

Military Welcome Packet

*Virginia Beach City Public Schools
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

It's tough being the "new kid" in class. Children in military families may be the "new kid" several times during their school years. That is why Virginia Beach City Public Schools designed a Military Welcome Packet that will ease the transition for military families new to the area and its school district.

More than 20 percent of the 72,000 students in the Virginia Beach City Public Schools are from families in the military. Through NNPS, the district benefitted from the Military Child Initiative (MCI), which aims to improve schools and educational experiences for highly mobile and vulnerable young people, especially those in military families. The idea for the Welcome Packet originated at meetings of the Military Task Force, which were guided by MCI technical assistance activities from NNPS.

Although tailored to Virginia Beach schools, the packet is available to others on the district's website, www.vbschools.com. In Virginia Beach, the school system advertised the welcome packet in both family and school staff newsletters, as well as on local cable TV. So far, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Requests have come from as far as Djibouti, Germany and Italy.

The packet includes a letter of welcome from the superintendent, literature specific to the school district, including registration information, school locations, curriculum and programs. It also provides important information about the military, such as base locations and medical resources, as well as an informative CD from the Military Child Education Coalition.

The information is aimed at helping families navigate the process of moving, acclimate to a new school, and adapt to life in a large military town. Not only does the packet help simplify the nuts and bolts of transitions to new

schools, but also lets families know that the school district is there to help and that schools and families are partners in education. Most importantly, parents and school staffs reap the benefit of an easier transition for students.

The Task Force offered critiques and suggestions for the packet. Recipients have noted how helpful the information is. Soon the packet will be available as a reference for guidance counselors at every school.

"It is imperative that the Virginia Beach school system is aware of the impact the military has on the lives of the students and people who live in our city," said a high school guidance counselor. "The deployments, the war, and casualties affect all members of a family, whether it is the person who is serving or the spouse and children who stay home. It is my belief that the military initiative is only the beginning step in helping these families make successful transitions into our city."

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