Welcoming Practices that Address Transition Needs of Military Students in Public Schools

Transitions into Welcoming Schools Consortium (WP)

Technical Evaluation Report

Year 1: 2013 - 2014

Principal Investigator

Ron Avi Astor, Ph. D.

Co-Principal Investigator: Tamika Gilreath, Ph.D.

University of Southern California

Submitted by:

Rami Benbenishty, Ph.D.

Evaluator

Bar Ilan University, Israel

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The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team and do not necessarily represent the views of the Consortium districts and schools, USC team, and the Department of Defense Education Activity.

Direct correspondence to: Rami Benbenishty, Bar Ilan University, Israel  ramibenben@gmail.com

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction 3
Chapter 2: Peer-Support Programs 9
   I. Student to Student (S2S) Training 9
   II. Student to Student (S2S) – Plans and Beginning Activities 32
   III. Parent to Parent (PtoP) Training 35
Chapter 3: Parents’ Views of School and District Registration and Welcoming 39
Chapter 4: Developing Electronic Applications to Support Transitioning Families and Students 50
   I. Building a Database of Resources 50
   II. Analyzing Existing Registration Systems 53
   III. The Development Process of the Electronic Applications 55
   IV. Registration Application 57
   V. Mobile Application: Student Connect 59
Appendix A 66
Appendix B 73
Appendix C 80

List of Tables

Table 2.1 Training Sessions and Participants 10
Table 2.2 Assessing the Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills (JS2S & ES2S) 11
Table 2.3 Overall Assessment of Training (JS2S & ES2S, N = 41) 13
Table 2.4 Assessing the Training Processes and Impact (JS2S & ES2S, N = 41) 13
Table 3.1 Number of Respondents and Children by District 40
Table 3.2 Origin of Relocation to School 41
Table 3.3 Means and SD's, Assessment of the Registration Process 42
Table 3.4 Information Provided to Parents and Requested by Parents 42
Table 3.5 Mean and SD's of Assessment of how Welcoming is the School 43
Table 4.1 Entries in District Programs Database 51
Table 4.2 SIS Products and Various Systems 54
Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Research indicates that military children attend many more schools than the average civilian child. On average, a military family moves every three years and nine times over a 20-year career (Association of the United States Army, 2001). This frequency is triple the relocation rate of the civilian population (Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006; Department of Defense Education Activity, 2011a; Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, & Blum, 2010). As a result, military children attend an average of six to nine schools during their K-12 education (Department of Defense Education Activity, 2011b; Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Each transition can help students grow in maturity, social skills and develop resilience. However, depending on the situation, these experiences can also hinder military students’ progress—academically as well as socially and emotionally. In some instances, a move can be very stressful for the students and their parents (De Pedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, & Astor, in press; Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981). Research has shown that relocation can be a stressful experience for any family (Aronson, Caldwell, Perkins, & Pasch, 2011). Some studies have shown that moving is ranked as the seventh—out of 37—most stressful events in their lives (Hutton, Roberts, Walker, & Zuniga, 1987). However, a move does not always have to be stressful. Some recent studies suggest that military students may even adjust better than nonmilitary students if the proper supports are offered. How a school or new community helps in the transition process is critical. Research suggests that the ways schools welcome the student and their parents positively or negatively affect the moving experience (Gasper, DeLuca, & Estacion, 2012; Hagan, MacMillan, & Wheaton, 1996). Public schools with inconsistent and disorganized transition procedures may negatively impact students’ well-being, academic progress, and increase risk behaviors. The importance of supportive and well-coordinated transitions becomes even more central when the nation is at war and with pending changes involving the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In the past decade, these school transitions for military families into civilian settings have been accelerated as part of federal policy. Given these changing patterns of deployment, reintegration, and military base closures, transition planning in civilian settings should become a routine part of local, state and national planning. In particular, agreed upon procedures that ease transition between local public school districts could insure a smoother reintegration of service members’ children within civilian communities. Up until recent years, this has not been part of national planning civilian public schools. For example, the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) effort of 2005 influenced the relocation of thousands of families that were residing abroad to military bases within the United States (U. S.
Department of Defense, 2010); while many others that were already living in our country had to relocate to other domestic locations (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Many civilian public schools in these communities may not be aware of the needs presented by military students. Public schools in the United States currently work with and educate an approximate population of 1.2 million military-connected students (De Pedro et al., 2011; Bradshaw et al., 2010) that experience frequent geographic transitions (Angrist & Johnson, 2000; Gorman, Eide, & Hisle-Gorman, 2010; Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009). A majority of military students—approximately 80 percent—attend public schools side by side with their civilian counterparts. Despite the large size of this group, until very recently, the research literature has not properly explored the educational needs and school-based social experiences of military students who experience high numbers of transitions (De Pedro et al., 2011). DoD reports show that within the military community there is awareness of the need for greater transition supports within civilian public schools serving military students. The Report on Assistance to Local Educational Agencies for Defense Dependents' Education (2010), describes the important services developed by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), and the services provided by the Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force, and in particular the central role of military school liaison officers.

The military community and DoD have also identified public school transition as a major priority. Military family organizations and the DoD have engaged in a state-by-state campaign to help ensure that public civilian school districts address military students’ academic, social and transition needs. Academic policies and procedures vary greatly by state and from district to district (e.g., academic standards, graduation requirements, enrollment procedures, and program eligibility requirements). When transitioning to a new school in a new state or country, military parents must often advocate on their child’s behalf to minimize the consequences of misaligned policies and procedures (e.g., delays in enrollment, course repetition, and exclusion from curricular and extra-curricular school offerings). While the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children has sought to reduce the educational inequities experienced by military children as a result of their parent’s military service, knowledge of the compact is still limited and implementation challenges abound (Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012). Detailed expectations for states, districts, and schools respective to the compact and transition issues in general must be clearly articulated. Districts and schools must further develop concrete policies, procedures, and structures to address issues of transition that are mutually agreed upon and tailored to address the unique needs and organizational capacities of districts and schools. Movement in this direction will help facilitate a more seamless transition process for both military and nonmilitary families, particularly those with low levels of educational attainment and limited experience navigating an increasingly complex education system.
The Welcoming Practices Consortium

In order to address the needs of transitioning families, five school districts in the San Diego and Temecula area, that have a significant number of military-connected students, partnered with the University of Southern California (USC) and created a Consortium—

Welcoming Practices that Address Transition Needs of Military Students in Public Schools ("Welcoming Practices"). This Consortium was funded through a DoDEA grant to Chula Vista Elementary School District, is co-administered and coordinated by a USC School of Social Work team led by Dr. Ron Avi Astor, and evaluated by an independent evaluation team from Bar Ilan University in Israel, led by Dr. Rami Benbenishty.

The Consortium has three main goals:

1. Increase school engagement and belonging, academic achievement, and well-being of transitioning military-connected students.
2. Increase school engagement, involvement and satisfaction of transitioning military-connected parents.
3. Enhance awareness of the needs of transitioning military students and families and spread best practices and technologies developed by the Consortium, regionally and nationally.

The Consortium is expected to employ a combination of several inter-related strategies that aim to help achieve the Consortium's goals.

1. **Create, train, and support transition teams.** The roles of these teams are to Welcome the student and family to the community; Inform them about the district, school and community; Support them in the process of their transition; Connect the student and family to resources, and even more important, to people in the district, school and neighborhood community; and finally, Follow Up to ensure good integration into the school community.

2. **Implement mentoring programs to support transitioning students and families.** These programs aim to develop a base of student volunteers led by trained school staff members and parent volunteers trained to support transitioning students and families. In the first stages of this Consortium, two programs that were developed by the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) are being implemented – Student to Student (S2S) and Parent to Parent (PtoP).

3. **Develop and implement an electronic “Transition Suite.”** This set of mobile applications will include support for school registration, information on available resources in the district, school, and the community, and means to connect to other students and families in the school who could support the transition process.
It is important to emphasize that these strategies are not static and independent of each other. Rather, they are expected to interact in many ways and, in some instances, inform changes for future implementation. For instance, transition teams are expected to use the electronic applications and also help modify and improve these applications. Similarly, mentors will be interacting with transition teams, use the electronic applications, and contribute to the development of the applications, based on what they have learned in their interactions with transitioning parents and students. During the first year of the grant, while the applications were being developed, the Consortium also developed capacity among staff, students and parents through training activities, creating welcoming centers in several districts, and mapping existing practices. We expect that in subsequent years the electronic applications and the range of activities to welcome families and students will be used more interactively. The first sections of this report will focus on all the on the ground training and activities. The second part will focus on the creation of the applications.

Evaluation

An evaluation team is in charge of evaluating the fidelity of the program, the process/formative evaluation of strategy maintenance and the summative evaluation of outcomes. This evaluation closely aligns with the goals, outcomes, strategies and actions of the Consortium. The evaluation team is independent of the Consortium leadership. Nevertheless, in order to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the evaluation, our aim is to work closely with the Consortium leadership and gain access to all processes and sources of information. Further, in order to increase the contribution of the formative evaluation, the team generates intermediate reports and provides ongoing feedback on the range of activities carried out by the Consortium. This feedback mechanism includes intermediate reports disseminated to the Consortium leadership, as well as ongoing meetings and information sharing throughout the duration of the project.

This project is not about one specific and circumscribed program. The Consortium aims to achieve system-wide changes in multiple areas and on multiple levels (district, school, community), and the project is gradually evolving and adjusting to fit the unique needs of each district. Our evaluation concept therefore is to use ongoing quantitative and qualitative monitoring of many aspects relevant to the activities, products and potential outcomes of the Consortium efforts (http://buildingcapacity.usc.edu/research/annual-reports.html). We expect that information gathered during monitoring will be an important component of the administration and execution of the project plan because it will be immediately fed back to each of the districts in order to help adjust and modify the local programs and activities based on ongoing feedback received through the monitoring system.

The evaluation key components are:

Multi-Level: Analyses are conducted for the Consortium as a whole and for each of the participating districts. Presently, we do not expect to conduct school-level evaluations.
Nevertheless, if appropriate and informative, the evaluation team may decide to conduct evaluations in a number of high-transition schools, especially if they implement a set of best practices that will be of special interest to all other Consortium members. 

**Mixed-Methods:** The evaluation uses both quantitative and qualitative methods on the basis of multiple sources of data, including state achievement data, existing validated measures, feedback questionnaires designed for the current project, pen and paper instruments, internet-based questionnaires and smartphone-based short feedback queries. The evaluation also uses observations of transition-related activities (e.g., in transition centers), and content analyses of documents, electronic databases, and web pages.

**Comparisons over Time:** This evaluation will examine time trends in multiple areas. Among other analyses the evaluation will compare California Healthy Kids Surveys conducted in 2013, before this Consortium was formed, with surveys that will be administered in spring 2015. Additionally, as described in Chapter 3, we are surveying parents in Consortium districts to establish a baseline of their views regarding registration procedures and how welcomed they have felt by the district and school. Similar surveys are planned for each year of the project, so that we can detect trends over time.

The main evaluation design of this project is a multiple baselines design, where each baseline reflects the academic year in which military students transitioned into the district/school. Specifically, the evaluation is based on four main components:

a. **A follow up over time of transitioning students and parents:** Our plan was to gather the first baseline data by the end of September 2014. We expected to get lists of transitioning families and students from each district. We found out, however, that there were many obstacles to this process. Some of them related to technological barriers that prevented the production of lists of new students. Additional barriers were associated with receiving the permission of school district boards to release this information. Given that districts and schools are subject to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), we continue to look for ways to collaborate with districts to address this issue.

Presently we are implementing an alternative and more comprehensive process. We asked all superintendents to e-mail a link to an online survey to all district families and request them to complete the online survey. This survey includes questions about the background of the parents (e.g., whether they are military affiliated), their registrations processes and experience, and their assessments of how welcoming the schools were towards their children. A preliminary report is presented in Chapter 3.

The survey also serves our plan to continue and follow up parents’ views of transitioning issues. We therefore requested their permission to contact them again. We also asked them to consent to sharing with us their child's email, so that we could also request their children's consent
to participate. We intend to follow up with all parents and students who have consented to participate at the beginning of every academic year.

b. A Consortium-wide monitoring of military students, parents and staff: We will use the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) for students, staff and parents to support our evaluation. This system includes several validated instruments and contains a military module for students, staff and parents. The CHKS will be administered twice during the project—Spring 2015 and Spring 2017.

In the CHKS-based evaluation we will focus on outcomes for mobile military students and parents, examining to what extent the existing gaps between mobile military parents and students and the rest of the cohort are being gradually reduced over the course of the project. We will use the staff component of the CHKS to examine changes in staff self-assessment of need for staff development in this area.

c. A Consortium-wide monitoring of school administrators and transition-relevant personnel: In the second year of the project we will start using a system we have already developed with the same districts to periodically survey staff on a wide range of issues that will be directly relevant to transition policies and practices. This will include ongoing needs assessments (e.g., need for staff development), awareness of changes in policies and practices regarding transitions, perceptions of the effectiveness of such practices, best practices identified by educators and pupil personnel, etc.

d. Ad-hoc evaluations of processes, activities and programs: We are conducting a set of evaluation activities and provide valuable information for ongoing implementation and formative evaluation of activities such as staff development, involvement in a buddy program, the use of transition-related electronic applications, etc. In the present report we examine the S2S training activities. In later stages of this project we will continue to monitor activities and products designed to support and spread awareness on a regional and national level.

The Present Report

This technical report is the first of a series of annual technical reports planned for this project. The following topics are addressed:

Chapter 2: Peer-Support Programs
Chapter 3: Parents’ Views of School and District Registration and Welcoming
Chapter 4: The Development of Electronic Applications
Chapter 2: Peer-Support Programs

Background

Peer-support and “buddy” programs are potential ways to help transitioning parents and students. Families and students in school who are willing to help incoming students and families can significantly change the transition experience. Parents and students in the school and community are able to provide information about key aspects of the school and the community, such as rules and regulations, availability of resources and local culture. Furthermore, the interaction with school volunteers provides much needed social support in times of potentially stressful transitions. Some districts are already implementing programs to welcome and support transitioning students, such as the ‘Ambassadors’ program. In the present report we focus on a program that the Consortium introduced to districts in the first year of the project. In future reports we will include a description of other existing programs and attempt to compare between these programs.

