

An Evaluation of the Use of Educational Resource Guides for Military Students in Public Schools

Berenice Castillo
Hadass Moore
Gordon Capp
Kris De Pedro
Diana Pineda
Rami Benbenishty
Ron Astor

Most public school educators and staff are unaware of the presence and needs of military connected (MC) students in their schools. The Building Capacity (BC) Consortium sought to increase awareness and resources in public schools with MC students in ways that were sustainable. The Consortium developed a series of guides tailored to multiple constituents (school administrators, teachers, military parents, etc.) for use in the training of new generations of staff and the development of more supportive learning environments for the more than 4 million MC students in the United States. These guides are based on a thorough review of the literature and examination of available practices developed in the field. Teachers College Press at Columbia University published the guides in October of 2012 in collaboration with the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) and were paid and disturbed free of charge by the Consortium. Educational guides are often used in many university and academic settings, but few are evaluated for their effectiveness and usefulness. This study evaluates whether the guides were used and if they were found to be useful by the different constituents.

Introduction

Children from military families experience a myriad of stressful events that can negatively impact their social and emotional well-being. Stressors related to military connectedness, such as parental deployment, changes in family structure, and parental trauma from active duty can translate into the child's behavior and academic performance (De Pedro et al., 2012). Recent studies demonstrate the negative implications of military connectedness among youth, including negative mental health outcomes (De Pedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty, & Berkowitz, 2015; Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012; Cederbaum et al., 2014) and adverse behavioral outcomes (Sullivan et al., 2015; Gilreath et al., 2012). Military connected

youth in particular are more susceptible to suicidal ideation and depression, than their non-military connected counterparts (Cederbaum et al., 2014; Mansfield, Kaufman, Engel, & Gaynes, 2011). This susceptibility to mental health problems increases with the number of familial deployments the youth experiences (Cederbaum et al., 2014; De Pedro et al., 2012) and length of parental deployment (Mansfield et al., 2011). Although boys and girls from military families show similar mental health trends, children who have female family members on active duty (Sullivan et al., 2015) and older youth (Mansfield et al., 2011) have demonstrated an increased risk for depression.

Among military connected youths increase risk of adverse outcomes are problem behaviors such as substance use (Sullivan et al., 2015; Gilreath 2013), possession of weapons on school grounds (Sullivan et al., 2015), and exerting violent behavior at school (Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson, 2010; De Pedro et al., 2011). Recent studies demonstrate the prevalence of alcohol, marijuana, tobacco, and prescription drug use among military connected youth, especially among those who have a sibling on active duty (Gilreath et al., 2013; Sullivan et al., 2015). General adolescent substance use literature highlights the long-term consequences of early substance use initiation, especially the increase vulnerability of substance dependency (Guo, Collins, Hill, Hawkins, 2006). Additionally, military connected children are also at an increased risk for victimization both at school and in their home (Sullivan et al., 2015; Chandra et al., 2010; De Pedro et al., 2011).

The negative implications of military connectedness have the potential to impact the approximately 2 million children with a parent on active duty as of 2008 (DMDC Military Family File, September 2008). With adolescence being a critical time in development that paves the transition into adulthood, where the implications of adolescent behavior can linger on and

manifest in health outcomes and adult financial capital (IOMRC, 2015), there is a need to better support military connected youth. As of 2006 nearly 80 percent of military children attended civilian schools, and although the US Department of Education has provided funding and subsidies to schools serving military youth, schools remain in need of resources to meet the unique needs of military connected children (NMFA, 2006).

In an effort to create welcoming and academically supportive school environments for military and non-military connected children and families, the Building Capacity (BC) project was developed and funded in 2010 by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). BC is a large-scale consortium that includes eight military connected school districts in southern California, and serves military connected students, families and educators. Throughout the Building Capacity project, a series of best practices that support military connected students were identified through both the project and existing literature. In aims of building capacity in civilian schools to meet the needs of military-connected students and their families at a larger scale, resource guides were created with audience-specific educational material. The purpose of the resource guides were to provide tailored material to the multiple constituents (e.g. parents, teachers, school administrators, and pupil personnel) that interact with military children because each constituent have varying responsibilities and play distinct roles in the lives of military connected youth. The resource guides were designed to include evidence-based practices that schools could integrate from the various staff positions, in an effort to better support students. These resource guides serve as an intervention that can help improve the academic and social supports at the school level to meet the needs of military youth. With military connected students increase susceptibility to move and transfer between schools, it is important for schools to provide a nurturing and welcoming environment that support the military culture, children and

families. In this study we evaluate the use and usefulness of the resources guides from each of the constituents. This is one of the first studies that examine the helpfulness, use, and effectiveness of resource guides from the constituent perspective, where users have the ability to relay whether the resource guides were user friendly and helpful.

