goals of Joining Forces is really to change the culture, all across America," Biden said. "The work of this consortium is so important."

Former interns who earned their MSW degrees as part of the project, along with students, parents and school officials, provided meaningful examples of the efforts schools make to smooth transitions for families.
USC graduate and former Building Capacity intern Kim Becker, for example, talked about organizing the Marine Corps birthday celebration at Jefferson Middle School in Oceanside during Year 1.

And Oceanside Unified School District Superintendent Dr. Larry Perondi, also part of the roundtable, talked about what his district’s principals are doing to bridge “the military and civilian divide.”

“It’s important for schools to use their websites to reach out to military families so they are able to find the information and resources they need even before they move,” Dr. Perondi said, adding that it’s important “for a warrior not to worry about where their children go to school.”

Members of the consortium, including students, teachers, and district officials were able to attend the gathering and speak with Dr. Biden following the event.

Following Dr. Biden’s visit, Dr. Astor also had several opportunities to continue discussions with high-level policymakers about improving school climate for military students and integrating military culture into university training programs. He met with staff from the White House, the
Department of Education, DoDEA, the Veterans Administration, the Joint Chiefs, the Joining Forces campaign, as well as members of the Armed Services Committee in Congress.

_California Public Engagement_

Also in Year 2, preparations began for hosting the California Public Engagement, an event organized along with MCEC to bring together influential leaders and decision makers in each state to identify gaps in services for military children and set a statewide agenda for meeting their needs.

The School of Social Work at USC helped to sponsor the event at USC. Dr. Astor and Dr. Anthony Hassan, director of the USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans and Military Families, served as state co-chairs and hosts of the event in partnership with MCEC.

The event, held in mid-September, brought together representatives from seven sectors: business, community leaders, education, faith-based, health services, service providers, and service clubs and organizations. The participants heard from experts, identified resources available in the community and worked in groups to create action plans regarding policies such as the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.
Feedback on the event was generally very positive. The participants who completed evaluation forms were pleased with how the event was organized and said the presentations and discussions increased their awareness of military-connected students and families. Most also said they planned to collaborate with other members from their sector group to work toward goals established at the meeting. The action items developed during the event are being worked on at the local, state and national levels as Year 3 begins.

*MCEC Science Advisory Board*

In 2012, Dr. Astor became part of MCEC’s Science Advisory Board, which is charged with providing “expert advice through research-based data” to MCEC and to its Living in the New Normal initiative. Resilience, child development, positive psychology and multiple deployments are a few of the topics addressed by the board.

*Operation Educating the Educators*

With the release of the guidebooks for educators, USC has become a leading participant in Operation Educate the Educators, an initiative of MCEC and the AACTE to raise awareness about the educational needs of military children among educator preparation programs. The effort includes a set of principles for colleges and universities to follow and provides teacher education programs with resources to assist them in forming partnerships with PK-12 schools so they can “develop school cultures that are supportive of students in military families.” Over 100 colleges and universities have already signed up to participate, which is an encouraging sign that many more teachers, principals and other professionals will enter their new careers with an awareness of education issues related to military children.
Next Steps

Every partnership created through *Building Capacity* and each project or program implemented in the schools leads us to think of even more ways to improve schools so that they are more welcoming and supportive toward military children. We are always preparing ahead for further expansion and long-term change.

In Year 2, as the guidebooks were being released, we were also planning ahead for evaluating their use among the educators who receive them. We are interested in whether educators and parents use the practices described in the books, to what extent they are implementing the ideas and whether they see improvements in school climate as a result. This innovative approach is the first time that a book has been used as an intervention.

As Year 3 begins, we are already asking the educators and parents in our Consortium who receive the books to complete a Qualtrics survey so we can gather information on how these books are being used to change practices and policies.