In order to maximize the impact of this system of pairing new families and students with school volunteers, it is important to train these volunteers and continue to support and coordinate their work over time. MCEC developed two programs – Student-to-Student (S2S) and Parent-to-Parent (PtoP) help transitioning students and families.

The S2S training aims to enhance the capacity of participating faculty and students to help transitioning students and parents (see \[http://www.militarychild.org/public/upload/images/BRS2S.pdf\]). It does this through a set of resources, tools, and strategies to provide information about schools and communities as well as facilitating the creation of new friendships and social networks.

In the following sections we present the evaluation of the S2S and PtoP programs. In the last section of this chapter we discuss the challenges of sustainability and spread associated with these programs. These are central challenges that need to be discussed early on.

1. Student to Student (S2S) - Training

The S2S training is comprised of three core modules: (i) Finding the Way; (ii) Relationships; and (iii) Academics. There are different versions for elementary schools (ES2S), junior high schools/middle schools (JS2S), and high schools (S2S). JS2S and S2S include both students and school staff, whereas ES2S includes only staff.

Our Consortium has adopted this program and partnered with MCEC in a series of training sessions. In this chapter we summarize the evaluation conducted by our team of these
training events during the first year of the project. We present the methods used, findings of the feedback questionnaires and of our observations, and concluding summary comments.

**Methods**

Evaluation combined structured feedback questionnaires completed by the participants and observations conducted by USC team members during the training events. The questionnaires were designed based on a content analysis of the literature on these programs to ensure representation of the programs' goals and activities. They included sections on assessment of a. acquisition of knowledge and skills related to the S2S training; b. training processes; and c. overall assessment of training. Informed consent and releases were secured from participants and parents.

Observations were semi-structured. The observers were members of the USC team from the Welcoming Practices, mostly graduate students and experienced professionals. Observers were provided with instructions and specific issues to observe and document. The specific issues included: a description of the training venue, facilities and participants, relevance and comprehensiveness of content, training methods and process, delivery of materials and participants' involvement. Additionally, observers were encouraged to use their judgment and include supplementary observations and impressions as they became familiar with the specific training setting. They introduced themselves to the trainees in the beginning of training.

Evaluation team members participated in each of sessions and handed out the feedback forms. Just over half (41 - 56.9%) of the ES2S and JS2S participants returned evaluation forms (32 ES2S participants and 9 JS2S participants). All five staff members participating in S2S completed the feedback questionnaire.

**Findings – Feedback Questionnaires**

**Attendance**

The training sessions and their participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 2.1

*Training Sessions and Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ES2S</td>
<td>3/3 – 3/4</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS2S</td>
<td>2/27-2/28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Some of the participants attended only one day of training and some school principals entered and left training sessions, as they were busy carrying out their roles.

Most of the participants were teachers, principals and assistant principals. There were also USC social work interns. We present the findings from the ES2S and JS2S, and from the feedback received from the five staff members who provided feedback on S2S.

Knowledge and skills acquired through the training

The first series of questions asked if participants felt that after the training they had the knowledge and skills to teach transitioning students about items depicted as important in the S2S training literature.

Table 2.2

Assessing the Acquisition of Knowledge and Skills (JS2S & ES2S)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to make connections and friends</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to be accepted by their peers</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to communicate with transitioning students?</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to deal with peer pressure</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to become part of the ‘in crowd’</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting around the campus</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School celebrations</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School culture</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School diversity</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local points of interest</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School policies and procedures</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local community culture</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedules and scheduling</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local expressions (e.g. slang)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insights on being an outsider</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterschool programs, clubs, and sports</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different courses in the school</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen hang outs / Popular locations</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests and exams in the school</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading scales and GPA in the school</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the credit / points system works for courses</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post high school options</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1 = not at all / to a very small extent to 5 = to a large extent

In general, respondents tended to agree that training provided knowledge and helped acquire skills in a range of areas. Respondents rated highest the acquisition of the skill of how to make connections and friends (mean = 4.50). The skill related to becoming connected was rated the lowest, although not very low (4.08, on a five point scale).

The areas of knowledge that were rated highest were “Getting around the campus.” “School celebrations”, and “School culture.” Some areas were rated much lower such as ‘grading scales and GPA in the school’ (3.57), how the credit/points system works for courses (3.27), and especially ‘post high school options (mean = 2.82).

A review of the responses of the five staff members participating in the S2S training indicated that they tend to assess all items related to knowledge and skill acquisition very favorably. All of them felt that training helped them with regard to the skill of how to make connections and friends to a large extent. The only issues that received less positive assessments were with regard to knowledge of school policies and procedures (only two agreed to a large extent), knowledge about teen hang-outs and popular locations (only two) and knowledge about afterschool programs, clubs and sports (only one staff member agreed to a large extent).

**Feedback on training**

We asked the participants to provide a series of assessments on the training processes and outcomes.
Table 2.3

*Overall Assessment of Training (JS2S & ES2S, N = 41)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training improved my understanding of S2S goals</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>.602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2S program is flexible enough to fit in my school / district</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was satisfied with the overall structure of the training</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>.771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found the discussion groups and practical workshops helpful</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The next steps for setting up S2S programmes are clear</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel confidence in my ability to coordinate a successful S2S program</td>
<td>4.49</td>
<td>.711</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale: 1 = not at all / to a very small extent to 5 = to a large extent

All assessments of training were positive and had a mean higher than 4.5 on a five-point scale. The only item that had a slightly lower rating was the participant feeling confident in the ability to coordinate a successful S2S training (Mean = 4.49). All five staff members who participated in S2S also assessed all items very positively.

Table 2.4

*Assessing the Training Processes and Impact (JS2S & ES2S, N = 41)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training:</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was well organized</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was engaging and interesting</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved my understanding of staff members in S2S projects</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was effective and I would recommend it others</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>.863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met my expectations</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>.779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped strengthen my collaboration with other staff members who are S2S coordinators</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated me to share my knowledge with others</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>.746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allowed me to participate in ways that I prefer</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated materials I already knew</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.264</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scale: 1 = not at all / to a very small extent to 5 = to a large extent

Assessments of training processes and impact were also positive, with the highest assessment being the organization of the training session (mean = 4.73). The lowest assessment, although still quite high, is the degree to which training allowed the respondents to participate in preferred ways (4.41). The responses of staff attending S2S were even more positive.

Strongest and weakest parts of training

We presented participants with two open-ended questions asking about the strongest and weakest parts of training. Several respondents said that all parts were strong and could not identify weak parts. Several others provided their perspectives. Referring to the strongest parts, they addressed a wide range of issues including the quality of information, videos and resources provided, the presentation by a military family, and the hands-on, interactive and collaborative processes during the workshop. “Ice-breaker” games were also strong parts mentioned by several participants. The personal qualities of the presenters and their ideas and suggestions were also mentioned as strong parts. Participants in the S2S workshops also mentioned the team-building activities.

With regard to the weakest parts, participants seem to have organizational, as well as some content-related, criticisms. The organizational criticism seemed to center around certain logistical aspects that are related to having children trainees (e.g. the availability of unrestricted candy and coffee for children), as well as the structure of activities (e.g. asking for more student presentations in the S2S). A participant suggested conducting the activities along the same timelines as their school activities (i.e., 7:30 – 2:30). Others suggested using fewer lectures and spending more time on students' sharing. It was also suggested to increase communication between S2S coordinators in the different schools and districts, after training is over.

Findings: Observations made by USC team members

The following summary of findings is from the observations conducted by USC Welcoming Practices team members. Some of the observations may reflect unique circumstances as each training session includes different settings, trainers and participants. Nevertheless, we present the observations as feedback that could be helpful for planning future training sessions and to provide information that would be relevant and important as our evaluation team continues to monitor S2S activities in the Consortium districts and schools.
We first note the observations made with regard to the facilities used. Most of the training sessions were conducted in appropriate facilities and had the technological support needed. In one of the events, the air conditioning may have been malfunctioning and irritated some of the participants. In some sessions the room may have been too small for the activities carried out by the participants. In contrast, in another session the setting seemed to be too large for the number of participants, creating a sense of “emptiness.”

Separate training sessions were conducted: ES2S (elementary school staff), JS2S (junior high school students and staff), and HS2S (high school students and staff). These sessions have certain components of content and process in common, but they also differed significantly. We therefore present the observations separately for each type of training.

Content
In general, S2S training aims to enhance the capacity of participating faculty and students to help transitioning students and parents. It does this through a set of resources, tools, and strategies to provide information about schools and communities as well as facilitating the creation of new friendships and social networks. The training is comprised of three core modules: (i) Finding the Way; (ii) Relationships; and (iii) Academics

Finding My Way
Finding my Way focuses on how to help students navigate around the campus, to inform them of school procedures and policies, celebrations, customs, school climate/culture and diversity. This may include information on popular teen hang-outs and local expressions and culture. This area includes community highlights (activities or events).

ES2S
The teachers and administrators were in mixed groups from different schools. Discussions compared best practices or “smooth” or “bumpy” transitions from each respective school. Smooth transitions include activities such as a pride club, USC interns, school tours, etc. Bumpy transitions include lack of information about year round schedules. Each school discussed ways to help new transitioning students. The participants listed resources already available at each school site. Groups conducted a sticky-note exercise for their “finding the way” activities. Suggested ideas for finding the way included having a tour of the school with a map, a buddy system, or a welcome packet.

Impressions on delivery and participants' involvement:
The trainers introduced each of the modules as the day progressed but given that this was a new training it often felt forced and scripted which served as a distraction to the content and recommendation being presented.

Sessions were perhaps too long in that the modules started to blur.

The groups may have benefitted from more examples of good elementary school transition programs that are external to their district.

**JS2S**

- Training was in a group discussion on the topics of navigation (getting round campus), culture, and community.
- The trainer emphasised the “little things” as being important for new students.
- Each school discussed getting around campus and then shared their ideas back with the larger group.
- A large number of students identified knowing classroom locations at the top of the list of getting around campus.

**Impressions on delivery and participants' involvement:**

- The students seemed really engaged and many held their hands up to share their own experiences.

**S2S**

- Day 1 was spent introducing S2S and then almost exclusively on *Finding the Way* and the trainers focused on their specific school’s Campus, Community, and Culture.
- The students and school staff also watched videos about S2S programs at other schools.
- This training had several small group discussions where the students could brainstorm relevant information about finding the way.
- The morning session of the first day focused on an understanding of transitions and team building. The session and day began with instructors trying to demonstrate what “transitions” mean by asking the participating students how many times they have changed schools since starting kindergarten. Student transitions ranged from no transitions to six transitions.
- Students were asked to consider the concerns of a new student, regarding the campus, community, and culture.

**Impressions on delivery and participants' involvement:**
- First day suffered from a lack of clear direction to the students regarding specific best practices to use for welcoming new students. The second day brought more direction to the students.
- Overall the activity was thought-provoking and relevant, however the guidance was not specific. The observer gave examples of potential specific steps. 1. Advise new students to visit a certain museum, 2. Advise new students to seek counselling with a particular advisor, 3. How to appropriately discuss the diversity of a school, 4. What is appropriate versus not appropriate to share
- The students largely appeared to support and relate to the program material.
- Trainers were successful at eliciting inside knowledge about culture or cliques the students had and were able to articulate after a few short moments including unique language to schools that students and teachers will need to be aware of when welcoming new students (e.g., “Get your numbers” meant checking in during physical education class so that you weren’t marked absent or tardy).
- The instructor engaged the students well, using pedagogical techniques such as having the students circle words, highlight phrases, write-in notes on the slides to maintain their focus. Some students were writing their own notes and emphasizing certain points (highlighting) they thought relevant, however some observers thought the participants should have been encouraged to take down more notes.
- The post-it activity encouraged students to think about and become aware of concerns which may affect students relocating to their school, however the trainer did not encourage substantive discussion regarding the practical implications to the students.
- The trainers could have been more direct in their desire to have the students create transition teams.
- School staff and administrators did not offer positive examples of things that happen at their school, only negatives.

**Academics**
The academics section discussed knowledge about the scholastic system, e.g. courses in the school, tests and exams, schedules, grading scales and GPA in the school, post high school options. In addition, there was sharing of information on after-school activities.

**ES2S**
- Groups discussed the academic issues that the transitioning students experienced.
• Discussions also concerned the Compact (how teachers and administrators need to advocate for implementing the Compact at their own schools) and the Common Core standards.
• This section was a more of a lecture and large group discussion.
• The trainer discussed the difficulty of transferring grades to the new school and referred to personal experiences as examples.
• Some of the participants discussed the need for having an exit process when students are leaving the schools due to parent PCS orders.

**JS2S**

• The trainer discussed the importance of academics, school requirements and mentioned the interstate compact.
• The students were mainly asked to be aware of the school academic requirements

**Impressions on delivery and participants' involvement:**

• Students appeared bored as this was about policies and not practical experiences about welcoming practices.
• The session mainly appeared to target the adults (staff) at the training.

**S2S**

• The trainers inquired about grading scales, credits, graduation requirements, etc.
• The students appeared knowledgeable about their school (e.g., 220 credits to graduate, 30 credits per semester, classes were 52 or 54 minutes in length, etc.).
• The students discussed school requirement variations from school to school and state to state.
• The group discussed school resources that aid in academic and college success, such as free practice SAT exams.
• The trainers provided resources such as School Quest to help students keep track of personal information during their moves.
• The students were asked to read over a prompt about a new student, an activity called “Pat’s Story” about a student who is coming into their school. The students discussed how they would help out Pat academically. After the discussion, the students presented to the adults.

**Impressions on delivery and participants' involvement:**

• The instructor did a good job of telling the students that their responsibility is to guide new students to the right resources and asked who the S2S
mentoring students would send new students to with questions (e.g. counselors).

