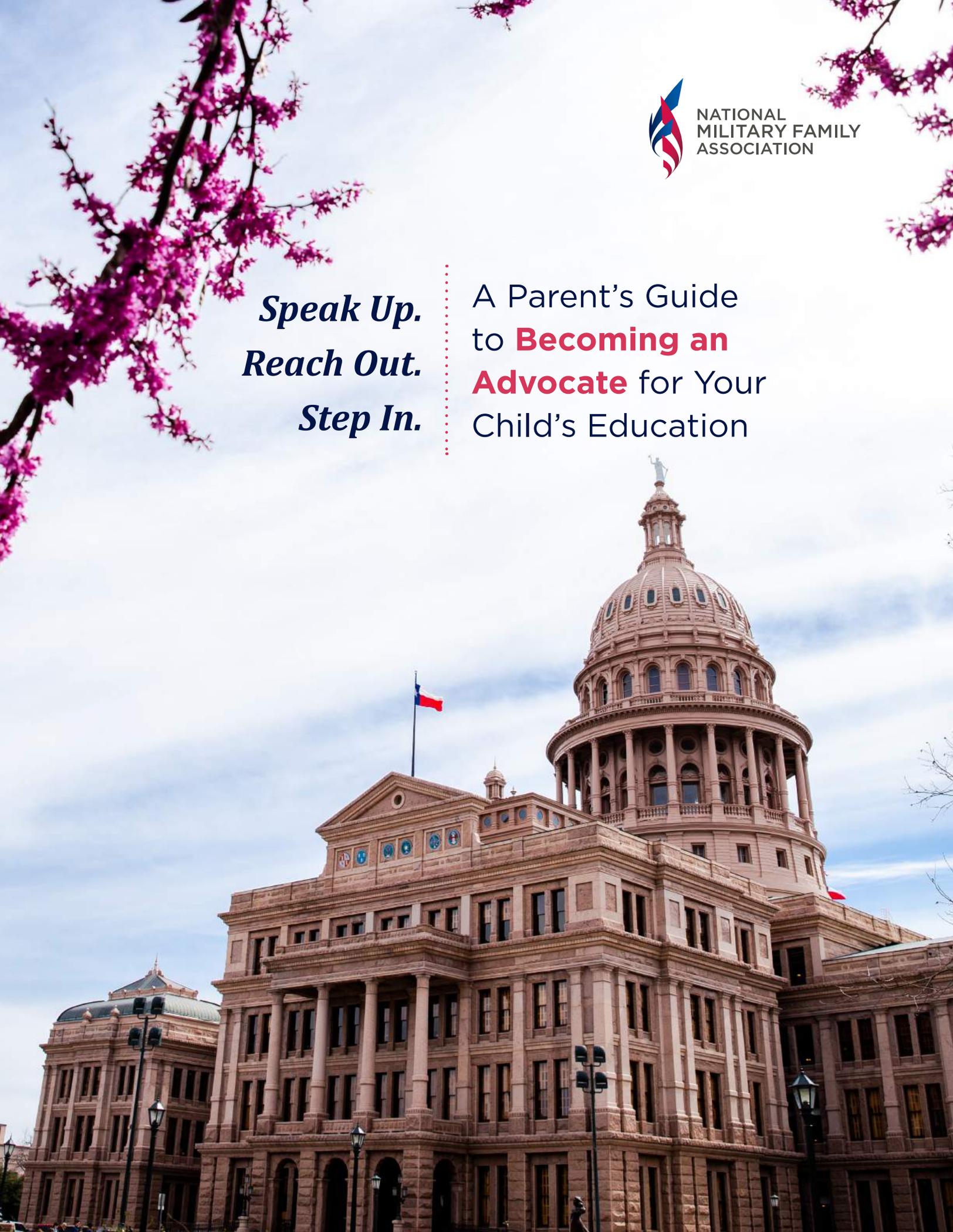


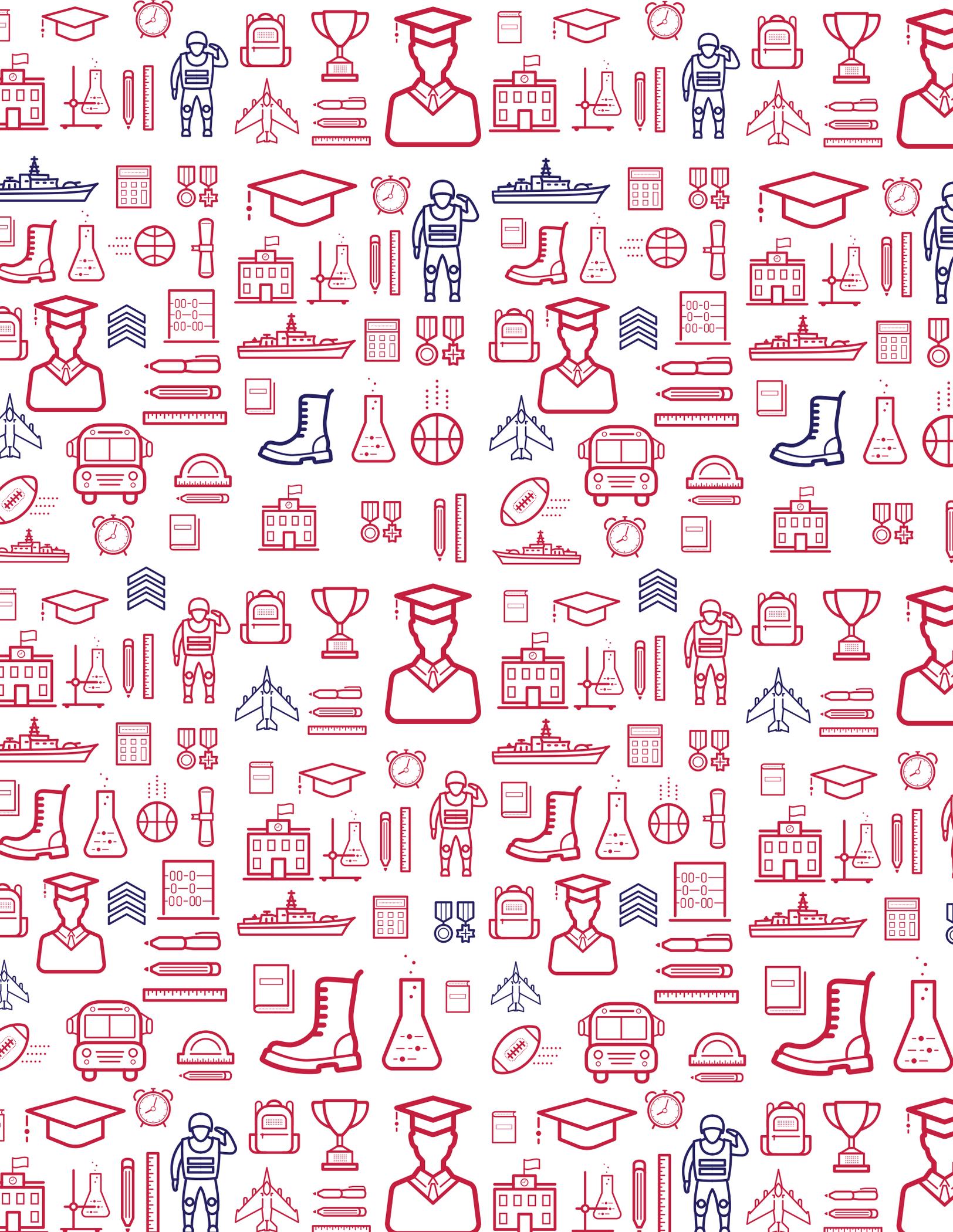


NATIONAL  
MILITARY FAMILY  
ASSOCIATION

*Speak Up.  
Reach Out.  
Step In.*

A Parent's Guide  
to **Becoming an  
Advocate** for Your  
Child's Education





# MILITARY LIFE is hard enough. **SCHOOL** SHOULDN'T HAVE TO BE.

.....

