

01**How long have you been involved with the Compact?**

I have been working with Compact related issues since I became a Navy School Liaison Officer for Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, Texas in the fall of 2009.

02**What are the biggest challenges you face in Virginia and how has the Compact helped?**

One of the biggest transition challenges has been supporting students who have attended specialty center programs in sending states. This includes elementary students who were receiving gifted instruction. Although Virginia has been a member of the Compact since July 1, 2009 some schools continue to question Compact rule Sec 5.102 Educational Program Placement. This rule requires that the receiving schools honor the sending schools educational placement of the student based on current assessments and asked that the receiving school place the student in a program similar to the one the student attended in the sending state. There have been a number of schools who have been apprehensive about permitting enrollment into specialty programs especially those with cohorts or extensive waitlists.

As the state designee, I have had a number of conversations about what constituent's similarity. This Compact provision has been helpful in opening the doors to schools that otherwise may have been closed to transfer students. It has also led to discussions on the need to build capacity in our specialty programs to make room for transfer students who may wish to take on the academic rigor offered. I've noticed that school districts with high numbers of military connected students who have routinely experienced this transition issue have begun to adjust enrollment and application processes to better support military connected student's accessibility to these programs. I want to encourage all school districts to follow suit.

03**You have worked as a School Liaison Officer in the District of Columbia (D.C.) and you are now the Commissioner Designee in Virginia. Have you noticed any significant differences/similarities in the transition issues?**

In general, transition issues between the two localities are similar. Every family is looking for schools that are the best fit for their child(ren). The big difference is that in D.C. accessing the better performing traditional public schools and public charter schools is quite challenging. The cost and limited supply of affordable housing in D.C. and the location of the military housing community on Joint Base Anacostia Bolling (JBAB) makes it very difficult on military families who choose to reside in military housing to avoid a grueling commute or are required to do so per their orders. The Compact permits some military families to access better performing schools through the program placement provision but many families must attempt to gain access through the D.C. Common Lottery. This lottery permits all residents to seek enrollment in schools outside of their zoned school.

In both D.C. and Virginia some military families face having their children enrolled in schools that they would otherwise not have chosen. The best solution here is to improve the schools zoned for military housing. We are talking about areas that have high degrees of cyclical poverty that appear not to be improving. Improvement to these schools, however, is easier said than done.

Military families and children do not have time to wait for school improvement efforts to take effect or for there to be a cultural shift. Keep in mind that some improvement efforts have been actively underway for a decade or more. Still, these schools have not seen the sustainable changes we all want and need to see. Therefore steps must be taken now to assist military families who face these types of educational setting challenges. I'm happy to share that Virginia has taken steps this year to restore choice to members of the military who live in military housing.

Beginning July 1, 2018 Virginia school districts must have policies in place that will provide military families residing in military housing the option to request enrollment at a school other than that of their zoned school within the school district that serves the military housing community. Like the D.C. Common Lottery, there must be space available to accommodate the requesting student. In addition, school districts are not prohibited from requiring parents to transport their students to and from school. This isn't, by any means, a solution that will work for all families. The real solution is to improve schools in areas of high poverty and especially those zoned for military housing. It would improve the quality of life for military families, and I believe it is a matter of national interest and national security.

04

If you could pick one topic that the Compact does not cover and turn it into a rule, what would that be?

The Compact Commission should consider expanding its definitions of eligibility and applicability. There are a number of career public servants that play a vital role in the service to the United States. Expansion of the compact should include children whose parent's work for the U.S. Department of State. These students experience some of the same challenges and stressors as their military connected peers - which includes worrying about their parent during some type of deployment.

Expanding applicability of the Compact to include public universal preschool programs needs to be considered. Many states are moving away from "targeted" public funded preschool programs to public funded universal preschool programs. It is time that the Compact Commission investigates this trend to determine if the Compact should be revised to include Pre-K programs.

05

Do you think that the knowledge of the Compact is growing on military bases and in public schools?

From my vantage point, I believe that many more people are aware of the Compact. This is especially true in regard to spouses of active duty service members and of school districts with high numbers of military connected children. Credit needs to be given to School Liaison Officers and State Commissioners who have remained actively engaged in building Compact awareness and with its application.

06

Do you have any thoughts on what we can do to expand the outreach of the Compact and spread its message?

Each state needs to determine where they are in regards to the implementation of the Compact and take the necessary steps to address any shortcomings. I see outreach as an ongoing effort since the needs of both the military and educators are always evolving.

Malcolm Gladwell would say I'm a connector. As a connector I affect change by linking networks of people to those who are in the know and who are in the position to make things happen. Soon after I arrived at the Virginia Department of Education we convened key stakeholders from around the state which meeting allowed us to discuss how we could improve support for military connected children. The outcomes helped shape my strategic plan. This plan leverages professional development through which I'm now better able to reach multiple audiences spreading the word about the Compact, and the importance of supporting military families and students.