- The students seemed very aware about the Common Core standards; Temecula Valley High School had implemented the changes earlier than some of the other schools in the district. The students were not too thrilled about the standards, but the school staff explained to them that the changes were there to help the students better succeed in college.
- By the end of the day, students were losing a bit of focus and ready to break for the day. The presentation by the students of how they would help the new student was uninspired and concise, but thorough and complete.

Relationships/Acceptance

This section concerns the discussions on insights from being an outsider, being part of the “in crowd,” understanding peer pressure, making connections and friends and being accepted by peers. It is important to note that MCEC staff involved in developing the training indicated that ‘being part of the “in crowd” is not a goal of the program. Rather, the focus is on “100% acceptance.” This concept of “100% acceptance” was the most important theme and is at the core of all the S2S programs. This is because MCEC recognizes the uniqueness of each individual student, regardless of whether they are coming from a military or civilian background. The program is attempting to change how people view others who are different from themselves – from negative to positive.

The majority of comments addressed the different activities/exercises used by the various trainers.

ES2S

- Emphasis was on 100% acceptance. Teachers were asked to model accepting-behaviour.
- Other discussions focused on how teachers may be complacent with accepting their students.
- One group talked about how students divide into cliques.
- Staff discussed ways to connect with students/families such as through having celebrations and honouring military families.

Several activities were conducted:

- One activity “accepted” 90% of photos of loved ones and asked how people felt, but this appeared not to make an impact with the group.
• The Charlotte/Jonathan video from Britain’s Got Talent made a greater impact and caused more of an emotional reaction with the group. This video taught the group about first impressions.
• A cell phone activity asked participants to pull up a photo of their favourite things and then said she accepted some but not others. The point was to show that even if only 10% of people are not accepted, it still doesn’t feel good for the person who is excluded.
• A mock TV show activity based on “The View” included a panel of participants who served or were military children themselves. The panel talked about their transitioning experiences.
• Participants not as familiar with the military lifestyle talked about their experiences, e.g. an administrator who inquired when a student did not come to school and discovered their parent had just returned from deployment but no one knew.

Impressions on delivery and participants’ involvement:
• There could have been greater elaboration about what “100% acceptance” meant and the observers felt that the tone may have come across as “summer camp” style. The whole thing was a bit odd and everyone seemed a little confused at the end.

JS2S
• Emphasis was on 100% acceptance and not turning anyone away. There was also a brief mention on the issue of bullying. The trainer conducted two activities.
• First impressions—students were asked to look at celebrity child photos and comment as to their initial impressions.
• Musical chairs—teachers led the students in this exercise with an emphasis on making connections.

S2S
• Conversations about making connections with students, acknowledging biases and working past first impressions to make sure people are welcomed and accepted. Accepting others may be difficult!
• Students discussed different “cliques” on their school campus; the trainer did not direct the conversation to one about “acceptance.” Much of the conversation concerned making “negatives” into “positives” and finding an alternative to where a student might go to fit in.
• Near the end of this topic the trainer brought up the topic of challenges faced by special needs students as they integrate into new schools.

There were several activities in this section:

• First impressions used celebrity yearbook pictures but seemed less effective as students did not discuss their responses and were reluctant to share possible negative first impressions; the participants seemed to enjoy this activity.
• A drawing activity had the students draw each other while only staring at the other person’s face.
• “New Student” discussion was intended to cover Academics. The majority of the students were very engaged and interested, however it had very little focus and was insufficiently guided and controlled.
• The students were shown a clip from “Remember the Titans,” and asked to determine the “risks” and “rewards” of meeting new people. This was used to show conflict resolution and cooperation with individuals who initially have conflict. The trainer did a good job of briefly and appropriately discussing race prior to the clip. In the discussion following the movie clip, the trainer used an example of relations with a rival high school. The students related strongly to this example.
• Another trainer mentioned the movie “Mean Girls” which may have appealed to a different set of students than the football clip used in other parts of the presentation.
• This section also used a clip from “Dancing with Wolves.” Including the suicide scene in the clip was not crucial to make the intended point. The topic of suicide was not addressed by the trainer. However, the students seemed mature enough to handle the topic.

Impressions on delivery and participants’ involvement:

• Students often brought up relevant and controversial topics, such as race relations on campus or drug use by certain student populations. However, the trainer did not follow-up the discussion with appropriate guidance to the students.
• Students appeared to gain an appreciation for the level of help needed by a new student and the types of questions a student might ask.
• Students connected more with the movie clips.

Relationships – personal attributes

This section was about being honest and caring, being reliable and being able to communicate.
*ES2S*

- Participants divided into groups and answered the question, “What is a leader?”
  participants were given a book on leadership; they were given an activity where they crafted a student leader. These activities and a review of several articles covered characteristics they should develop as leaders and picking student leaders. An activity included art supplies to create a leader on chart paper. This was an artistic and creative display of identifying leadership characteristics.

**Impressions on delivery and participants' involvement:**

- The trainers were pleasant and did their best to keep the group engaged, which was difficult given that many participants were splitting the day with another staff members from their school or could only attend one day.
- ...Many participants had to leave early due to the start of registration.
- ...Staff appeared to be caring, reliable and able to communicate.

*JS2S*

Impressions on delivery and involvement:

- One to two students were shy in this part, but were encouraged by others in their group to speak up. Each school made a presentation of what they had planned to do to help new students.
- The students seemed very enthusiastic. They answered questions and seemed happy to participate. They did not seem shy or reserved. There was not one student or group of students dominating the discussion.

*S2S*

- ...Lots of direct focus on honesty and caring, practice for students talking to the group and presenting information.

**Impressions on delivery and participants' involvement:**

- Participants seemed to enjoy the training, especially after they were able to get into their group without the school staff supervision.
- ...Some of the students were more vocal than the other students; however, all were encouraged to participate. Students were a little bit shy and reserved the first day, but they opened up more during the second day during all the group activities and interaction. Several of the students already knew each other. Two went to middle school together and were friends from soccer and three others had a JROTC connection. The oldest of the group (11th grade) appeared to feel a little bit of an outsider at first; however, she was smiling and interacting by day two.
• ...Students were very engaged during the “New Student” discussion. They shared honestly their feelings relating to the culture of their school.
• ...Some students were more reserved and only participated voluntarily a couple of times over the course of the two-day training.
• ...Students enjoyed and were engaged in icebreakers and teamwork activities.

Processes

Trainers
This section presents comments on the knowledge, delivery, enthusiasm and motivation of the trainers, how they performed at establishing a relationship for future contacts. It should be noted that we have omitted identifying information so that the focus would be on the types of personal behaviors presented and how our observers were impressed with the impact of these behaviors.

ES2S
• ...This was only the third time that the two trainers were implementing the training so it was a bit rough going at times.
• ...It was difficult for the trainers to establish relationships with the participants as many of them were in and out due to scheduling conflicts.
• ...Trainers used humour throughout the training. The first day was a bit slow, especially in lecture formats, however, some participants were highly engaged in the process.
• ...Z and K were a mother and daughter team. They were knowledgeable, being a military family and teacher, and seemed to motivate the group with their exercises and discussions. Z’s engagement with the crowd seemed more fluid. K’s style was a little more forced; it appeared that she was a little uncomfortable with the material.
• ...One trainer was engaging in her conversations with staff and how the group had fun with all the laughter going on.

JS2S
• ...B was a former principal and was very knowledge about the academic part with some knowledge about military students. He motivated students with his activities. He was enthusiastic and light hearted.
• ...The trainers helped motivate student participation. B made sure to move around the room to make sure that each school answered discussion questions.
• The trainers were enthusiastic and had clearly worked with a large number of students and staff across the country and internationally. The trainers were also personable and respectful of students and staff. Trainers were both very effective. They were enthusiastic and effectively engaged students and faculty. They were able to keep the energy up in the room – despite the small group.

• P was a very knowledgeable and enthusiastic trainer. The students seemed to appreciate his sense of humor. He stressed that the program should be student-led and adult-supervised if it is to be sustained; he did not provide MCEC’s contact for future guidance. He had an ability to speak fluidly and comfortably on topics without notes. He does not try to be “in character” or speak in the language of the students. He was very enthusiastic and was able to control the energy in the room and make smooth transitions between intended emotions.

• Weaknesses of P’s approach may be seen in using comments such as “You people [teenagers] are largely influenced by peer pressure.” A comment which generalized unnecessarily and could be perceived as accusatory and negative.

• P also made a couple of references to these students not being “Wal-Mart greeters.” The intent was to help the students get beyond just saying hi, however, the choice of analogy was questioned by the USC observer.

• C comes from a military family and appeared knowledgeable on transition experiences of the students and their families as well as differences in school policies across the country. She often covered topics with very concise presentations that seemed a bit hurried. It did not appear that she connected well with the students due to her manner of delivery.

• T was a military-wife with two children who have experienced numerous moves. She relied on this experience when working with the students. The trainers also did a great job acknowledging the skills and knowledge the students in the room brought to the table. They immediately credited the students as competent and capable which was great. She seemed to have a little less confidence with the materials, but she seemed to make more of an effort to build a rapport with the students during their breaks.

• B appeared confident, knowledgeable and enthusiastic with the material; he was able to explain items well, but the delivery of the material was not personalized compared with other trainers. As a result, the information seemed a little drier.

• B did a great job of addressing students with special needs. He included them in his discussion about responsibility, service, and acceptance.
School Staff

The following section presents the observers’ perspectives on staff motivation, engagement, interest level, enthusiasm, and commitment for the different training workshops.

ES2S

- ...The staff were more motivated in the morning than in the afternoon, they were also more enthusiastic the second day in comparison to the first.
- ...Day two had a higher level of engagement.
- ...The staff members were most engaged in the group activities and less during lectures.
- ...Staff members appeared more committed to discussing personal issues at their school sites and helping their school site develop welcoming programs instead of a general district program.
- ...Staff members with family in the military were passionate about the talks and appeared the most committed.

JS2S

- ...Staff appeared to be engaged, passionate, and committed
- ...Staff stated how they could see how the training was empowering students.
- ...Staff members seemed most interested in the activities and were happy to play a passive role.

S2S

- ...The staff was very motivated and engaged. They appeared committed to the programme and expressed a lot of possibility for what the students could do for their school.
- ...The staff had a strong rapport with the students participating in the training and the conversations were not inhibited by a teacher/student power dynamic.
- ...Oceanside staff members seemed to know the kids well and were positively engaged.
- ...L was very motivated and engaged. From discussions, it sounds like she will put in some volunteer time to help implement the program. She will provide space at the career center.
- ...R was quiet; it was noticeable that he was a little more of an “authoritative” figure. When he did speak, it was to empower the students and talk about their responsibility for the program. Throughout most of the presentations his body language was a bit indifferent. He made a couple of good comments that showed his support for the program and the students.
...M appeared enthusiastic when the students became enthusiastic. She asked about further details in the students’ plans and activities.

...K really kept the students on track when they separated into group discussions. S offered a lot of her perspective as an AVID teacher.

...The teachers treated students like equals in the process and vice-versa.

...They were struggling with the appropriate level and nature of involvement even by the end of the second day.

...The staff did not necessarily seem to be in attendance because of a commitment to military families. There was certainly a convenience/availability factor in the selection of the staff.

Students

This section asks about the students’ motivation, engagement, interest level, enthusiasm, and commitment for the different training workshops. This is only available for JS2S and S2S, as students did not participate in the ES2S training workshops.

JS2S

...Students were engaged, interested and having fun.

...Many students commented that they were glad they came and enjoyed the training.

...The activities kept their interest, especially when they were up and moving.

S2S

...The students did not self-select into the program. They did not know ahead of time the purpose of the training. There appeared to be biases in the group of students selected by the staff/faculty of the high school.

...The students got off to a slow start during the lectures at the beginning; however, by the second day they were motivated and there was a lot of camaraderie. The students were also used to shorter days. By the end of the first day the students were getting kind of tired.

...Students were enthusiastic, motivated and forward-thinking about where they want to take their program. They seemed to form relationships with each other easily; it was hard to tell that they didn’t know each other before!

...Students seemed to enjoy that they would be the “pioneers” of the S2S program.

...There appeared to be a lot more camaraderie amongst the group at the end of the training.

...A couple of students were reluctant to participate; however, the proportion of reluctant students seemed below average expectations.
...The students brought personal experience to the conversation and were committed to the idea of helping other students in transition. They were taking the conversations seriously while still having fun.

...All students shared throughout the day.

...The students were mostly military-connected. They understood the challenges confronting new students. For the most part, the students took initiative and were confident (with dialogue and presentations). Once they had full comprehension of the program and did some ice breakers with their fellow students, they were on board and motivated.

Building for the next steps

The overall goal of training is to empower staff and students to implement S2S activities in their schools and help spread the program by training other staff members/students to carry out these activities. Our observers were instructed to assess in what ways and to what extent the training provided clear guidance, strategies, resources, and other information to support trainees in carrying out S2S in their schools. They were further asked to note in what ways and to what extent the training prepared participants to sustain the program by training other staff/students to carry out programs and activities to support transitioning students.

ES2S

...MCEC trainers provided books, a Power Point presentation, and many hand-outs. The website for Building Capacity and Teachers College press, which published books written by the Building Capacity team, were provided.

...Toward the end of the presentation the trainers had groups pick out activities from the green workbook to build leadership provided by MCEC. This is when participants really became aware of the materials.

...Participants were asked to work on a blueprint for their respective schools that focused on the three modules introduced by the training.

...The trainer presented the service learning continuum (page 17 of the workbook).

...Due to poor timing arrangements, two of the schools did not complete a blueprint as the staff had to leave and another group left right after presenting. This was problematic in that they were not able to hear other blueprints which might have helped shaped their own thinking. There was also no time to debrief.