JOIN THE  
CONVERSATION.

.....



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## **Your child's education matters. Join the Education Revolution.**

Your child deserves the best education possible, but uneven academic standards across the country create gaps in learning, inconsistent instruction, and academic disadvantages with permanent impact.

Join us in an Education Revolution and help ensure that your military child—and all children—have access to high, consistent education standards wherever they are.

## **Contact us.**

**National Military Family Association**  
2800 Eisenhower Avenue, Suite 250  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314  
703.931.6632

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# You are Your Child's First Advocate

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*Being an advocate for your child's education starts with one thing:  
A passion to change 'what is' into 'what should be.'*

There are more than 1.6 million military kids in the United States. Of those, 933,000 are school-aged children, ages 6–18. Many of those children will change schools nine times between kindergarten and high school graduation. All are affected by inconsistent and uneven education standards.

PCS moves uproot military children from their schools and communities, requiring families to navigate new school districts and academic standards.

These varying standards create gaps in learning, inconsistent instruction, and academic challenges that can put military kids at a severe disadvantage all because of a parent's call to serve.

If your child's education hangs in the balance, or if you believe change needs to happen in your school district, you can speak up, reach out, and step in. Our military kids need advocates who know their struggles and understand their circumstances. No one knows that better than you, their parent.

*Let's get started.*



# Interstate Compact

# First Things First: What is the Interstate Compact?

## Interstate Compact Quick Facts:

### THE COMPACT PROTECTS MILITARY CHILDREN WHO



Are enrolled in K-12 in a public school and...

Have a parent on active duty, including activated Guard and Reservists or...



Are the children of fallen, medically retired, or discharged service members, for one year following the service member's death, retirement, or discharge.

### THE COMPACT IS RECOGNIZED IN



### THE COMPACT WILL HELP MILITARY KIDS WITH



- Enrollment
- Placement
- Attendance
- Eligibility
- Graduation

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (the Compact) is an agreement among all 50 states and the District of Columbia to provide uniform treatment for military children, like yours, enrolling in new school districts. It was specifically designed to eliminate some of the roadblocks military kids face transitioning to a new school.

The purpose of the Compact is to make sure military kids are immediately enrolled in their new school after a move, placed in the appropriate academic program, and able to graduate on time.

### How does the Compact work?

The Compact establishes a consistent set of rules applicable to military children in all public school districts. This comprehensive approach provides consistency for military kids as they transition in and out of districts with varied policies.

The Compact is maintained by the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3). Each state appoints a representative to serve on the MIC3 as that state's Commissioner. Working with state councils, Compact Commissioners are responsible for raising awareness of the Compact in local school districts, coordinating with local military officials to address common transition-related issues, and assisting military families with questions about the Compact.

The Interstate Compact has created positive and impactful procedures—like those that govern transfer of records, kindergarten and first grade entrance ages, course sequencing, entrance and exit testing, and graduation requirements, among others—that smooth the school transition for thousands of military children.

### But there's a problem.

Not all school districts, administrators, and teachers are familiar with the Compact and its requirements.

Arm yourself with all the facts about the Interstate Compact and use them to help advocate for your child!



## Speak Up

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Emily Stamps and her family received orders to Kingsville, Texas and immediately started looking into the schools in their new neighborhood. Her stepdaughter was a thriving 4th grader, who would start her 5th grade year at the new school. A few weeks in, Emily noticed her child wasn't thriving like she had at their previous school.

Emily's stepdaughter, who only spoke English, was first placed in a bilingual classroom. When her academic performance suffered, the school moved her into an English-only classroom, where the work was too easy and lessons centered around state test material.

