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To: Governor Steve Bullock
Senate President Jeff Essmann
Speaker of the House Mark Blasdel
Senator Tom Facey, Chair, Education and Local Government Committee

From: Superintendent of Public Instruction Denise Juneau

Subject: Report on the Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

As required by 20-1-231, MCA, this report provides a summary of the state's participation in the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children and the activities and discussions of the Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children during FY 2014. This report and other information associated with the Council are posted on the Office of Public Instruction's website at http://opi.mt.gov/Media_Center/Index.html?gpm=1_7.

Purpose

In 2013, the Montana legislature approved Senate Bill 203, which enacted into law the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The purpose of the Interstate Compact is to remove barriers to educational success imposed on children of military families because of frequent moves and deployment of their parents. The state's participation in the compact is intended to facilitate

- the timely enrollment of children of military families;
- the student placement process;
- the student's qualification and eligibility for enrollment, educational programs, and extracurricular academic, athletic and social activities; and
- the student's on-time graduation.

Council membership

One of the requirements of participation in the Interstate Compact is for the state to create a state council on educational opportunity for military children. The members of the Montana Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children include:

- BG (Ret.) Harold Stearns, Compact Commissioner, appointed by the Governor
- Denise Juneau, Superintendent of Public Instruction, appointed by the Governor
- Master Sergeant Benjamin Aylward, Malmstrom AFB, appointed by the Governor
- Major Renea Dorvall, Montana National Guard, appointed by the Governor
- Tammy Lacey, Great Falls Superintendent of Schools, appointed by the Governor
- Senator Edward Buttrey, Great Falls, appointed by the Senate President
- Representative Jean Price, Great Falls, appointed by the state council
- Mark Beckman, Executive Director, Montana High School Association, appointed by the state council

The Montana Office of Public Instruction provides vision, advocacy, support, and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities.

The Council has appointed two members to the Council in addition to those appointed by the Governor. In January, Senator Buttrey nominated Representative Jean Price from Great Falls to serve on the Council. The Council unanimously approved the nomination. Rep. Price co-sponsored SB 203 and she worked with the staff at the Interstate Compact Commission to promote the work of the Compact even before Montana became a member. In April, the Council voted unanimously to appoint Mark Beckman, Executive Director of the Montana High School Association to the Council. Mr. Beckman is familiar with the issues that military-connected students face in becoming eligible to participate in extracurricular athletics when they transfer into a school district.

As Compact Commissioner, General Stearns is responsible for the administration and management of the state's participation in the compact. The council is required to appoint a Military Family Education Liaison to assist military families and the state in facilitating the implementation of the compact. This position has not been appointed yet, but is expected to be filled before the end of June.

By statute, the Compact Commissioner and the Military Family Education Liaison are non-voting members. At the meetings, Master Sargent Aylward and Major Dorvall have abstained from voting because of their federally-funded positions.

The Office of Public Instruction invited representatives from Montana's U.S. Senate and Congressional offices to attend the Council meeting in April. All three offices (Senator Tester, Senator Walsh, and Representative Daines) sent staff members to the meeting. These individuals were invited to sit at the table with the Council and all engaged in the meeting discussions. They also expressed an interest in attending future meetings of the Council and were encouraged to do so by Council members.

Activities of the State Council

The Council met twice in FY 2014. The meetings were held on January 31, 2014 and April 29, 2014 in Great Falls and were hosted by the Great Falls Public Schools. In April, the Council met at Loy Elementary, which is located on the boundary of the Malmstrom Air Force Base. Ninety-three percent of the students enrolled in the school are military-connected. Six Loy students (all military-connected) gave Council members and invited guests a tour of the school and talked about the programs and activities that the school has to welcome students of military families.

In January, General Stearns reported to the Council on the meeting of the Interstate Compact Commission that he attended in November 2013. There are now more than 40 states participating in the compact. The compact provides for the uniform treatment of military children transferring between school districts and states. It was developed by the Council of State Governments' National Center for Interstate Compacts, the Department of Defense, national associations, federal and state officials, departments of education, school administrators and military families. General Stearns shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the work and the focus of the Interstate Compact Commission. The website for the commission is www.mic3.net.