...More elaboration could have been placed on the sustaining portion. Also, more time could have been allowed to study the chart.
JS2S

- Each student and staff member was provided with a backpack and a participant manual.
- On the second day, schools were asked to work on an oral presentation on what they would do when they get back to their schools so this helped the students think about their plans.
- Students were told to think about what they learned and what they can bring to school on Monday.

S2S

- The training provided a rubric for the students to fill out while they made their plans. It gave a skeletal structure of some of the things that they should consider in the program/club development. The students were also shown video examples of what other S2S and JS2S programs were doing. The students were also given a flash drive with the electronic copy of all the training materials.
- Students were given the time to develop, present, and get feedback on a concrete plan to get their S2S program off the ground. This is a very effective means to ensure that the group has every chance to succeed.
- The students were placed in groups to develop and practice a few welcoming activities of their own; they were asked to evaluate their activities.
- The training provided several examples of what activities existed at other schools; trainees were urged to “steal” ideas.
- The training provided many strategies in the form of welcoming activities completed by the students as part of the training (human knot, jeopardy, question/advancement game, etc.), which may be reused to help new students transition to the school.
- Trainers were very effective at using activities to both build trust among this group as well as illustrating how these activities could be useful in the ongoing success of the program.
- The written materials (including flash drives) will also be helpful to this group as students were clearly planning to use many of the materials they had been given.
- By the end of the training the students are motived and empowered by planning their own icebreaker activities. Practice of the ice breakers in front of the group gave the students confidence that they can replicate the activity at school.
- Limitations include that some of the observers reported that the training seemed to lack in “clear guidance,” there were no clear distinct first or second steps to take for the students upon their return to school, and there was room for more concrete
examples and tasks but the trainers did not provide opportunity for engagement and brainstorming.

- The training highlighted the need for acceptance and the difficulties associated with being accepted.
- The trainer talked about the success of the program and asked the students to consider sustainability in the plan. As a result, the students mentioned having freshmen “officers” in the club for continued involvement.

Observers’ assessments:

- The training covered a lot of the development and starting of a school group, but there was not a lot of information about how they will sustain the group from year to year.
- Having the students perform the welcoming activities was a good method of teaching, as the students had to show leadership and planning skills in order to complete the activity as part of the training, and the students practiced an actual implementation of the game with their unprepared classmates (to imitate new students).
- The training did not provide specific advice for dealing with issues such as cliques, racism, depression, or loneliness.
- The training did not define an order in which the students should address campus, academic, or relationship issues.
- At the end of the first day the students were possibly not ready for on-boarding new students to the organization.
- The training provided a very good overall understanding of multi-faceted challenges faced by new students and how they can help to welcome them (through peer-to-peer relationships and group activities).

What worked

Staff

The observers noted that staff liked more practical step-by-step guides. They enjoyed the videos and the ideas about how to welcome new students. Our observers noted that the staff were engaged and enjoyed the discussions at their tables along with the activities.

Students

Our observers thought that pacing was great to engage students as long as possible, but give breaks where appropriate. What seemed to have worked more with students were exercises in which students were out of the seats and getting to engage with other students, such as team building exercises. When students felt secure, they were able to have more of a connection to the material presented.
Our observers noted specific exercises that seemed to be especially effective in energizing and “waking up” the group: PSA activity, “The View” talk panel, and an activity where participants were asked to create their own leader using a variety of art supplies. It seemed to be a good team-building exercise, in that participants really seemed to get involved in the process. It was also a nice change of pace from previous activities and breakouts.

Another standout moment was when the facilitators showed the participants a welcome video created by other S2S students from different schools. It really seemed to resonate with the participants and many later included the video as part of their school blueprint.

**What needs to be improved in S2S and recommendations**

In terms of process and structure, our observers thought that eight-hour sessions were quite difficult for students. They commented that perhaps students should have been encouraged to join tables/groups of students that they do not know, so that they expand their leadership and friendship-making skills, and learn more from the experiences of other schools. It was further noted that the student discussions without the “school staff” or “adults” in the room could have occurred earlier on. This is related to an observation that perhaps more could be done to increase the students' feelings that they “own” the school plan and could be less constrained and more creative planning their own school activities.

Our observers also thought that perhaps too much candy was provided to students. Observers also commented on the use of time: The students were given time to develop their plan; however, no time was given to the evaluation of their plan. A lot of their “planning” time went to coordinating contact information. It was also suggested that more time be provided to issues of children with special needs, especially when addressing “100% acceptance.”

Perhaps there were time constraints, but maybe the training could have talked a bit more about students with special needs during their “100% Acceptance” discussions. Students with special needs were not explicitly mentioned like they were in the JS2S training, which seems surprising, considering high school students might be more apt to discussing the subject matter.

Our observers thought that perhaps staff could have received more practical “tips” and specific steps to follow when they initiate the program. A thorough walk-through of the book they were provided may have been helpful.

Observers noted that the video movies and clips chosen were quite dated and new ones might have been more helpful. To be more focused, the trainers could record time marks for the videos to avoid showing unnecessary parts.

Some notes were made with regard to the choice of certain videos—a video that would have been more appropriate for junior high students than high school, the video clip on the
football movie may have been too long, and perhaps for some of the students not so relevant (another video was also football related). One of the observers noted that race was an issue in two videos (“Remember the Titans” and a Native American-related clip), but actual present-day issues of race in school were not really discussed. It would have been a good opportunity to help students understand how to deal with these issues. According to one of the observers the video with Dr. Kenneth Ginsberg could have been taken out. The seven C’s topic was covered in lecture. The video seemed to be directed more toward school staff than it was for the students.

The observers thought that perhaps more videos could be developed with examples of good practice, especially for the high school level. Further, S2S or MCEC have examples of “best practices” or “success stories” that they could provide as part of a New Organization Toolkit. The videos are great, but do not travel back to the school with the students.

Suggestions were also made with regard to specific exercises. The training could have benefitted from a more “creative” ice-breaker activity instead of each participant working with a partner to find commonalities. Perhaps the sticky note exercise continued for too long and could have been shorter.

Observers felt that MCEC’s presentation of their organization resembled an “infomercial,” particularly the videos. MCEC emphasized which materials were MCEC materials. The observer felt it came off as marketing the MCEC brand or product to the students, rather than them trying to provide a meaningful service.

Concluding Comments on S2S training

We have evaluated a series of training sessions that included ES2S, JS2S, and S2S. We based our evaluation on feedback questionnaires completed by the participants and observations made by USC observers. These two sources of information seem to provide a coherent positive picture of the training sessions. Participants were exposed to a wide range of issues, through multiple methods and exercises, and with the support of additional resources such as booklets and video clips. The participants tend to assess very highly the levels of skills and knowledge acquired, and the training processes, structure, and organization. In general, our observers support these positive views and provide examples of engaging and motivating activities, exercises and discussions.

Participants and observers were also able to identify issues that may need revisiting and improvements. Of the highest importance is attention to the need to provide trainees with specific and concrete guidelines for next steps, and especially the need to build sustainability for all activities for transitioning students. The main implication is the need for follow up and continued support (e.g., 'booster training') for schools that intend to improve their support for transitioning students and families. This may require continued involvement of MCEC's S2S
team and/or the development of a **Consortium Support Network** to help sustain and expand the programs intended to support transitioning students.

### II. Student to Student (S2S) - Plans and Beginning Activities

Several school teams developed plans for the school (see Appendix A). The S2S training explained the need for such school plans and provided guidelines as to how to develop them. As these plans show, there are similarities and variations between schools.

**Preliminary Activities**

Our evaluation team is monitoring the activities and progress made by the various S2S school teams. This process is in its early stages and shows uneven progress in schools. There are schools that report very little activity and progress, whereas several schools describe a range of activities and recruiting efforts that suggest that the school team is actively implementing lessons learned in S2S training.

In the following sections we provide examples of materials gleaned from monitoring of school S2S teams. An important component of the teams’ role is to motivate and engage students and staff in supporting military families. To illustrate, here is an example of a message sent:

- Kick-off your eS2S program with a bang this school year! Here are some tips to ensure you’re off to a strong start:
  - Continue to reach out to students to develop their eS2S clubs. Your program should be customized to best fit your school and follow your plans/timelines developed before the summer break.
  - We recommend tracking your students who participate in the eS2S program (e.g., student leaders, new students, and student council) and activities (e.g., student lunches and weekly meetings). In addition to relying on training, welcoming teams see the USC Welcoming Practices team as a source of support.
  - One district stated, “USC will aid in the evaluation of the program; by sending out survey links, etc. to gather information on the program. USC may even meet with staff members and students to aid in the evaluation. You should be able to use that information to determine what will make your program stronger and more successful.”
  - For example, at another district, their project manager emailed information to staff that attended the trainings, stating, “Use the tools and resources gathered at the training and your developed plans to start implementing your eS2S programs. If you need additional guidance, USC can show more examples of what is being done at other school district sites.”
In this stage of the development of the S2S teams, several teams report organizational activities designed to establish the team in the school - creating space, recruiting more volunteers and raising money.

- M will train I, the new School Based Resource Teacher, to continue to support S2S students as their new sponsor.
- Creating flyers to promote JS2S participation
- Raising funds by recycling and selling engraved rocks.
- Creating a JS2S Pamphlet; Organizing the JS2S Welcome Center
- The PAL class incorporated the MCEC training, so the school now has 28 new members added to the original team.
- Resource teacher D from Santa Margarita School had the S2S students speak at an assembly back in early September to explain the program and will be welcoming students all year.
- There's a Student Center at one high school in a teacher’s classroom called "The Pirate's Deck".
- S2S will focus on recruiting new members at the annual TVHS Club Rush, assist Daisy, Director of the Veterans Supplemental Support Network collect various supplies from over 40 TVHS clubs needed for our military/ veterans during the football game in honor of our troops which is being held on 9/11. Pizza, salad, and drinks served.
- S2S Recruited 25 students. Planning a meeting with new recruits next week. Will implement ice breaker activities and discuss up-coming agenda.

Teams describe multiple types of events that target military students and families as well as activities that target the school community as a whole. Here are several activities focusing on the military:

- Hosted a "Meet and Greet" for military families on July 31.
- Military coffee coming up on Oct. 15th
- Completion of parent needs assessment and military resources bulletin board in the office
- Updating military resources page on our school app
- We identified and generated a list of our military students and sent it to all our teachers
- We have a military and family life counsellor supporting our students on an individual basis
- School Liaison Officer has distributed a sign-up sheet for each class to select eS2S Student Ambassadors to give school tours to new students.
- The school wants to use grant funds for supplies for an event at Naval Base San Diego. Students will create "gift boxes" to decorate the event.
- We have started counselling services in partnership with Fleet and Family Services, and Military Family Life for students who were identified in September during student monitoring as needed this level of support.
• We plan to create a menu tab on our school blog with resources for military families
• School is starting up their Military Pride Club again.
• The students created a JS2S welcome video last year. This video was forwarded from last year's intern.
• School has been briefing their new Military Family Life Counsellor.
• Students helped out with freshman orientation; they gave campus tours, shared information about the campus, and conducted ice breakers and team building exercises.
• Clerk notifies military families moving in and out.
• Hallway has a map showing where military families are deployed.

Other activities target the whole school:
• This year we will create a video of our school to help new students familiarize themselves with our campus and our staff
• Student Ambassadors are assigned to help students on their first day of school.
• A parent registry book has been created and is in the front office. The next step is to decide who and how we contact families once they sign the book.
• Students created a rules video for new students.
• There's a welcoming Powerpoint for new students.
• Established student Welcome Team
• During our freshmen Business Day, S2S provided campus tours, assisted with class schedules, and answered questions regarding the up coming school year. Ms. V. was at Station 1 greeting all incoming freshman and processing their paper work. Several military families were informed about S2S during check-in. Assistant Principal set-up an informational station in the mini- gym while students picked up their class schedules. Mr. I and several S2S students greeted new freshmen and their parents and further discuss the benefits of S2S Club.
• Students in the PAL class meet and greet new students during lunch; new students get hand-written invitations.
• There were only a few reports on the barriers to progress. Staff differences have caused delays in program implementation.
• "We have been in some very basic implementation stages at V.1 Elementary. So basic that we needed to improve the climate at the school before we could implement any student to student programs, otherwise, our staff would not be supportive. Climate is improving, and we will hopefully be able to start planning for some student involved programs and projects. I will keep you posted."
III. Parent to Parent (PtoP) Training

Parent to Parent (PtoP) is a program that was developed by MCEC and adopted by the Consortium. The program empowers parents to be their child’s strongest advocate on educational and social issues through MCEC’s Parent workshops. The workshops cover various topics available for all parents. Some of the workshops include:

- School transitions
- Elementary school workshops such as “Preparing your child for Kindergarten”
- Middle school and High school workshops such as “College Admission Portfolios”
- Military–centered workshops such as “Staying connected to Education During Deployment”

The Welcoming Practices Consortium chose this program as a component in its efforts to develop practices and policies to support transitioning families and students. This program was chosen due to the fact that it was created specifically with military families in mind, engages local parents, and although there is no rigorous evaluation of this program, it received praise from schools and districts that have adopted it. MCEC trainers were contracted to implement parent workshops for districts in the Welcoming Practices Consortium. This implementation is in its early stages. We provide here a preliminary evaluation and will continue to evaluate the program and provide more complete evaluation in the next annual technical report.

Trainers

There are currently four MCEC trainers in the Consortium. These trainers were hired at the end of May 2014 and received an orientation and training with the MCEC Training Director at the MCEC National Seminar training in DC. Three of the trainers have experience with military life and are familiar with the military culture.