Methodology

Four resource guides were developed with similar core content but tailored to specific audiences. Hence, guides were developed for parents, teachers, school administrators, and pupil personnel. The resource guides include introductory material to familiarize the audience with military culture, and school-based interventions and strategies to support military students and families. Teachers College Press at Columbia University published the guides in 2012 and were distributed free of charge.

Using the publisher's records, an internet based confidential survey was distributed to those who had received the free resource guides. The feedback surveys were used as a measure to assess the use and usefulness of the resource guides. Surveys were to be completed at the discretion of resource guide recipients. The survey included questions for quantitative and qualitative feedback on the usefulness of the resource guides, where quantitative feedback was based on four-point scales.

Measures

Demographic information in the assessment included the self-reported identification in the following groups: pupil personnel, teacher, principals, assistant principals and administrators, military parents, or other.

Resource Guide usefulness. The usefulness of the guides was assessed with the following feedback survey items, "This guide is helpful", "This guide provides new information", "This

guide is interesting”, “This guide is well presented”, “This guide is respectful of military families”, and “This guide is respectful of educators”. The response scale consisted of the following categories: not at all to a large extent. The scale was recoded as follows: 1= not at all, 2= X, 3= Y, and 4= to a large extent. Qualitative responses to the question, “Please describe if and how the guide(s) were helpful and useful to you; could you give example(s)?” were also used to assess the usefulness of the resource guides.

Recommendation of Resource Guide. To assess whether resource guide recipients would recommend the guides to others, the following item was used: “Would you recommend the guide to administrators, military parents, teachers, and pupil personnel?”

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and post hoc Scheffe analyses were conducted to assess the usefulness of the resource guides between the audiences (administrators, military parents, teachers, and pupil personnel). Qualitative responses were assessed through thematic analysis. Data were analyzed using X software.

Results

Important to note is that our research team has distributed thousands of feedback survey requests to those identified by the publisher to have received free resource guides. We have received 649 responses. Most of the respondents were pupil personnel, 35.1% (n=221), followed by teachers, 19.4% (n=91), principals, 14.3% (n=91), assistant principals and administrators, 6.7% (n=42), military parents, 6.7% (n=42), and 22.2% (n=140) identified themselves as ‘other’. The ‘other’ category included individuals such as, university professors and students, counselors, county social workers, school liaison officers and military personnel, as well those who listed a combination of the mentioned categories.

The respondent provided survey feedback on 304 pupil personnel guides, 265 teachers' guides, 156 school administrator guides and 151 military parent's guides. Since individuals were allowed to receive any combination of available resource guides, those who received multiple guides were eligible to provide feedback on each one. Thus, the number of completed feedback surveys received exceeds the number of individuals providing the feedback.

The respondent's feedback on each of the items used to determine the usefulness of the resource guides is summarized in Table 1. Overall, the feedback on the resource guides was positive. On a scale of 1 to 4, mean assessments across all resource guides ranged from lowest score of 3.21 (teachers' guide provides new information) to 3.86 (pupil personnel guide is respectful of military families). Of the assessments, the guides being respectful of military families received the highest scores across all resource guide types. The pupil personnel guide was assessed most favorably, with Scheffe post hoc tests indicating statistically significant difference at $p < .05$ in providing new information compared with both the administrator guide and teacher's guide. Additionally, Scheffe tests also revealed statistically significant differences in the material being well presented in the pupil personnel guide at $p < .05$, compared to the administrator guide. Of the assessments, lower scores were given to the resource guides providing new and interesting information.

A thematic review of qualitative reports further support the quantitative findings. The usefulness/helpfulness of the resource guides was a theme that arose in qualitative reports, for example, one respondent expressed how the guides helped increase focus to military connected students,

“Before having the guides to use, we didn't have much focus on military families and students, but we have been able to use [resource guide] to help broaden our internal resources and external agency knowledge”.

Other respondents noted the helpfulness of the resource guides in increasing knowledge of military connected students and families, and available resources.

“I learned about resources of which I wasn't previously aware...”

“After studying the guide, I became much more sensitive to military families..”

“Enjoyed reading about the evidence-based and evidence-informed programs. Many of them I had never heard of before”

Similarly, the guide's presentation of material, 'well presented', as easy to follow was also a theme that arose in qualitative responses.

“I do like how the guide is presented: it is easy to flip through the pages and read.”

“Good examples of programs or steps in each school; very appropriate for the audience; good explanation of military-culture and ramifications”

Aside from themes that supported quantitative results, respondents noted examples of practical use and implementation of activities that stemmed from best practices highlighted in the resource guides.

“Attempted some of the activities at my school site such as a bulletin board and the celebration of military appreciation days with the entire school”

“I use the guides when instructing the student interns at my school.”

“I have a lot of new ideas from the guide that I want to implement in my classroom this year...”