"The work they gave them was straight from state practice tests. My stepdaughter was encouraged not to use normal math strategies to do her work but was told to use a variety of test strategies instead, which she didn't understand. I spoke up to the principal and she was placed in the gifted and talented classroom, where the work was still structured around state testing, but my stepdaughter was given more flexibility as to how she solved the problems."

The Stamps are looking ahead to their next PCS move and preparing to tackle similar challenges all over again. Emily says that next time, she'll speak up immediately.

"For our next move, we have a pretty good idea of where we are going, and I have already started looking at schools and emailing administrators. I won't play roulette with our child's education."

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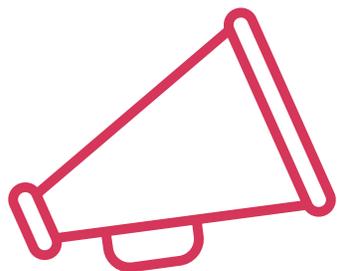
***SPEAK UP*** when something doesn't make sense, doesn't work anymore, or affects your child negatively.

### **When is the right time to speak up for my child's education?**

As a parent, you understand the importance of communicating with your child's teacher to make sure they understand your child's strengths, weaknesses, and learning style. After a PCS move, that communication is even more important. Usually, working proactively with your child's teacher helps transitioning to a new school go smoothly. But what if your child is struggling and the teacher isn't responsive to his or her needs?

### **Make it Happen (How to SPEAK UP Right Now)**

1. Work proactively to establish a good, open relationship with your child's teacher. Introduce yourself in person or via email. If you are in a new school, share examples of your child's work from the previous school so the teacher can assess where your child is academically.
2. Educate yourself on the curriculum and standards used in your child's new school, especially if it's different from what you and your child are used to. That way, if your child struggles, you're better able to understand the reason for their problems.
3. If problems come up, start with your child's teacher. If he or she isn't receptive or able to solve the issue, ask to include the principal or school counselor in the conversation.



## **FEAR FACTOR: The 4 Myths (and Realities!) of Speaking Up**

- 1. Backlash from the service member's military command.** Being worried about backlash is an impediment for many parents, but it shouldn't stop you. If you're concerned about command reaction, reach out to your School Liaison Officer for guidance, and consider talking to your command FRO, FRG, Key Spouse, or Ombudsman.
- 2. Questioning from friends, family, neighbors, or other military parents.** If people in your life question your reasons for advocating, take it as an opportunity to educate someone who might not understand what military kids go through. Turn a critic into a comrade!
- 3. Discouragement from others.** Sometimes, despite explaining the reasons we might push for change, others won't understand. That's okay! It takes courage to go it alone.
- 4. It's intimidating.** You might worry about rocking the boat or risking that your child's school experience will be negatively affected if you speak up. But what if you do nothing? Which would be worse?



## Reach Out

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For Jennifer Carter, a military spouse and mom of four, arriving to a new school mid-year proved difficult. Teachers assumed she knew where to find out important dates and information, who to talk to, and even where to turn for help. She noticed her kids' new school didn't have a military transition coordinator like their previous school did, and it made the new move even more of a struggle.

"It is important to have a program or group specially designed for the military child and their parents on the individual school level," Jennifer explained. "Not only do they foster school connectedness among the kids, but the groups are extremely valuable for a military family, too. They're a place where families feel they belong, where they can be embraced and have a shared understanding of the excitement and difficulties that arise from a military lifestyle."

Jennifer reached out to her school administration and asked if she could start a transition program for military kids at the school, and she says it's simple for parents to do anywhere!

"If your school doesn't have a transition program for military-connected students, I highly recommend beginning one. Go for it! It's amazing how quickly a school military group can grow into a flourishing supportive network. Go to your principal, guidance counselor, and/or the PTA and suggest the idea of creating a military-connected support or social group. As new military parents come in, ask the office to pass along your contact information or group information for them to contact. It could be such a huge blessing to an incoming family to have someone to email, or a group to connect with where they can receive the answers to those many questions families have when starting a new school."