We also continue to think creatively about how to bring additional services to the schools. That is one reason why we continue to seek additional grants. In Year 3, we also expect to focus more on systemic changes that will ensure the work we have started continues once the grant has expired, and to continue to encourage similar efforts in all military-connected schools throughout the U.S.
Appendix
BUILDING CAPACITY IN MILITARY-CONNECTED SCHOOLS PROJECT

INTELLECTUAL PORTFOLIO

Books (Published or In Press)


Book (In Progress)


Book Chapters (Published or In Press)


**Journal Articles (Published or In Press)**


**Journal Articles (Under Review)**


Esqueda, M.C., Malchi, K., Cederbaum, J.A., Pineda, D., Benbenishty, R., & Astor, R.A. (under review). The military social work fieldwork placement: An analysis of the time and activities graduate student interns provide military-connected schools. Invited to *Children and Schools*.


Publications (In Preparation)


Estrada, J.N., Astor, R.A., Gilreath, T., Benbenishty, R., & De Pedro, K. (In progress) The role of high schools in mediating and moderating gang affiliation with school safety.


Military and Nonmilitary Students, Parents, and School Staff In Eight Military-Connected School Districts. Invited to *Children and Schools*.

**Peer-Reviewed Conference Presentations**

Pineda, D., & Astor, R.A. (March 2013). Meeting the Needs of Military-Connected Students: Calls from the Field and Inter-Disciplinary Responses from Higher Education. Accepted for presentation at the National School Social Work Conference, San Diego, CA.


Gilreath, T.D. (October 2012). Recent substance use among military connected youth: A latent class analysis of perceptions and experiences. Accepted for presentation at the American
Public Health Association, San Francisco, California.


Malchi, K., Cederbaum, J., Esqueda, M. C., Benbenishty. R., & Astor, R. A. (January 2012). Alignment of student-instructor assessments: Examining the skills and competencies of
social work interns placed in military-connected schools. Presentation at the Society for Social Work and Research Conference, Washington, D.C.


Invited Conference Presentations

Atuel, H. & Pineda, D. (June 2012). Military Child Education Coalition Scientific Advisory Board Meeting and Annual Conference, Grapevine, TX.


Astor, R. (May 2012). National Joint Conference with Chilean Minister of Education representatives, Heads of City Education Unions, and five Chilean Universities, Santiago, Chile


Astor, R. (July 2011). National Academies – Institute of Medicine, Irvine, CA.


**Conference Presentations Under Review**


**Policy Brief**


**Commentaries based on Research**


Funded Proposals

Center for Advanced Research in Education of Chile 2012-2013
Monitoring school climate with schools: Design and validation of a monitoring system
Role: Astor and Benbenishty (Consultants)

F31 Rodriguez (PI) 2011-2014
National Institute of Mental Health
Parental Military Deployment and Adolescent Mental/Behavioral Health
Role: Astor (Mentor)

Monitoring School Violence in France 2011
Ministry of Education
Role: Astor and Benbenishty (Consultants)

DODEA #HE1254-10-1-001 Astor (PI) 2010-2014
Department of Defense Education Activity
Building Capacity to Create Highly Supportive Military-Connected School Districts: The Integration of Local School Data, Community Supports, Evidence-based Programs, and Empowerment Strategies to Promote Positive Social and Academic Climates

Proposals Under Review

R21 Gilreath (PI) 2013-2015
National Institute of Mental Health
Development of a military salient stress measure and links to adolescent drug use
Role: Astor (Co-I)

Social and Behavioral Context Lester (UCLA, PI) 2013-2016
Institute of Education Studies
Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS) on Academic Outcomes in Military Children
Role: Astor (USC, PI), Gilreath (USC, Co-I), and Benbenishty (Consultant)

Proposals In Progress

Social and Behavioral Context Datnow (UCSD, PI)
Institute of Education Studies
Partners at Learning in Military-Connected Schools
Role: Astor (USC, PI)

Scored Proposals
R21 Cederbaum (PI) 2013-2015
National Institute of Mental Health
Exploring Race/Ethnic Differences in Military Family Functioning and Service Use
Role: Astor (Co-I)

Jaycox (RAND, PI) 2012-2016
Department of Defense
Enhancing Military Child and Family Resilience: A School System Approach
Role: Astor (USC, PI) and Benbenishty (Consultant)