Districts Involved

The Consortium team at San Diego Academic Center (SDAC) has introduced each of the Welcoming Practices Districts to the PtoP team. The USC team coordinated meetings with the district leaders that included superintendents, or assistant superintendents, directors and other administrators to introduce the PtoP team. At these district meetings, USC began with the Welcoming Practices grant overview including the component on parent workshops and introduced PtoP team where they presented to a group of district leaders on PtoP. The USC team not only introduced the PtoP team to gatekeepers at the district and schools through meetings, but also connected them via email. USC has encouraged districts to coordinate with PtoP to have parent workshops at the schools. This is taken from lessons learned from the recent Building Capacity Consortium, that it is essential to start the process at the district level, get the blessing of the superintendents, and encourage them to instruct and guide their staff and principals to become involved and supportive. With the superintendents and district lead support, it would
be easier to get the attention of the principals, although coordinating training and interventions in schools is rarely a simple task. It is important to approach the superintendents through channels that were already established and proved effective. Therefore, being introduced by the USC partner is helpful for any outside organizations. In addition, USC staff introduced PtoP to the school liaison officers (SLO) and the Military Family Life Consultant/Counselor (MFLC). SDAC also provided the PtoP lead a spreadsheet of all the schools and districts point of contacts in order to follow-up with each districts regarding scheduling dates for workshops. Each district has a different point of contact that is working with PtoP.

**District A:** PtoP is working with Director of Student Services

**District B:** Navy SLO and MFLC are working with PtoP to coordinate workshops. SLO sends out information to families and the MFLC help PtoP with the scheduling at the school.

**District C:** The PtoP program was introduced to Principal and have met with Superintendent, and are working on dates for workshops.

**District D:** PtoP is working with Program Specialist from the District office who works with each school and invited PtoP to a parent school event.

**District E:** PtoP is working with Parent specialist of the District Welcome Center. PtoP was invited to a parent meeting with the Parent specialist and local parents to discuss the logistics of setting workshops.

**Challenges and Obstacles**

The first set of challenges was associated with defining the central role of the USC team within the Consortium and in relation to MCEC. Typically, MCEC works directly with districts and schools that contract the organization to receive training. In the present context, there was a need for a different process that acknowledged the need to coordinate training on behalf of the Consortium and establish communication patterns that would facilitate implementation on a large, Consortium-wide, scale. At first, PtoP did not share any updates nor communicated with the USC Consortium team. Following an intervention by the Principal Investigator, PtoP staff began to respond back to USC Project Manager and update on the difficulties they had connecting with districts. As a result, USC Consortium team connected between PtoP leads and each of the districts, and coordinated invitations of PtoP leads to district meetings to introduce the PtoP program.

One of the barriers that PtoP has encountered is a difficulty in finding reliable district or school point of contact that PtoP leads could rely on to help with the scheduling and coordination. Thus, there was a delay on scheduling dates for PtoP meetings/ workshops.

Another challenge encountered was the lack of attendance from parents at workshops. Once the PtoP workshops were scheduled, the challenge of parent attendance emerged. In one of the districts PtoP workshops have been integrated with the monthly military family coffee/ tea meetings at a several
schools. Though one introduction meeting was well attended, only a few attended follow up workshops. At one meeting only a handful of parents attended a PtoP meeting, while at another meeting no parents showed up. This particular challenge could likely be attributed to lack of parent knowledge of the events and poor marketing and dissemination of workshops, as well as scheduling conflicts with other on-campus events.

**Recommendations for Improvement of PtoP**

The USC Consortium team that monitors the implementation of PtoP and the evaluation team have developed some recommendations to help overcome some of the barriers and challenges. These ideas will be shared and discussed with the PtoP staff.

**Improve Coordination:** PtoP leads should work hand in hand with the USC Consortium team and with the districts point of contacts. On a school level, meeting with the principal, parent representative and pupil personnel is important to demonstrate the importance of the program, describe and coordinate the plan and get the support of the leadership.

**Promotion:** The program could benefit from a strong marketing effort to better promote the program. PtoP has Facebook presence that could be leveraged better. Given the extensive presence of this program across the country there may be marketing resources on the national level that could be helpful to local PtoP teams. Some ideas to help marketing in schools:

- Developing colorful flyers about a workshop/meeting, informing schools and with school’s permission displaying flyers on campus
- Working with the schools and Principals to send out a phone, email or flyer e-blast
- Attending local events and meetings in the same city of the schools to promote PtoP
- Working with the PTA/PTO of the schools and districts
- Asking SLO's to send out e-blasts to military families
- Scheduling workshops well in advance and not close to schools events
- Repeatedly sending out reminders to schools

**Delivery:** Presentation and delivery of PtoP workshops cold be improved, and to our assessment, improvements in this area would increase the attractiveness of the program to parents. Our observations indicate that trainers tend to spend too much time on promoting MCEC. Instead, we recommend that focusing on the benefits to parents and the program’s value to the schools would be a good selling point of the program.

**Concluding Comments on Spread and Sustainability of S2S and PtoP**
The conceptual framework underlying this Consortium emphasizes sustainability and spread. That is, the need to ensure that programs implemented through this Consortium be sustained over time when this Consortium is over, and that programs implemented in districts and schools spread to cover as many districts and schools. Lessons learned from our evaluation of the Building Capacity Consortium (Benbenishty, Final Technical Evaluation Report, 2014) suggest that in order to increase chances of sustainability it is essential to build internal capacity (mainly on a district level) and to integrate programs into everyday practices and professional duties. Programs that are predicated on outside paid personnel are harder to maintain. Further, in order for a program to spread within a district it needs strong buy-in and commitment of district management and middle management. To spread such a program to other districts and region it is essential to consider embedding such programs in training professionals in institutions such as universities.

This Consortium has five districts and about 100 schools. There is a need to plan how to spread training across all Consortium schools and how to ensure sustainability over time. An important strategy is to ‘train trainers’ in each of the districts and in schools that experience high transition rates. These trainers should be supported over time through ‘booster’ training workshop, and perhaps over time through a network of key personnel in the Consortium that are responsible for welcoming practices, including S2S and PtoP programs.

A lesson learned from our evaluation of the Building Capacity Consortium is that staff turnover may interfere with sustainability of activities and programs. We encourage the Consortium leadership and MCEC to engage in developing a long-term plan to address the issue of sustainability and spread, as early as possible.
Chapter 3: Parents’ Views of School and District Registration and Welcoming

Background

The aim of the evaluation team was to survey transitioning parents and students every academic year, starting in the first academic year of the project. Although this plan was shared with Consortium members and was approved, when we tried to implement this plan we met several unexpected obstacles. Some of the difficulties were related to the fact that Consortium districts could not easily identify the parents who had joined the school in the last year, and were unable to distinguish between military-related parents and other families.

After considering the obstacles, we revised our original plan and decided to conduct an initial online survey asking all parents in the Consortium to respond, irrespective of the year they joined the district or whether they were related to the military. We think that this change in design made a positive contribution to our ability to monitor registration and welcoming practices. We can now encompass many more transitioning families with different types of transitions, some of them 'natural', as graduating from elementary school and moving to a middle school, and transitions due to geographical moves. Most youth in middle school and high school have had transition within a two year period from 'feeder' schools. A high number of elementary school children had transition from preschool to kindergarten and from kindergarten to first grade. Military families move often and transition between schools, sometimes even during the school year. Hence, asking a broader group of parents about their transition experiences would be helpful in examining differences between these different types of transitions. Moreover, this method will help us compare the military connected families and civilian families in how they experience different types of transitions.

Consequently, the district superintendents sent out emails directly to each of their parents asking them to fill out a 'customer satisfaction' survey surrounding issues of transition. The evaluation team did not directly approach and did not receive any names or emails of parents and students. The survey was sent to parents in English and in Spanish. The links to the online survey were included in the email letters sent by district superintendents to all parents in their districts. Following this process, we intend to send the links to Consortium families again. The links to surveys will also be placed on the district website, and registrars will ask new parents arriving to the district to complete these electronic surveys.

This process began in early November. In this report we describe the findings based on the first round of responses that includes only three districts. We will continue to send reminders and include all the districts and expect to have many more responses. It is important to emphasize that the findings below pertain only to the responses of the first group of parents and it cannot be seen as representative of all districts and schools. Hence, the findings below should be interpreted cautiously and seen as exemplars.
and preliminary indications that need to be replicated in the much larger sample. After receiving the more complete set of parent responses we intend to prepare a separate report for each of the Consortium districts, as well as a Consortium report that will be included in the next annual technical evaluation report.

In this survey we asked parents when they entered school, so that we could identify families that are new to the district. We also asked parents for future participation and requested their contact details if they agreed. Further, we asked parents who were willing to let their children participate (middle school and high school students in the Consortium schools), to provide an email address of their children so that we could ask these children to participate.

The survey includes several sections:

I. Background Information

II. Most recent Experiences in Registration

III. Information Received and Requested Regarding District Services and Resources

IV. How Welcoming was the School

V. Willingness to Participate in Future Surveys

Findings

Background Information

At this stage we have responses from 1427 parents, 1409 of them were useable responses. These parents described a total of 2300 children, about half of them males, mean age 10.06 (SD = 3.72). Two thirds reported that their child/ren attend one school, 28% that they have children in two different schools and 5.5% that their children attend three or more different schools. About 8% reported having a child in prekindergarten, 19% have a child in kindergarten, 61% in elementary schools, 27% in middle school, and 29.5% in high schools (the total is more than 100% because many parents had more than one child in school).

About 70% said they nor their spouse were associated with the military, 8.9% said that either them or spouse were currently serving, 17.7% said that they or their spouse is a veteran.

Table 3.1

Number of Respondents and Children by District
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Total Number of children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonsall</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chula Vista</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temecula</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>1230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District not identified</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1409</td>
<td>2301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Future Communication**

We asked the parents whether they owned a smartphone and which operation system (IOS or Android). This information is important for the design and the dissemination of the electronic application being developed by the Consortium. About 91% said they own a smartphone, the majority of them iPhones (58.2%) and almost all the rest android (39.4%). The great majority responding to this English language survey said they wanted to receive future information in English (94.9%) and almost all the rest asked for Spanish.

**Relocation and Registration**

About half of the respondents (46.1%) said that this was their child's first school, whereas a 17.5% relocated from a different school in the same district, a fifth (19.7) relocated from a different district in California and 9.7% from outside California.

Table 3.2

**Origin of Relocation to School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This was the first school of our child</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>46.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From a different district in California</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From another school in this district</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From outside the state of California</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About two thirds of the respondents registered this academic year, 9.2% last year, and 22.6% registered earlier. About 40% (41.4%) said they received information prior to registration and a similar number (39.6%) said they did not get information; the rest do not remember or did not respond. The
source of this information were families in school (15.4%), school or district secretary (9.9%), 3.4% was the principal, 2.8% the registrar and 1.1% the SLO.

Most of the parents registered in person (81.3), 25.6% online, and about 2.5% registered via email and documents in the mail.

Table 3.3

Means and SD's, Assessment of the Registration Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The registration process was clearly explained to me.</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions related to the registration process were answered</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a timely manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The district/school expressed an interest in understanding and</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meeting my family’s needs throughout the registration process.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My interactions with the district/school throughout the</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>registration process were positive overall.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child’s school records and documents were received and</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>processed in a timely manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, how satisfied were you with the registration process?</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

* Scale: 1 = Very Dissatisfied to 5 = Very Satisfied

Overall, the parents expressed moderate levels of satisfaction. Their assessments were lowest with regard to the degree to which district/school expressed an interest in understanding and meeting their family’s needs throughout the registration process (mean = 3.52) and the highest was their assessment – 'My child’s school records and documents were received and processed in a timely manner' (mean = 3.87).

Parents were asked what information they received from the district or school and in what areas they would like to received more information.

Table 3.4

Information Provided to Parents and Requested by Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>District Provided Info</th>
<th>Parent Wants Info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent engagement</td>
<td>1124</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>459</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extracurricular activities/ before and after school programs</th>
<th>947</th>
<th>67.2</th>
<th>558</th>
<th>39.6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic requirements</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community support programs in the local</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic support programs</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and wellness programs in the local area</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local mental health services</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs and services for military-connected families</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local military installations</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial services in the local area</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal services in the local area</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Table 3.4, the majority of parents reported that they received information on parent engagement opportunities (79.8%), extracurricular activities (67.2%) and academic requirements (63.9%). Less than 20% of the parents reported receiving information on local mental health services (17.7%), programs and services for military-connected families (15.8%), the local military installations (12.6%), financial services in the local area (11.8%), and legal services in the local area (10.6).

Less than half of the parents said they were interested in receiving more information. Three areas were requested most: Academic support programs (44.1% of the parents), academic requirements (40.2%), and extracurricular activities/ before and after school programs (39.6%). Parents requested least information on financial services (15.8%), legal services (12.4%), programs and services for military-connected families (11.2%) and information on local military installation (9.6%).

Table 3.5

### Mean and SD's of Assessment of how Welcoming is the School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child felt welcomed by the school</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I felt welcomed by the school.  
\[ \text{score} = 4.03, \text{SD} = 0.98 \]

The school made my child feel like he/she were part of the school community. 
\[ \text{score} = 3.97, \text{SD} = 1.00 \]

The school helped my child succeed in school. 
\[ \text{score} = 3.93, \text{SD} = 1.06 \]

The school made us feel like we were part of the school community. 
\[ \text{score} = 3.92, \text{SD} = 1.03 \]

The school helped my child connect with other students. 
\[ \text{score} = 3.81, \text{SD} = 1.05 \]

The school made special efforts to accommodate the needs of my child. 
\[ \text{score} = 3.64, \text{SD} = 1.08 \]

The school helped me connect to other families. 
\[ \text{score} = 3.29, \text{SD} = 1.12 \]

The school helped connecting me to services and resources in the community. 
\[ \text{score} = 3.19, \text{SD} = 1.09 \]

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

The highest assessment of parents was that the child felt welcomed by the school (mean = 4.12). Most other assessments ranged from 3.81 to 4.03. Three assessments were lower – The school made special efforts to accommodate the needs of my child (M = 3.64), the school helped me connect to other families (M = 3.29) and the lowest assessment related to the parents' assessments was that the school helped connecting me to services and resources in the community (M = 3.19).

**Welcoming schools**

We asked military families whether they felt welcomed and respected in their child/ren's school. We received a range of responses and there was no majority to any view expressed by parents. We first note that some responded had issues with the question itself. Several said that military families should not be singled out, because there were other types of families that need attention (e.g., children of divorced parents, children in same sex families, and families which struggle financially).