**REACH OUT** to people who can help you.

### When is the right time to reach out on my child's behalf?

Have you spoken up about a problem your military kid is facing but haven't gotten the issue resolved in a way that helps your child succeed? Have you gone up the chain to your child's teacher, counselor, and principal, but still haven't gotten the help you needed? Maybe it's time to look outside the school for support and assistance.

### Who to **REACH OUT** to Right Now

#### Level 1. Teacher, Principal, Counselor, or your school Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).

Reach out to people who are within your school first: teachers, the principal, or even the PTA. If you aren't involved with the PTA, get involved. You can change the climate of your child's school with their help.

#### Level 2. School Liaison Officer (SLO).

Each military installation has a SLO who is familiar with the local schools, understands the ins and outs of the way things are done in your district, and can help navigate Interstate Compact-related issues. For Interstate Compact issues, email or reach out to your state's Compact Commissioner to see if they can provide assistance.

#### Level 3. School Board or District Superintendent.

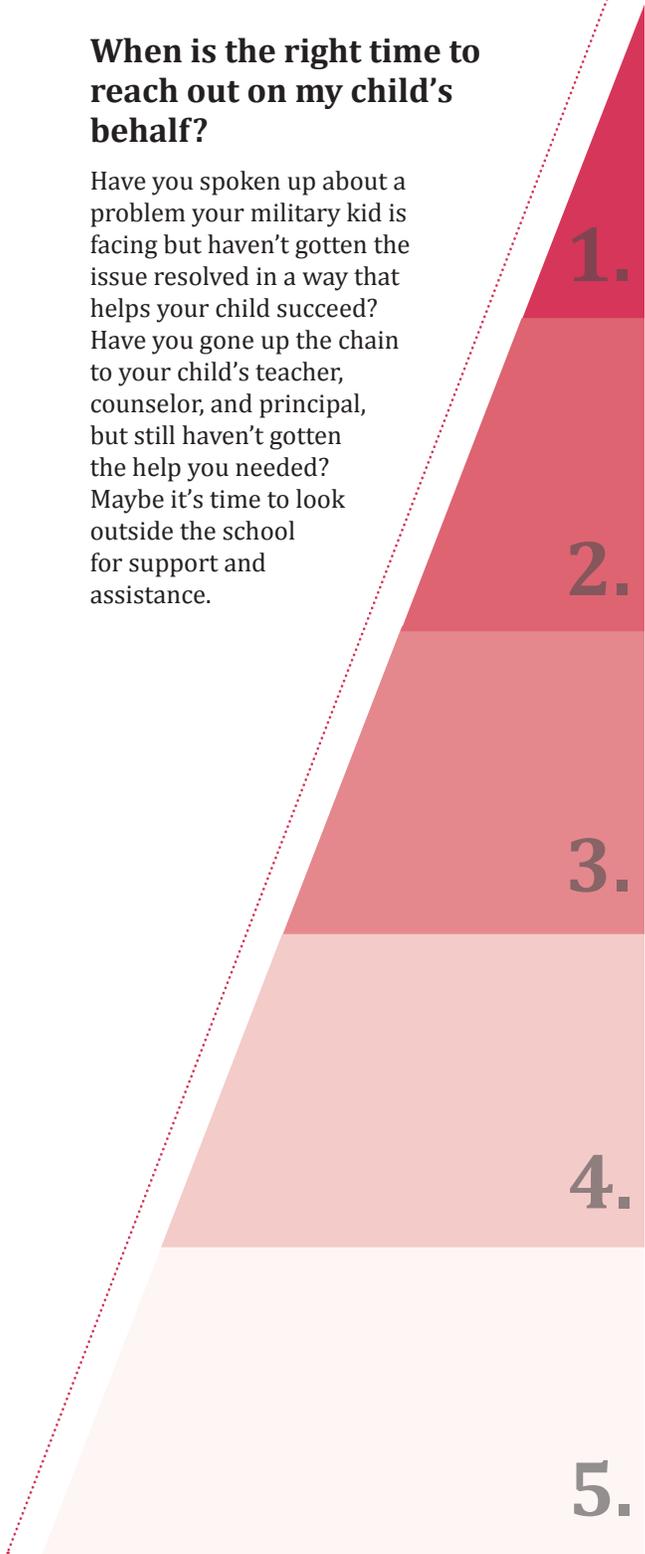
Start by looking at the website for your child's school district to find contact information. If emails and phone calls go unreturned, try finding a school board meeting that's open to the public. There, you can share your story and ask for help.