Descriptive statistics demonstrate an overall high recommendation of the resource guides to other groups. Respondents provided feedback on whether they would recommend a resource guide intended for a specific group to another. Table 2 provides a summary of the percentage of respondents who would recommend the resource guides to other groups. Of the resource guides, the pupil personnel guide received the highest percentages in recommending the guide to various groups, but especially for pupil personnel (97.7%). The lowest recommendation was reported for the military families guide to other groups, ranging from lowest, 72.6%, would recommend the military family guide to administrators, to the highest recommending this guide for the intended group, 90.3%.

The recommendation of resource guides to groups other than whom the guide was designed for was further assessed by the respondent's identification in a particular group. 82.4% of military parent respondents recommended that specific guide to other military parents, whereas provided slightly lower recommendations of that guide to pupil personnel, 72.7%. Overall, pupil service personnel who responded to the survey were most likely to recommend the guides to various groups, and especially to other pupil personnel staff (98.9%). Of all groups, respondents made most resource guide recommendations for school administrators and pupil personnel. Table 3 provides a summary of the these findings.

Table 1

Means and SD's of Users Feedback by Guide Type

	Administrator N = 125-128		Teacher N = 208 - 212		Parent N= 120-123		Pupil Personnel N = 258 - 268	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
This guide is:								
Helpful	3.39	.655	3.42	.623	3.46	.643	3.55	.536
Providing new information***	3.25	.710	3.21	.744	3.37	.658	3.48 ^{ab}	.585

Reliable	3.48	.630	3.48	.606	3.53	.565	3.60	.535
Interesting*	3.38	.732	3.43	.646	3.46	.657	3.58	.580
Well-presented**	3.55	.613	3.56	.593	3.62	.551	3.72 ^a	.508
Respectful of military families	3.75	.517	3.75	.475	3.81	.412	3.86	.349
Respectful of educators	3.68	.576	3.69	.531	3.74	.510	3.79	.406

Scale: 1 = Not at all to 4 = To a large extent

^a Significantly different than Administrator Guide in Scheffe test ($p < .05$)

^b Significantly different than Teacher Guide in Scheffe test ($p < .05$)

Table 2

Percentage Who would Recommend the Guide by Group of Potential Users and Guide Type

	Guide Type			
	Administrator	Teacher	Military Parent	Pupil Personnel
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Military Families (n = 503)	72.6	78.9	90.3	81.8
School Administrators (n = 502)	93.7	85.2	88.2	93.8
Teachers (n = 514)	86.5	87.8	91.1	91.5
Pupil Personnel (n = 507)	91.9	89.2	90.1	97.7
Military Personnel (n = 495)	86.2	84.1	90.0	89.5

Table 3

Percentage Recommending the Guides by Group of Potential Users and Respondent Group

Respondent	<u>Potential Users</u>				
	Military Family	School Administra tor	School Teacher	Pupil Personnel	Military Personnel
Military parent	82.4	75.0	78.8	72.7	78.1

Respondent	<u>Potential Users</u>				
	Military Family	School Administrator	School Teacher	Pupil Personnel	Military Personnel
Teacher	76.5	83.3	82.4	84.5	80.5
Administrator	69.0	89.3	75.9	85.7	79.3
Principal	57.7	84.6	73.1	73.1	73.1
Assistant Principal	38.5	84.6	69.2	91.7	91.7
Pupil Service Personnel	80.7	94.0	91.8	98.9	90.1
Other	81.2	89.8	90.9	93.2	86.1

Conclusion

A main goal of the Building Capacity project was to provide evidence based practices that schools could implemented with ease and that were sustainable, regardless of their financial resources. A tactic provided is an increase in collaboration with local colleges and community programs that can provide the services needed. For example, many colleges provide internship experience opportunities to their students from varying academic levels, hence partnering with local college would be mutually beneficial, low-cost, and sustainable.

The development and dissemination of these guides is a form of intervention to help increase awareness and resourcefulness in public schools with MC students and families. This study allowed us to not only evaluate how each constituent group perceived the content of the guides, but also whether the resource guide itself was user friendly. Overall, these results demonstrate that the resource guides were well received among all constituent groups, and the qualitative feedback reflected the positive evaluations. The positive feedback received on the

resource guides suggests the need to develop strategies that increase the dissemination of, and access to, these resources guides. Currently, the resource guides are only available in print; one strategy to increase access is by making them digitally available while remaining free of charge. Another strategy is to make these guides available to existing training programs, which may prove to be beneficial for service and helping professions that encounter military children and families, to increase awareness of the military culture, unique needs of military children and families, and sustainable strategies to support this population. Further, it would be helpful if these guides would be updated periodically, based on the emerging literature and experience with best practices relevant to military schools.

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NMFA:

http://support.militaryfamily.org/site/DocServer/DoD_Support_to_Civilian_Schools_Educating_Military_Child.pdf?docID=4081

DMDC:

<http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2008%20Demographics.pdf>