In compliance with the interstate compact, the Office of Public Instruction is adding an indicator to its statewide student information system to identify military-connected students. Specifically, OPI has established data elements to indicate if a student is a dependent of an active duty member of the United States Military, National Guard or Reserve Force of the US Military. Also, OPI has added four new enrollment codes for military-connected students to the statewide student information system. The military-connected identifier and enrollment codes will be used to track on-time graduation, enrollment and eligibility, and will help school administrators understand enrollment and placement issues related to students of military families and assess where student support is needed.

At each of the meetings, the Council heard presentations on the efforts of the Great Falls school system to welcome and assist new students from military families. With a three-year grant from the Department of Defense, the school system has successfully implemented interventions and supports to aid the transition of military-connected students and families into and out of the school district. The grant resources have allowed the district to hire additional, highly-trained staff and target programming for transitioning students. The goal is for the students to move forward academically in a safe, nurturing environment that is focused on the needs of the child. The grant of approximately \$650,000, which the district named TROOPS (Transitional Resource Opportunities Offered to Parents and Students), runs out at the end of this school year. The district is concerned about the extent to which it can sustain the services that it has been able to provide to military-connected students.

The Council is developing a model school district policy for children of military families. The Council received a briefing from Barbara Ridgway, Staff and Student Services Administrator for Helena Public Schools, regarding the school district's adoption of its policy on Children of Military Families (<http://www.helena.k12.mt.us/district/boardoft/boardpol/policy/index.dhtm>). The Council is using the Helena district's policy as a starting point for developing a model policy for other school districts to use. The Council plans to add a statement on attendance flexibility, which would allow for exemptions to a district's attendance policy for children who need time away from school when active duty family members are deployed, on leave, or returning from service. The Council also plans to develop policy language that further addresses participation in extracurricular activities and athletics. The Council has also enlisted the assistance of the Montana School Board Association to review similar policies in other states.

In the year ahead, the Council will be working on educating school administrators on the unique issues facing military-connected students. The Council will make a presentation to the Montana Association of School Administrators (an affiliate of the School Administrators of Montana) at their fall conference in September. The Montana High School Association works closely with school administrators on waivers of the 15-day transcript rule for students who encounter difficulties with the transfer of student records due to military moves. The more an administrator understands the unique challenges facing a military-connected student, the easier it is to work with the Montana High School Association on eligibility issues. It is also important for administrators to better understand the mental health support that may be necessary for a student whose parent is deploying.

FY 2014 Costs for Participation in the Interstate Compact

As of June 13, 2014, the State of Montana, Department of Military Affairs has spent \$2,682.31 for activities associated with the Interstate Compact and the state Council. Of this amount, \$2,000 was paid to the Council of State Governments for participation in the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children and the remaining \$682.31 was spent for travel and meeting expenses of the state council.

Next Steps for the Council

After two meetings, the Council has identified several issues on which to focus in the year ahead:

- 1) Train school district staff on identifying and reporting children of military families in the statewide student information system;
- 2) Educate school administrators, counselors and athletic directors on the challenges of facing military-connected students and their families with the goal of fostering academic success for all students of military families and facilitating the participation of students in extracurricular athletics and activities;
- 3) Become a co-sponsor with the Montana National Guard of Purple Up! Day, which commemorates military families in our communities;
- 4) Disseminate the *Guide for Parents, School Officials and Public Administrators*, which has been developed by the Interstate Commission on Educational Opportunity for Military Children;
- 5) Develop a process and brochure for parents and school districts to navigate the system if they come to an impasse for a child in the areas of enrollment, placement, eligibility to participate in extra-curricular activities, and graduation; and
- 6) Learn more about the Service Member and Family programs offered to military families offered at Fort Harrison.