

Virginia Council for the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military
Children
Minutes: December 8, 2011

Council Members in Attendance:

Senator John C. Miller, Chair
Delegate M. Kirkland Cox
Dr. Patricia I. Wright, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Dr. Bobby R. Browder, Superintendent of Prince George County Public Schools
Dr. James G. Merrill, Superintendent of Virginia Beach Public Schools
Professor Marlena E. Bremseth

Council Members not in Attendance:

Dr. William C. Boshier, Jr.
Ms. Susan McIntosh

Department of Education Staff in Attendance:

Melissa Luchau, Military Family Education Liaison
Michelle Vucci, Director of Policy

Senator Miller opened the meeting by welcoming the Council members and guests.

The first agenda item was an update on Virginia High School League (VHSL) eligibility issues related to military children. Senator Miller informed the Council that in September VHSL passed an emergency policy to grant immediate eligibility to “student transfers into a school to live with a relative or guardian due to the fact the parent(s) or legal guardian is deployed overseas and/or to a combat assignment or on temporary assignment in excess of 90 days by orders of the United States Military.” The previous policy prohibited students from participating in VHSL activities for the first 365 days following transfer to a school, unless the transfer corresponds to the family’s move into the attendance zone.

Senator Miller also brought another VHSL eligibility issue to the attention of the Council members. He noted that there has been some concern expressed related to military families who are deemed “key and essential” and must live on base, thus limiting their option to choose what school their children attend. If these military parents choose to send their children to a school off-base, they are not eligible to participate in VHSL activities for one year. Council members discussed the issue. One Council member noted that this issue should be examined in terms of attendance zones. Council members noted their interest in exploring the issue further and asked Senator Miller to continue conversations with VHSL.

The second agenda item was a brief update from the military family education liaison about the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3) Annual Meeting. Thirty-one state commissioners, or their designees, attended the MIC3 meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, November 13-15, 2011. At the MIC3 meeting, commissioners voted on two significant rule changes. The first was a rule to create a ceiling (\$60,000) and a floor (\$2,000) for annual dues. This rule passed the Commission, and will save Virginia approximately \$20,000 in annual dues. The second proposed rule change would have required students not meeting the receiving state's age requirement for kindergarten to attend one day of school in the sending state before they are allowed to continue their enrollment in the receiving state. The Virginia Council discussed this issue at their meeting on August 22, 2011, and passed a motion to support Virginia's current policy, which requires a student not meeting the age requirement for kindergarten in Virginia but meeting the requirement in the sending state, to have registered in the sending state. The Virginia Council issued public comment in opposition to the proposed rule change, as it is inconsistent with a previous advisory opinion issued by the Commission, would add an additional requirement on military families, and would change the current policy which is working effectively in the Commonwealth. The proposed rule change was tabled at the MIC3 meeting and will be discussed again in the rules committee throughout 2012. The MIC3 meeting also included opportunities to share best practices with other states including reciprocity for exit and end-of-course exams, ways to involve the guard and reserve military, ideas for state Council agenda items, and working with the Department of Defense (DOD). In small groups the commissioners also continued to discuss the kindergarten enrollment issue.

The Council also reviewed their Annual Executive Summary of the Interim Activity and Work of the Council. The executive summary provides information regarding the four meetings that the Virginia Council convened in 2011, as well as other actions that were taken during 2011 to disseminate information regarding the Compact to school divisions, military families, and other affected entities. The military family education liaison, on behalf of the Virginia Council, spoke at numerous events and worked with educational partners to spread the word about the Military Compact and answer questions about its implementation in the Commonwealth. The Department also issued numerous guidance documents to assist school divisions as they work with military families. Included in the appendix of the executive summary are presentations that were made to the Council during 2011. No changes were made to the report. The report will be submitted to the Governor and the General Assembly before the first day of the General Assembly session.

Several school liaison officers addressed the Council to discuss areas of success and areas that need improvement in terms of implementation of the Compact. One school liaison officer noted that while much progress has been made in Virginia to get the word out about the military Compact and that school divisions, school liaison officers and the Department are working well together to assist military families, more work needs to be done to get information and training on the Compact to teachers and guidance counselors. The notion that information on the Compact has reached superintendents, but not school

level personnel like teachers and some guidance counselors, was echoed by other school liaison officers addressing the Council.

Some school liaison officers noted that there are still issues in transferring exit or end-of-course tests from one state to another, without requiring the student to take additional tests. Specifically, there have been issues in transferring students from DOD schools, because they are required to take the TerraNova tests, but school divisions in Virginia have trouble accepting these tests for verified credit because there are no cut or passing scores assigned. One school liaison officer also discussed some challenges in transferring Individualized Education Programs (IEP) for special needs children because different states and different school divisions offer services in different ways. Some members of the Council noted that this can be a struggle for all special needs children, not just military children, given the variety in methods of services offered from state to state and school division to school division, despite meeting federal requirements.

One school liaison officer also noted that the Reserve and Guard have unique challenges because the military families are more geographically diverse. It is often difficult to identify children in these families because they may be inactive for certain time periods. The school liaison officer noted the importance of making parents in the Reserve and Guard aware of the services offered and engaging them as family members are activated.

School liaison officers noted that workshops and professional development trainings are very helpful for school personnel to learn more about military lifestyle and the provisions of the Compact. The officers also thanked the Virginia Council for their support and giving them time to address some of the successes and areas of improvement in helping military families transition to our public schools.

The members of the Council discussed some of the issues raised by the school liaison officers. One Council member noted that Virginia needs to continue to work with DOD to ensure a smooth transition for military children. Council members also expressed an interest in exploring issues related to special education students, and how to better connect them to the resources that are available in Virginia's schools. Council members also noted that more work needs to be done to get information on the Compact to teachers and school counselors.

The Council then received public comment from one member of the audience. The commenter noted that Virginia is head and shoulders above other states in terms of implementing the Compact and easing the transition for military transfer students into public schools.

Senator Miller closed the meeting by thanking the Council members and guests.

Presentation materials from the meeting can be found at:

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/student_family/military/va_council/index.shtml.