#### Level 4. Department of Education.

Look up your state's education agency or department to find out who provides support and assistance to your local school district. These education officials are responsible for setting state-wide education policies, and they can encourage local school districts to set policies that support military families.

#### Level 5. State Representative.

State representatives have an important role to play in ensuring local schools are able to provide a quality education to every child. Nearly half of a school district's funding comes from the state level. Even if you don't vote in the state where you are stationed, reach out to your state representatives to let them know what they can do to improve military kids' experiences in school.





## Step In

“When my husband was assigned to Fort Knox, in Kentucky, I became a volunteer school mom—as many military spouses do. Along the way, I discovered I wanted to engage more and do more. So I said, ‘I think I’d like to run for the school board.’”

What started as a small opportunity to be involved in her daughter’s classroom turned into a big chance for Joyce Raezer to step in and make needed changes within the Fort Knox school system.

Joyce, a mom of two whose husband is now retired from the Army, ran for a spot on the Department of Defense Education Agency (DoDEA) school board representing the schools aboard Fort Knox. While serving on the school board, she worked alongside others to ensure the curriculum at her children’s school was consistent with those at other schools, and that the military-connected students were set up to thrive.

When the Department of Defense needed to hire a new school board superintendent for the Fort Knox schools, the school board wasn’t included in the process, like many civilian schools are. Joyce and her school board colleagues, with the help of the National Military Family Association, sued the Department of Defense for the right to have input on who DoDEA’s Fort Knox school board superintendent should be. Because of this momentous decision to step in and change what wasn’t right, Joyce was part of a solution that affected many more military students than just her own children.

“Pick your cause and find a way to get involved,” Joyce said. “Mine started with my kids—finding a better education for them and a better voice for me. Whatever the problem is that you want to fix, find out where to go to connect with the person who has the authority to fix the problem. Eventually, YOU could be that person.”

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## ***STEP IN*** to make a change.

### **When is the right time to step in and make change happen myself?**

Change doesn't always happen when we speak up and reach out. But that doesn't mean you have to give up. It might be time to step in if you've reached out to the people you thought could help, but nothing resulted in a solution. If you believe change is possible, or if you think you have a solution to an unresolved problem, step in and take action!

### **Make It Happen** ***(How to Step In Right Now)***

Stepping in can take on lots of different forms depending on what the situation is and what problem you're trying to solve. Here are a few options that could work for you:

1. **Classroom.** Become a room parent/volunteer in your child's classroom. Organize other parents to volunteer.
2. **School.** Run for a position on your school PTA. Set up a welcome program for new military families.
3. **School Board.** If the issue is a district policy, meet with your local school board member. Attend a school board meeting and organize other parents to attend with you! Start a petition to change a policy you disagree with. Think about running for the school board!
4. **State.** Contact your state representative to express your opinion on state laws affecting education. Reach out to your Department of Education. Consider running for office!



Our child has attended 7 different schools, it has been hard on him because **the quality of schools are not the same everywhere and the standards**

**are different in each state we have lived.**

Math has been the biggest challenge.

My children struggle because **curriculum and standards are different in every school.**

We have chosen to homeschool, in part, **to avoid the issues that would occur with changing schools frequently.**

The teaching methods have been different and the **kids sometimes have a hard time adjusting.**

A military child's education shouldn't suffer because of their parent's call to serve.

The battle for freedom is the service member's job. The battle for education is ours.