Several parents objected to the question because they think that providing special attention to their children may not be helpful:

- If the school keeps telling my children they are at some type of disadvantage or require some sort of special services because they are military, they may begin to believe it. The best way for a child to acclimate to any environment is for them to be treated the same as anyone else, and they will believe they are equal to and as capable as their peers. To target these kids simply because of their parents' profession is discrimination.
Other parents indicated that the school either did not know whether they were military parents or did not treat them differently in any way (in some cases as friendly as other families and in others as badly as other families). From their responses, it seems that they did not mind not being identified or treated differently. In contrast, we received comments from several parents who described how dissatisfied they were from the registration process and from other interactions with the school. Some of these comments (e.g., rude treatment by registration staff) did not seem related to issues they faced as military parents. Others describe frustrations more directly related to their situation as military families. This included mainly difficulties in registration conducted from overseas, and lack of understanding of the life circumstances of children who moved often.

- Absolutely not [feeling respected]. There has been no attempt to support my children during my husband's deployment and no willingness to continue academic programs and needs from prior to our move. They were uninterested in previous school records and required my daughter to be tested again for the GATE program when she was at school.
- Frankly I am very upset that there is not something to be done for military children who transfer in. Knowing that military kids have to change schools frequently, there should be room for them to attend the school they are zoned for. Coming in and having to drive all around town to register my son to a school that he was 'overflowed to' was very stressful and upsetting. Not one person seemed to care that my son was a military kid and had changed schools many times already. There should be a military liaison working with the district to help. My daughter's experience at another school was little better, though I felt that some of her teachers were completely unaware of the challenges a military child faces. Her counselor, was very helpful, however.
- It was not an easy transition coming from overseas. We felt welcomed when we finally arrived here but the resources and support online were less than ideal back in 2010. I hope things have improved, it was an awful experience to purchase a home online from the other side of the world, move a family of 6 and then when I arrive at the school to register, I was told that there was not room for my children to attend the same school. It eventually all worked out but a miserable start. To purchase a home in a school district and then be told you can't attend it is a stressful experience.
- No, there is a lack of support, understanding, or compassion for children who move a lot due to life in the military. Extremely disappointed in and with the school in this manner.
- We just recently retired and I did not feel respected going into school. The teacher nor the principal took any consideration that my son was bounced around from school to school since kindergarten. And having his dad deployed over and over again. Being a military family is hard
enough and I don’t want anyone feeling sorry for my family. The military life has just made me and family stronger.

- They seemed disappointed that yet another military family was coming into their school.
- This is our third year and the first year that I have seen any effort made to reach out to military families and to engage the school liaison officers. With such a large military population that relationship needs to be expanded on.

Many other military families reported on positive experiences. It seems that some of the positive experiences were due to expressions of recognition and appreciation of the military parents, both individually and as a group. One military spouse shared how good her husband felt when the school principal shook his hand in appreciation and gratitude when he learned that her husband serves in the military. Others mention signs that the school respects the military families.

- Absolutely! Military families are not only welcomed but honored
- Always feel welcome and appreciated. They frequently recognize the military families (i.e. Military Appreciation Day) and our children. I enjoy hearing that our children are reinforced with the idea of "American Exceptionalism." That they still continue to say the Pledge of Allegiance and sing the Star Spangled Banner; moreover, that they can wear and show outwardly their support of their nation
- I loved that they had a few special times the school homered the military & had a Hero wall & maybe there could be more support to military kids who's family has to be gone serving our country.

Other parents were very appreciative of the ways some of the teachers treated their child, understanding their life circumstances:

- My son's teacher has been absolutely amazing and understanding when it comes to the transition our son has had to make moving from another state.
- My son's teachers have always been understanding and supportive of my son as we have gone through 3 deployments. These deployments have been hard on my son, who is close to his dad, and it has been nice to know that my son's teachers have shown him patience and compassion while he deals with his dad being in a war zone.
- I have never felt any type of disrespect/feelings of un-welcomeness due to our affiliation with the Navy. My son's teacher is very understanding of the small behavior/social-emotional changes that have come up due to my husband being deployed (he left 1 month prior to school starting).
• The principal met with me personally, and allowed me to share my child's background and strengths with him. This direct interaction enabled him to suggest the most optimal placement for my child, and gave me a sense of assurance that our principal CARED for the specific needs of my child. He gave us a guided tour of the facility, and shared with us exciting opportunities available during the school year...this gave my child something to look forward to while she anticipated the start of the school year, and a sense of satisfaction in "finding her place" amidst the student population at school.

Finally, two parents shared a concern that sometimes the type of attention given to a military child may not be appropriate for the child's needs, and there is a need to improve staff skills in attending to the unique circumstances of her child as a military child.

• We are a military family and I feel the staff has no skill to support my child in her experiences. My husband has been deployed several times in her life and the staff approached that with much sympathy. Although, it's nice to know they are concerned for her, I feel they fed her feeling lonely or out of place because of her father's absence. She is regularly asked if it is "hard" to have daddy gone and if it makes her sad. I've felt that this perpetuates those feelings when they might not otherwise be there.

• In my opinion, it is important to have an understanding and empathetic staff, so when she is feeling lonely or sad she knows she can talk to them. However, having people ask her how hard it is or if it makes her sad somewhat plants the idea in her had. She's lived her whole life this way and really doesn't know a different life. She doesn't complain nor has she acted out as a result of his absence as of yet, but certainly the idea is being planted with how she's approached. Staff members should be trained on how to have understanding and empathy with children of deployed or migrant military families, but not perpetuate the problems as though she is someone to pity.

A different type of concern was shared by another parent who felt that the fact that the school knew his child is a military child, resulted in attributing difficulties she was experiencing to his military service. In that parent's eyes, this resulted in mis-diagnosis of her special needs and delayed services.

In order to continue our monitoring process, we asked parents whether they would be willing that we contact them in the future. About 20%, 286 parents said they were willing. In addition we asked parents whether they would be willing to provide us with contact information of their children so that we could contact them and include them in future surveys. We received 150 positive responses. About 400
parents said they would be interested in getting a summary of the findings of this report. We will follow up with families who are willing to be interviewed in depth.

**Lessons Learned and Concluding Comments**

Overall, the survey among parents seems to support the conclusions from the needs assessment that was conducted before this Consortium has been launched. Parents expressed only moderate levels of satisfaction and were especially less satisfied with regard to the degree to which district/school expressed an interest in understanding and meeting their family’s needs throughout the registration process. Consequently, this Consortium should use the registration process to communicate to parents that their needs are important to the district. For instance, to the extent possible, parents should be queried about their needs throughout the registration process, and when possible offered information related to services related to this needs.

Further, it seems that not enough information is provided to many parents about academic requirements relevant to their children. We recommend helping to create effective ways to make this information accessible to parents, based on their children's grade and special needs. Given that probably most of requirements are similar across districts and schools, it may be possible to develop an application that makes the information accessible through a simple interface. We recommend conducting a preliminary examination of the need and feasibility of developing such an application through this Consortium.

We should mention again that we do not have a representative picture of all that Consortium schools and districts do in this area. In our analyses of the more complete set of responses we will look for good practices developed in this area and perhaps identify examples of innovative practices and procedures that could be shared and disseminated.

Our analysis of the information needs of parents reveals that certain types of information (e.g., about mental health services or military installations) are requested by a relatively small group of parents. We understand that the application development team is developing such an interface. We recommend informing this team about these parents’ requests for information. In future surveys among parents it would be important to examine whether the availability of such interface and information made a difference in parents' assessments of the registration processes.

When parents' were asked about welcoming practices, their highest assessment was that the child felt welcomed by the school. This is encouraging and in the future should be compared with children's perspectives. Parents had much lower assessments pertaining to whether the school made special efforts to accommodate the needs of their child and the school helped them connect to other families and to services and resource in the community. These issues are at the heart of the mission of the Consortium.
and provide clear directions for the design of Consortium activities and application development. Specifically, the Consortium should develop means to assess the particular needs of registering parents and offer them information that would help them and their children connect to the school community and to district, school and community resources that are relevant to their needs.

Our survey among parents suggests that there is a need to be aware of different attitudes of military connected parents with regard to their perspective on receiving special attention. While some of the parents were very unsatisfied when the schools did not acknowledge their special circumstances, other military parents felt that they should not be treated differently. Our evaluation team should continue to analyze these responses in order to provide Consortium leadership and staff with insights on how to balance responding to typical needs of military parents and their children and not 'singling out' military families in ways that may be perceived as stigmatizing.

Finally, a lesson we learned from the findings so far is that our evaluation should be sensitive to major differences between districts. In addition to Consortium-level report, our team should generate district-level reports that could be helpful to each of the districts.
Chapter 4: 

Developing Electronic Applications to Support Transitioning Families and Students

Background

One of the important tasks of the Welcoming Practices Consortium is to develop a suite of electronic applications to support transitioning families and students. The evaluation of this development process is in its early stage and will continue next year. The development process included several tasks that this chapter will review:

- Analyzing Current Registration Processes and Welcoming Practices
- Identifying Current Available Resources
- Design and Development of Electronic Applications

In the following sections we describe these activities and provide examples and illustrations of the products of these development processes.

I. Building a Database of Resources

Processes

An important goal of the electronic application is to provide parents with information resources that they could use that are available in their school, district, and the community. Our evaluation team documented a range of activities designed to create a database of resources that could be accessible to parents (and students) through the electronic application. We observed a collaborative process that included a USC team, Consortium districts and schools, the San Diego Military Family Collaborative, and the application development team. The process was iterative and included exchanges of lists and ideas between the various partners so that the list of resources be exhaustive and relevant, and the way it would be categorized and organized be the most suitable for incorporation in an electronic database.

Structure and Content

The USC San Diego content development team identified about 2000 different resources and described each one of them, so that they contain information on the type of resource, details of services provided, its organization affiliation, addresses, time of operation, etc. The USC San Diego team initially mapped out the resources using four domains. Based on the analysis of available resources, a categorization system was developed. Resources were categorized into:
• **School and district based resources** – Resources embedded in specific districts/schools

• **Community resources** – Resources and services provided by many different community organizations, some of them part of a collaborative in San Diego.

• **Resources relevant to military families** – Resources associated with military installations and with organizations focusing on military families

• **National web resources** - These are websites and applications that provide information relevant to military families.

In the following sections we illustrate examples of the documentation of several types of resources.

The following are database fields describing various resources.

**District Program**

District Name
Department and Contact
Student Programs and Contact
Before/After School Program and Contact
Community Programs and Contact
Preschool and Contact
Emergency Preparedness
Health and Wellness
Community Resources
Military Programs
Military Resources
Mental Health/Behavioral Health Programs
Parent Engagement/PTO
Student Applications/Technology
Miscellaneous

Abbreviated examples of entries in this database are presented in Table 4.1 All contact names and addresses are in the original databases and omitted here. Appendix B lists transition-specific programs.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District B</th>
<th>District C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Programs</td>
<td>Foster Youth Services; Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Home/Hospital Instruction; Health Services; McKinney-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vento Homeless Services; Special Education

Before / after school program
ASES After-School Program; Daycare

Licensed care is offered at the following schools by the South Bay Family YMCA:
Allen (mornings only), Arroyo Vista Charter, Casillas, Chula Vista Hills, Clear View, Cook, Discovery Charter, Eastlake, Feaster Charter, Hedenkamp, Heritage, Hilltop Drive (mornings only), Liberty, Marshall, McMillin, Olympic View, Rosebank, Salt Creek, Sunnyside (afternoons only), Tiffany, Veterans, Wolf Canyon

Licensed child care is also offered by the Border View YMCA at:
Juarez-Lincoln and Los Altos

Pre School
There are 3 preschool programs within the District B Union School District. There are 2 tuition-based programs, one at the District B Community Center and one at District B West Elementary School. The third class is the district's Buddy Class. This program serves children with special needs and enrolls a few typical peers as role models.

Qualifications, Registration, and general information (http://www.cvesd.org/PARENTS/Pages/preschool.aspx)

Student Application Technology


Health and Wellness

District has a Health Services Council; Website provides school nurse information, pertussis update, keeping ill students at home, and parent resources; Wellness policy (http://www.cvesd.org/COMMUNITY/Pages/wellness_policy.aspx); District uses Kids Care Express, a mobile medical unit of the Family Health Centers of San Diego, to help provide immunizations at school sites.

Resources Database - Lessons Learned and Concluding Comments

Our evaluation team documented multiple face to face meetings, electronic mail exchanges and video conferences between the various partners. Our assessment is that this was a productive and effective process in creating the initial database. The information contained in this database is very rich and probably unique. It is important, however, to develop processes to update and change resource database entries to ensure accuracy and timeliness. These processes need to be sustainable over time and require as little investment of resources over time as possible. The current approach is to link resources in the Consortium application to existing links of organizations that are responsible for updating them as part of their everyday operation. For instance, the San Diego Collaborative maintains an excellent compilation of resources that are accessible through a website (http://www.211sandiego.org/) and are being updated and enriched regularly. Linking to resources on this site will help ensure comprehensiveness and timeliness. Another example are resources included in school websites. These websites are being updated regularly, so that linking to them would be a good strategy, at least to the extent that schools and districts are updating their websites. This strategy needs to be reviewed in the future in order to assess its effectiveness and viability.

This database was created as part of the development of an electronic application. We encourage the Consortium to consider making this important resource accessible through additional means, such as a stand-alone tab in the Consortium website. Although some of the information is only relevant to the districts in this Consortium, most of the information gathers and organized by the Welcoming Practices team would be of great interest to parents and staff in other school districts and military installations.

