



**Testimony of  
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Chairman of the Military Child Education Coalition**

***Before the Texas Senate Education Committee - April 20, 2006***

Madame Chair, Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to address you on two issues of critical importance to Texas' military families. My name is Tom Schwartz and I come before you today as Chairman of the Military Child Education Coalition, a national, private, non-profit organization formed to help address the unique academic and social challenges facing America's military-connected children.

MCEC's organizational focus is to address transitions, deployments, and other educational issues related to all military-connected children, including children whose parents are serving on active duty, in the National Guard, and in the Reserves.

MCEC promotes partnerships and provides opportunities for the networking of military installations and their supporting school districts. Borrowing a military term for joint military operations, MCEC is truly a "purple" organization and serves all branches of the armed services. The children of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard are all beneficiaries of MCEC's programs, services, and training. In fact, each branch of the armed services has joined MCEC, along with hundreds of school districts whose children benefit.

In Texas, we have played a key role in the Texans Caring for Military Children Initiative which has provided training and resources to dozens of Texas school districts whose students are affected by the work of the United States Military.

America's armed forces provide for our nation's defense in times of peace and in times of war. Serving alongside our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines are the more than 1.8 million children of the armed forces. These children also serve our nation and, in so doing, face unique challenges brought about by the demands of military life. They move repeatedly during the formative academic years, they endure long periods of separation caused by deployments, and they face the ravages of war when brought home to their families through the loss or the injury of a loved one.

Military children typically move from six to nine times in the thirteen years between Kindergarten and their senior year in high school. During wartime, the children of Guardsmen and Reservists join the ranks of mobile children as families cope with separation and, in many cases, changes in locale.

The Military Child Education Coalition's expertise, energy and resources are focused on improving the predictability of the educational experience of children in all military and other

mobile families. As you work to reform our state's school systems, there are two issues that MCEC would like for you to consider.

The first issue involves standardizing the start date of Texas schools to provide consistency and continuity to children as the move from place to place – both within Texas and outside of our state. We have studied the issue carefully and believe that moving Texas' school start until after September 1<sup>st</sup> will make Texas more compatible with those states that adhere to a traditional academic calendar.

We support this change because, while it would not affect the number of instructional days that students receive and would have no detrimental effect on the quality of their education, it would allow greater consistency from state to state and would aid military families in planning and carrying out family moves without disrupting their children's education. This change would also ease the transitions of military spouses employed as teachers as it helps to synchronize calendars between locales.

Additionally, a traditional academic calendar would allow greater opportunities for students and teachers to participate in summer academic and other programs including advanced coursework. This is critical to military children who often lose credits because of moves between schools and school districts.

Finally, we believe that restoring a traditional academic school year is fiscally responsible. It is estimated that this change could save Texas schools \$184 million in utility and operational costs alone, funds that could be used for core academic programs that directly benefit children.

On that note, I would offer a second measure for your consideration.

Currently, the state provides state-funded pre-Kindergarten programs to children who meet certain eligibility criteria. These criteria include children who are "educationally disadvantaged" and others. While military children are not disadvantaged, they do face the unique challenges I mentioned earlier. These could be aided by a solid academic foundation in their early and formative years.

We would ask that you consider broadening the eligibility criteria for state-funded pre-Kindergarten programs to include those children whose parents are serving on active duty or are activated in service in the National Guard or Reserves. We would also ask that you expand the eligibility criteria to include those children whose parents have been lost in service or whose parents are recovering from injuries sustained in service to our country.

Because many enlisted personnel already qualify for federal or state funded programs, we believe the fiscal impact will be minimal but we are certain that the educational benefit will be enormous and lasting.

We are all proud of our armed forces and we want to do all that we can to support our troops, and their children. As a Texan, I am proud of the commitments that this state has made to our troops and I am hopeful that you will continue to support them and their families as they carry out their missions in service to our nation.

Thank you for your time.