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*Join the Revolution.*

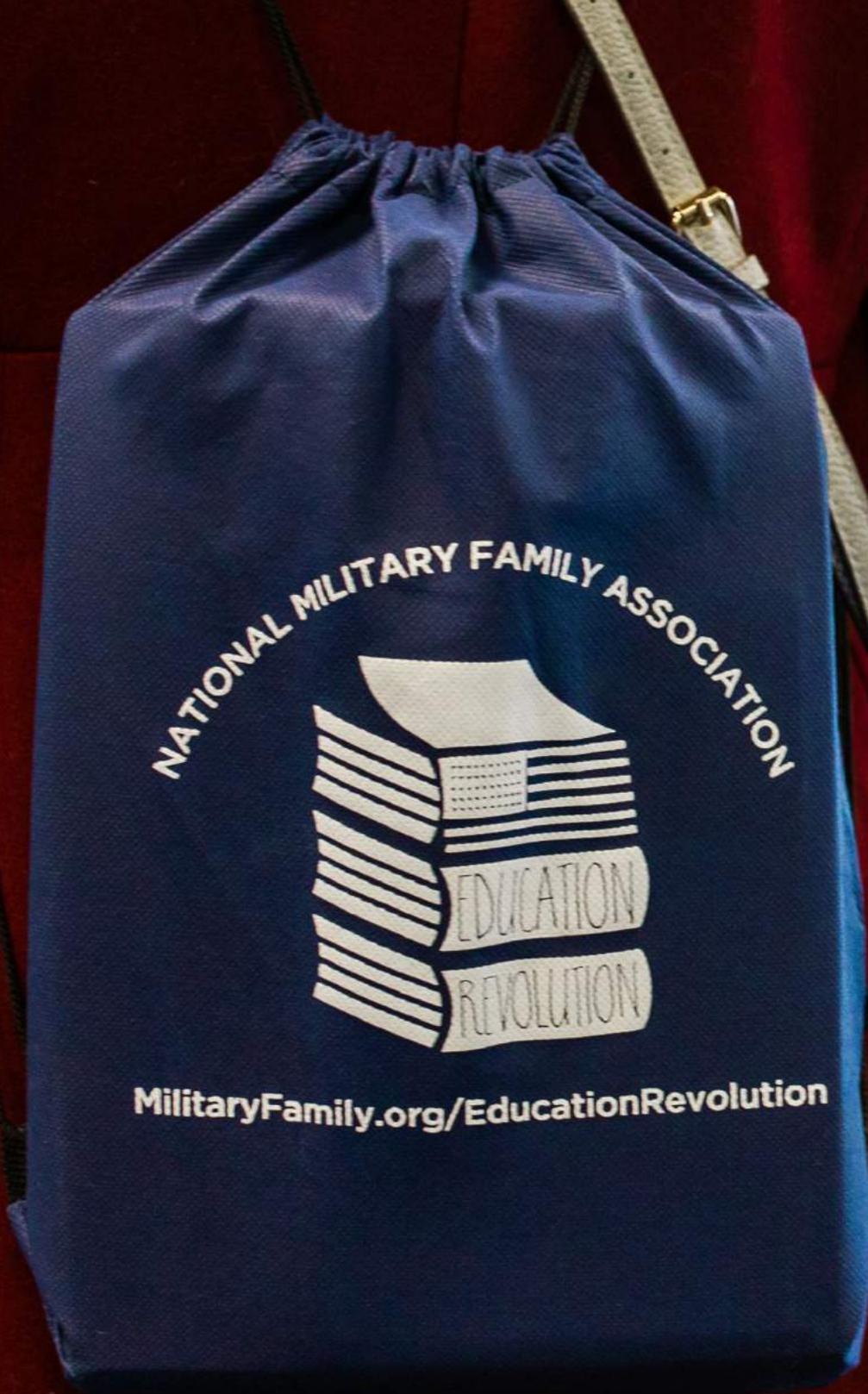
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Advocacy is having the courage  
to change *“what is”* into  
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