II. Analyzing Existing Registration Systems

In order to learn from the experience and practices of other districts and schools both locally and in other locations (including abroad), the development team studied many aspects of Consortium districts registration systems, and conducted a search for such systems elsewhere. This effort resulted in documenting more than 230 school and district websites particularly relevant to military families. These websites were of schools in the Consortium, in the Sand Diego area, and websites of schools near military bases in Texas,
Hawaii, Virginia, and the U.K. These sites were studied in order to glean over information about registration processes especially for transitioning families, with a special emphasis on transitioning military families.

Information Gathering

The USC San Diego team reviewed the registration processes in place for each district and assisted the technical team in creating the registration tool. At weekly IT meetings, team members discussed the content and functionality of the registration tool, discussed potential challenges and updated on districts SIS systems. The USC San Diego team provided several user input reviews to aid in the overall development.

The USC San Diego team began contacting Consortium school districts early in the year of 2013 to learn more about the current registration and enrollment process for students. The team scheduled meetings with each District point of contact to review the Welcoming Practices grant and to learn about the district’s process of registering in schools. District contacts provided more of general review of the registration and enrollment process. In order to better understand the registration process, team members contacted several school registrar offices to further investigate the detailed steps that parents needed to take in registering and enrolling their children at schools.

After initial meetings, the USC team continued to meet with district staff and IT personnel to inform districts of the application development process. A flowchart diagram was developed to capture the registration process of each district. This flowchart provided a visual of registration process for each district. In addition to analyzing the registration process, the team collected the registration forms that parents would need to complete in order to register and then enroll their child.

Our USC San Diego team, met with the Consortium districts to find out about the registration process and gather registration forms to identify the key components for the universal registration. In addition, the Project Manager and the lead of the technical team met with each district to better understand their current Student Information Systems (SIS). In these districts meetings, the Project Manager introduced the lead of the technical team to the District leads and the IT Directors of each district to discuss the development of the online registration and the web mobile app. The San Diego team gathered information on each district SIS and compiled in a table below.

Table 4.2

| SIS Products and Various Systems |
### III. The Development Process of the Electronic Applications

The Consortium proposed to develop electronic applications to support registration process, needs assessments, making resources available to parents and students, and helping transitioning students and parents connect with parents and students who could provide social support. The Welcoming Practices IT team is developing two inter-related electronic applications:

1. **A Web Registration Program:** This program is expected to provide a platform for parents to register to a district and school, including uploading files (e.g., school records) needed to complete registration.

2. **A mobile application designed to help connect new families to other families and students in school and to community and district/school resources.**

Although there are many school-related applications, none of them could serve as a complete model for this Consortium. It was therefore important to develop these applications based on the particular goals and context of this Consortium. It should be noted, however, that the aim was to create an application that could be spread and shared with many other districts across the country.

### Evaluation

Our evaluation of the development process aimed to achieve several goals. We wanted to record the process and identify important decisions and choices so that others could examine the process and make decisions based on lessons learned in this project. Our monitoring of the process gave us opportunities for formative evaluation, to provide ongoing feedback based on our observations and assessments of the process. Our evaluation is based on observations in meetings, interviews with members of the developing team and analysis of documents produced in the process.

### Development Team
An important early decision was the extent to which the application development be contracted to an outside company that would develop the applications with relatively little involvement of the USC Consortium team or whether USC would take full responsibility for the development. This was not a simple decision because the USC Consortium team did not have expertise in developing applications and it would have been perhaps safer to contract with an outside company. On the other hand, the USC team had content knowledge and access to district partners that probably no other outside company could have achieved. A decision was made to leverage existing university resources and expertise. The USC School of Engineering is highly ranked nationally and has one of the best departments in mobile phone application development and web applications. A member of the faculty in the USC Viterbi School of Engineering who teaches mobile phone application courses agreed to take on a leadership role in application development, work jointly with the USC Consortium team, and bring with her graduate and undergraduate students. A decision was therefore made to work with her as a leader of a group of students specializing in this area.

After making this decision, a joint USC Social work and Engineering development team was created. The team is comprised of two main groups: The content group and the technical team. The university-based content group is in charge of assessing the needs and requirements of the application. As described above, there are many indications that this team has conducted a very comprehensive analysis of what was required for registration, which resources were available and what was known about effective welcoming practices.

The two groups in the USC development team were in close contact with relevant district personnel responsible for registrations, welcoming practices for transitioning families and district personnel in charge information technology personnel. These points of contact were identified early on by the San Diego team and served as stable partners to a continuous dialog. The USC Project Manager and technical lead interacted multiple times with district staff face to face, through phone, email exchanges and joint meetings. This intensive process is very important to ensure that the USC development team has in depth understanding of current practices, gaps and needs that should inform the applications being developed. It is important to continue this process after the application is ready to ensure that it would be thoroughly tested and modified to meet expectations. This interactive process is a strength of the development process.

While in most cases this process seemed to be very effective and smooth for most districts, in one district there were challenges. Some of these challenges are unrelated to this specific task and are associated with district turnover, gaps in internal communication and coordination, and extensive workload that limited the capacity to engage fully in the dialogue and joint development. Efforts should continue to engage this district more effectively.

Our assessment is that the involvement of many part time students and especially the use of a class project to help develop the software had mixed results. On the one hand, students brought excitement, expertise and creativity to the development process. In fact, the head of the technical team felt they have done important
work that saved precious time. On the other hand, it seems that at that period the process lacked coherence and stability and the multiple changes in the team were not helpful. Regardless the effectiveness of the processes in the early stages of development, it seems important to ensure that there will be stable anchors in both components of the team; both the content and the technical teams need a stable person who is clearly responsible for coordinating the respective group. It seems that this kind of stability has been achieved more recently and considerable progress has been made.

In addition to having stable and well-coordinated technical and content teams, it is important to have effective communication and coordination between the two teams. In early stages it seemed to the evaluation team that there were miscommunications and misunderstandings about key aspects of the desired application. Subsequently, a set of structures and procedures have been put in place.

The technical team meets at least twice a week in the same physical space with the content team. The coordinators set in advance clear weekly agendas with weekly benchmarks set. The technical team meets weekly with representatives from the content team to review the interface between the content and the technical aspects of the application. Once a week the leaders (including the Principal and Co-Principal investigators, the head of the technical team, the Project Manager, and often the head of the evaluation team) and the coordinators of both teams meet to review weekly progress and chart the course for the next steps. Once a month, the joint development team presents its work to the whole USC team for review and group discussion as to next steps and task allocation. In key points in the development, the superintendents and their IT personnel are informed about the application and challenges and next steps are discussed.

Our assessment is that increased participation of the USC Consortium team principal and co-principal investigators and the head of the technical team, and more consistent and intensive schedule of meetings between the two groups, improved significantly coordination within each of the groups, and effective communication between the two group coordinators, resulted in major progress in the application development.

Here again, the issues of turnover, especially in the technical team, needs to be considered. The members of the technical team are highly attractive to industry giants, and perhaps may want to move ahead in their careers, before the development is complete. We understand that this concern is shared by the team leadership and there are efforts to cross-train so that if a team member leaves the impact would not be too large.

IV. Registration Application

Background

This web application is intended to help parents register to a district online. This option is especially important to military families serving in other states in the US or abroad. The application is based on analyses of all existing registration forms and requirements in Consortium districts. The application has facilities to
allow users to upload documents that may be required for registration. The information entered during the registration process is saved in a secure database, which could be accessed and analyzed, by authorized staff.

**Structure and Content**

A registering parent needs first to select a district from a list of the Consortium districts. The parent is then asked to register and create a user name and password. Then the parent starts the registration of a child (a student), by entering the child's name, gender and grade. This process is repeated for all children in the family registering to this district.

The registration process consists of entering information in four areas:

1. **General Information**
   a. Student Information
   b. Parent Information
   c. Legal Custody
   d. Emergency Contact
   e. Language Survey
2. **Education & Curriculum**
   a. Name of Most Recent School Attended
   b. Attendance History
   c. Early Childhood Experiences
   d. Special Education Survey
3. **Medical**
   a. Student Medical Information
   b. Medical Provider Information
   c. Medical Insurance Information
4. **Other**
   a. Student Resources

For each of these entries there is an indication whether information is complete or incomplete. The parent can determine the order of entering information by selecting a particular menu option. Each of these menu options opens a screen that the user could complete, or enter partial information. For instance, the student screen allows the parent to enter name, email, gender, grade, birth date and address. The screen also contains an
option to upload a file containing student’s birth certificate. Certain menu options allow free text (e.g., name), others are choices selected from a list (e.g., Country of Birth), and others provide multiple choices (e.g., child’s ethnic affiliation could contain more than one ethnic group). Date fields open up a calendar to facilitate selecting a date). The sign * is used to indicate that certain information is required and registration could not be submitted without entering this information.

Before submitting the registration form, the parent is shown an overview of the whole form. The parent has then an opportunity to change and add information. The form could then by submitted electronically, along with all required files (such as birth certificates and academic records).

Privacy and Security

Data security and privacy of users are of prime concern. The appropriate software tools and design are being used to ensure compliance with all relevant laws and regulations. The legal issues are continuously discussed both with the districts and with legal experts at the university. These discussions are still in progress.

Spread and Sustainability

Issues of spread and sustainability are central to this Consortium. At this stage there are two major points of concern. First, several districts have registration systems that they are using and have not decided to change or significantly alter. Further, due mostly to legal and ethical issues, the prospects of providing access to parent and student information through this system are not clear yet. There are several options being considered, each of them with its advantages and limitations. Our evaluation team will continue and examine the progress made with regard to this important issue. We expect that in our next annual report we will report on how it would be resolved.

A related issue is who would take over the continuous development, maintenance, and spread of this application after the Consortium funds are depleted. It is important to have a viable plan to increase the chances that this application would continue and support online registration in school districts in multiple locations.

V. Mobile Application: Student Connect

Background

Families and students transitioning to a new neighborhood and school district face many challenges. Among them is information about resources and services available in their new school and residential area. For many parent and student social isolation may be another challenge. They may enter a new place with few social ties to help them integrate into the new place and continue to thrive. The Student Connect application is being
developed with these parent and students in mind. It aims to provide them with quick and effective access to resources and service available in their new community and school and facilitate social contacts with other families and students who are willing to welcome them. This report provides preliminary overview of this application in its early stages of development.

The intended audience of this mobile application is students, but not all students have mobile devices. It is more likely that middle school and high school students will have mobile devices such as smartphones. For the younger students, generally in elementary school, the parents will be accessing the application. Thus the primary target audience is students between the ages of 11 and 18, and the secondary audience is parents of elementary students, who are between the ages of 4 and 11.

**Planned Application Features**

The application will provide information about resources and contacts. These could be searched by using key words and browsing lists. Parents and users may also be able to define issues of special interest so that this information will be readily accessible to them, e.g., as a 'favorite' list. Another important feature of this application is displaying information in multiple languages. The main languages of our intended audience are English and Spanish. The application will adjust, depending on the language preference in the settings of the mobile device. In the future, this application may be able to connect to major social media applications, such as Facebook and Twitter, so that existing capabilities for social contact through the media will be tapped.

**Technical Aspects**

The application is developed for both iOS (Apple) and Android platforms. The design of the application will follow all design elements and visual cues used in these platforms. That is, this application will 'look and feel' like any other professional applications that both parents and students know very well. This includes issues such as a standard color palette throughout the application, the location of the tab bar, the ways information is displayed, the presentation of map locations (e.g., service provider locations will be shown on a local map). Consequently, we expect a very quick learning curve, based on the user's familiarity with other applications.

In order to illustrate some of these points we present here screen shots provided by the head of the technical team.

**Screen Shots**
The Log In screen as shown in Figure 1 allows the user to log in. It also contains the name of the app at the top of the screen and the symbols used in the app icon towards the bottom. This location was chosen so that the user is able to see the text fields and Log In button even when the soft keyboard is displayed. If the user enters a username and password that do not match, then a dialog window will be display informing the user.

There is an info button at the bottom of the screen. If the user touches it, then the screen will flip vertical in order to reveal a screen about the application. We also provide the users with a ‘forgot password’ feature that enables them to reset a password through a reset link sent to their email address.

Figure 1: Login/Signup Screen
Once the users log in, they will be presented on the Connect screen. On the bottom of the screen there is a tab bar that will always be displayed. It shows the main functions of the app. Using the tab bar makes it easy for the user to find what they need, giving a consistent look, and helping them focus on the task of finding the resources they need. The icons used for the tab bar were chosen so they could be easily recognizable for universal use.

The Connect screen, shown in Figure 2, displays a list of resources that are currently available. The icons on the left represent the categories of the resource. The four categories are school (bell), school district (building), community (house), and military (flag). Using these icons help with universal usability.

When the user touches one of the items, then more detail about that item is displayed in the Details screen, as shown in Figure 3. They can also add that resource to their Favorites list. On the Connect screen, there is an icon of a spyglass in the upper right hand corner. This allows the user to search for resources. When users enter text into the search bar the list of resources changes accordingly. When they are done, then they can touch one of the resources in order to show the Details screen. The user can delete the text in the search field by touching the X. This allows them to easily reverse their action.
The user can change his/her preferences by checking/unchecking resources they would like to see, as shown in Figure 4. The users can check/uncheck multiple resources, and see a comprehensive list of community, school, military, and district resources. For example, suicide prevention being a community resource.

The Map screen as seen in Figure 5 shows the user’s current location and the resources that are located near to them. The resources are represented by their category icons (bell = school; house = community; flag = military). If users tap on one of them, they can get more information. Using these icons helps reduce the short-term memory load of the user. The location, by default is the district of the student.
The Profile screen as seen in Figure 6 shows the user’s district and school information. It allows them to quickly access their school or district. It also provides details of all schools in the district by providing a drop-down menu as seen in Figure 7. They just need to touch the phone icon to call the school. In this screen users can also change their password or log out.

**Concluding Comments**

Our assessment of the prototypes we saw and the material presented above is that this application has the potential to meet the goals set for this component of the Consortium. By developing a mobile application that looks so similar to many applications parents and students use every day, the chances of adoption and use are considerably increased. Furthermore, this application has the potential to connect to additional features that were developed for other applications such as directions to locations, reminders and alerts, etc.

Issues of confidentiality and access to personal information are present, but they seem to be less concerning as barriers to adoption. Users do not reveal personal information, although many of them would want to keep their search patterns private and not shared. There is a need to continue and study this issue to ensure that this application follows all required regulations and laws.
Concerns about sustainability and spread should be examined carefully, as early as possible. It is important to develop a strategy that will help increase the chances that this application continues to be helpful for the long run. This will include ongoing updates to resources and continuous development processes to ensure that users’ feedback and requests would receive timely responses, and keep the application attractive and useful.
Appendix A
Wolf Canyon Military Family Support Plan

The purpose of this plan is to better support our students and their families who are serving in the military. The following plan will be fully implemented for the 2014 – 2015 school year.

1. A New Student Registry Welcome Packet that includes:
   - Letter of welcome from the Principal with contact information
   - Parent Handbook
   - Yearbook Information
   - Liaison contact information

2. Office staff will notify faculty support member when a new student registers and a student welcoming committee (Student Ambassadors) will be dispatched once the child arrives to welcome the student and provide a tour on their first day at Wolf Canyon.

3. Student progress academically, emotionally and socially will be addressed quarterly during student monitoring meetings with teachers. Monitoring forms will have a box to check if a student has a parent or parents in the active military forces.

4. The Student Solutions Team (SST) will meet quarterly and review any students referred who have parents in the military. A plan will be created that best supports the needs of that student.

5. Wolf Canyon will provide families with an Exit Package that includes:
   - Letters from the classroom and classmates
   - School liaison contact information
   - Copies of the students’ shot records, registration information, birth certificate, and progress reports. Also, if the student has an IEP copies of the IEP will be provided in the exit package.
   - A Wolf Canyon School Information Request Form – for parents to submit when they relocate and would like to have the school provide things such as school pictures, the yearbook, awards, etc.
### SALT CREEK PLAN

**To welcome MILITARY FAMILIES to our school**

### BIG PICTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Students:</th>
<th>Data shows that 9% of our students are from Military Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOAL:</strong> Recognize Military Families throughout the year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Enrollees:</th>
<th>Families that enroll their students mid-academic year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOAL:</strong> Welcome students to the school and bridge the students to the school culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Current Students:

- **GOAL:** Recognize Military Families throughout the year

- **Data shows that 9% of our students are from Military Families**

- **Labor Day: September (BIG ACTIVITY - opening activity)**
  - In conjunction with 911- ribbon tying on the gate outside of the school gates:
  - Every student will tie a ribbon creating the American flag

- **In the MPR:** K-3rd grade students draw a picture that connects with Labor Day and 4-6th grade students write an essay. To be displayed in the MPR

- **Assembly:**
  - Color Guards
  - Parents in the armed forces in uniform
  - Possible Color Guard
  - Have selected speakers among the participating group

- **Veteran’s Day: November (Small Activity)**
  - Invite Veteran’s and assign Veteran’s to classroom’s to speak about their experiences, share memorabilia’s and pictures...

- **Memorial Day: May (BIG ACTIVITY - ending of school activity)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Enrollees:</th>
<th>Families that enroll their students mid-academic year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>GOAL:</strong> Welcome students to the school and bridge the students to the school culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Point Person:** Vanessa & Norma
  - Alerts the **welcome committee** that the student is military

- **Welcome Committee:** Gayle, Maria, Sandy, Lani, Vanessa & Norma. The role of the Welcome Committee is to introduce new student to key people and places.
  - “**Passport to Salt Creek**” - Create a passport marking the important places to visit and important people to meet (ACT)
  - **Good Bag** - Includes: “Passport to Salt Creek”, pencil, Salt Creek Key Ring or Spirit Tag, stickers (ACT)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assembly:</th>
<th>Resource Room:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navy- Color Guard (RESP: Lani)</td>
<td>Small room in building 400 to be transformed into a resource room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fly By- (RESP: Lani)</td>
<td>Shutterfly- connect all military families to communicate and interact with each other. Purpose: to build a strong military group at Salt Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Speech: Paola</td>
<td>Coffee Chat: Specifically for Military Families 2-3x a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Anthem: student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit Officers in Uniform (RESP: Sandy &amp; Becky)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Luncheon for Officers &amp; their students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proposal: Heritage Elementary School is a population of 920 students with 135 families affiliated with the Military. As a school with diverse needs Heritage seeks opportunities to support students in a variety of situations. Through our Military Child Education Coalition Training (ES2S), we have come up with the following plan to support students who have family members in the Military:

I. Military Pride Club:

**Purpose:** To bring together students who have family in the Military to provide exposure to coping skills, connection with students in similar situations, and access to resources like counselling

- Monthly meeting for students who have family members in military
- Two meetings with students: K-3 and 4-6
- Parent permission slips signed
- Offer opportunities for students to lead groups
- Poster of photos of students in club up for view in school auditorium

**Time:** Currently once a month and will continue through 2014-2015 school year.

**Persons Responsible:** led by a Military Intern Social Worker, Parent Volunteer, Associate Principal

II. Welcome Leadership Board:

**Purpose:** To share names and photos of new Military family students at Heritage Elementary School as well as celebrating student leaders around the campus.

- Located outside office in clear case for maximum exposure
- Changed quarterly to recognize new students
- Teacher led with student leaders recommended by teachers both military and non-military

**Time:** 2014-2015 School Year

**Persons Responsible:** Teacher from ES2S Team
III. Military Family Coffee Chat:

**Purpose:** To bring together Military families quarterly to share information specific to needs and access to resources

- In school auditorium focused on different topics based on parent interest and request
  - Programs for tutoring, medical access, extracurricular, or support groups

**Time:** First Coffee Chat occurred in April with success and will continue once a quarter in the 2014-2015 school year

**Persons Responsible:** Led by Military Family Liaison Officer, Fleet and Family Center, Military Intern Social Worker, or Principal/Associate Principal

IV. Memorial Day and Veterans Day Blacktop Assemblies:

**Purpose:** To recognize, thank, and celebrate our service men, women and families

- Include letters to military personnel
- Invite Navy/Marine Color Guard to present colors - parent volunteer offer
- Invite Military Service family members to recognize

**Time:** 2014-2015 Holidays

**Persons Responsible:** Principal, Associate Principal, and ES2S Team

V. Welcome Video for New Students:

**Purpose:** To introduce Heritage to new students by reviewing rules, introducing important staff members, and giving a brief school tour

- Students from Heritage will be in the video
- Available in office and on website

**Time:** 2014-2015 School Year

**Persons Responsible:** Principal, Associate Principal, and ES2S Team

- **Next Steps:** With these activities already taking place or being set up to occur, we also have some background work to ensure student and parent participation. Following are the steps we plan to take to ensure these activities are used to their full potential

VI. Communication

**Purpose:** To inform students and parents about activities and resources available

- Facebook Page, Weekly Message (email and phone), PeachJar, Website

**Time:** Currently active

**Persons Responsible:** Principal, Associate Principal and ES2S Team

VII. Participation:

**Purpose:** To ensure an optimal number of students, parents, and community members are able to participate in Club and school activities.
- Identify student leaders- have a member of club represented in Student Council
- Communicate with parents- utilize resources parents have and promote participation

Students continue to meet twice a month to discuss recruitment, organization, communication, and upcoming events.
Frank English is working with staff to start a Bonsall High School S2S group.
The school still meets as a team on an on-going basis. The new school counsellor was included as part of the school's S2S team.
- Invite Fleet and Family along with Military School Liaison Officer to events
- Military Club meet quarterly after school to minimize student missed class time and invite parent participation

Time: Current and ongoing

Persons Responsible: Principal, Associate Principal, and ES2S Team

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Persons Responsible: Principal, Associate Principal, and ES2S Team
APPENDIX B
### School Transition Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman Transition Project through the Princeton Leadership Center</td>
<td>The Freshman Transition Project through the Princeton Leadership Center is a New Jersey statewide program designed to help incoming freshmen make a successful adjustment into high school. Faculty advisors train a team of upperclassmen in a variety of leadership and facilitation skills. The student leaders then co-facilitate monthly “Learning Station” activities for all freshmen on topics such as decision making, problem solving, time management, active listening, communication, and relationship building. Freshmen work in small groups with the same student leaders over the course of the year to create a sense of belonging and community spirit within each small group. The program is sponsored jointly by the New Jersey Departments of Education and of Human Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link Crew</td>
<td>The Link Crew is a year-long program for freshmen transitioning into high school. The program links 8–10 students to 1–2 junior or senior Link Crew leaders. Different options for the program are designed and used by each school to fit particular needs. A school in Fountain-Fort Carson, Colorado, for example, incorporates registration work, vision and hearing screening, and shared lunch on the patio into its program. The same company that provides the Link Crew program has a similar program called WEB for middle school students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radford High School Transition Program</td>
<td>The Malama I. Na Haunama Program at Radford High School in Oahu, HI is a transition and orientation program addressing the needs of mobile students in a school district with many military youth. The curriculum was designed to provide preparation and support for all transitioning students to promote academic achievement and a successful adjustment into the Radford community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PACE (Planning Academic and Career Excellence) was developed initially as a transition course to meet the needs of mobile students at Bartlett High School in Anchorage, Alaska. It quickly changed its identity, becoming an accredited high school class with the goal of training leadership and problem-solving skills, as well as supporting new students. Student “facilitators,” once transfer students, teach the course to new students. The facilitators work in groups to create their own lesson plans on a variety of topics. The topics are selected by the school staff and students. Some topics have included: “Self-reliance and responsibility” and “Connecting with the local community.” The focus is not only on transitions, but also building skills that lead to personal competence. The facilitators also learn skills including leadership, organization, and responsibility. Mary McKean, former principal of Bartlett High School, describes: “That is why the PACE program is so wonderful — because it is students turning on the light, if you will, and connecting with their own peers in such a way that then we have their peers who want to become facilitators and it just continues on and on and on. And so it does need to be a school-wide initiative or philosophy that everyone plays a role in.” PACE is a featured model for “Facilitating Connectivity”, a resource for student-led facilitation as a means of helping students create a positive school environment.
This mentor program provides a positive transition experience for new students from military families. A team of student volunteers, supervised by a school counselor or other staff member, teaches transitioning students about three subject areas: 1) Academics, 2) Relationships, and 3) Finding the Way, which includes information about school policies, the community, and a general orientation to the school. Each team customizes the training lesson plans to their home site. The team provides a forum for incoming students to quickly feel welcomed, comfortable, included, and accepted into their new school community. The team also helps outgoing students better prepare for transitioning to another school. For example, Buena High School in Sierra Vista, Arizona, has implemented the S2S program. The high school’s units of instruction include a school tour, a review of school rules, skills for meeting other students with common interests, developing an academic “game plan,” and getting to know the Sierra Vista area. Dr. Jim Hawkins, superintendent of Killeen Independent School District, supporting families of Fort Hood, Texas, said, “One of the programs that we are very proud of and is working extremely well in our high schools is the S2S program, because a lot of times the adults, in terms of transitions, are very interested in the academics and the transcripts and all that, and the kids could care less. They are interested in the social issues and the friends, am I going to fit in, am I going to be somebody or nobody. And so the student-to-student program is an initiative that is led by students. So we have high school students who go through training that is provided by MCEC, and when new students come to the high school, they are in the groups that are student led. And, yes, they learn about school things, but they also learn where to hang out in town, where the best stores in the mall are, and things like that which really help them both academically and socially, and so they don’t feel like they are there by themselves. And no one can do that like a peer. And so we are very proud of that and they are looking at expanding into the middle school area, and we will be one of the pilots for the middle school program.”
Across Ages pairs older adult mentors (age 55 and above) with young adolescents (ages 9-13), specifically youth making the transition to middle school. The program employs weekly mentoring, community service, social competence training, and family activities to build youths' sense of personal responsibility for self and community. The program aims to: increase knowledge of health and substance abuse; improve school bonding, academic performance, school attendance, and behavior and attitudes toward school; strengthen relationships with adults and peers; and enhance problem-solving and decision-making skills. The overall goal of the program is to increase the protective factors for high-risk students in order to prevent, reduce, or delay the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and the problems associated with such use. Across Ages can be implemented as a school-based or after-school program. It has been replicated most successfully in urban/suburban settings where there is access to transportation and a sufficient number of older adults not personally known or related to participating families and youth. If the project is school-based, most of the activities for youth will take place in the classroom; if it is an after-school program, a school, community center or faith-based institution are appropriate settings. Evaluation data demonstrated the efficacy of the intervention for all program youth. In particular, the research showed the effectiveness of matching youth with older adult mentors in improving prosocial values, increasing knowledge of the consequences of substance use, and helping youth avoid later substance use by teaching them appropriate resistance behaviors. There was also a direct relationship between level of mentor involvement and school attendance.
The School Transitional Environment Program (STEP) makes transitions easier, not just for mobile students, but for all students. STEP is an intervention program to support students at predictable school transitions (elementary to junior high or junior high to high school). STEP redesigns the high school environment to make school transitions less threatening by reducing school disorganization and restructuring the role of the homeroom teacher. The program does not require whole school reform, and thus is less costly. Students are assigned to homeroom classes in which all the students are STEP participants, and in which the teachers act as guidance counselors/administrators, helping students choose classes, counseling them on school and personal problems, and communicating with their parents. All students involved in the program attend the same core classes, which are physically close together to help participants develop stable peer groups and become familiar with the school. Each student receives a 15–20 minute homeroom counseling session once a month. STEP teachers meet once or twice a week to discuss students who may need additional support. The program benefits students at greatest risk for behavioral problems who attend large, urban schools that have multiple feeding schools. Evaluations showed that STEP students have fewer school absences, higher grade-point averages, more positive feelings about school, and a better self-concept than controls, as well as a lower dropout rates than controls and fewer absences.
APPENDIX C
References Relevant to Transitions and Welcoming Practices


for the Workshop on the Impact of Mobility and Change on the Lives of Young Children, Schools and Neighborhoods, Washington, DC.


