

## Fact Sheet: Advocacy Tips for Parents

**Being an advocate for your child’s educational success requires having access to the best and most appropriate information possible.** You may feel understandably overwhelmed by the volume of information and resources available to you when making important decisions about your child’s education. This fact sheet provides an overview of some key topics you should be aware of in order to be an effective advocate for your child’s education, and links to additional information.

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### Selecting a School

Although all parents will want to select a ‘good’ school for their family, there are many considerations for selecting the school that is right for your child and his or her needs. These considerations include:

- **School Schedule** – When transferring to a new area, the schedules of the local schools are an important consideration for your family’s lifestyle and needs.
- **Curriculum** – While all schools within a state are expected to meet the same standards, states and districts vary in the extent they allow flexibility for schools to design their own curriculum and instructional program. Some schools have particular emphases such as mathematics and science or the arts and some emphasize a particular instructional strategy such as phonics or digital learning. **Consider your child’s specific aptitudes and needs to select an appropriate fit.**
- **Class Size** – While research is mixed on the exact student-to-teacher ratio for optimal classroom learning, conventional wisdom suggests that smaller class sizes are advantageous because they allow opportunities for more personalized learning. Smaller class sizes are more likely found in preschool and elementary grades, while upper middle and high school public school classes can be as large as 35 or 40 students. **Consider whether your child is able to manage large class sizes or whether a smaller structure is more appropriate.**
- **Teacher Quality** – Under the Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, schools are required to notify parents about the number of teachers in their schools who meet “highly qualified” status. Teachers are highly qualified if they are certified, if they have a degree in the subject they teach, and if they pass required tests. Teachers who are teaching under emergency credentials are not highly qualified. Many private schools, however, do not require teachers to earn certification. **Consider teacher certification and credentialing requirements when selecting a school for your child.**

- **Academic Achievement** – Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), schools are required to report student performance on statewide mathematics and reading tests for the school overall and for subgroups of students within through publically available School Report Cards. **While statewide tests are not the only measure of a school’s quality, they provide important indicators of academic achievement.**

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## Educational Supports

Outside of the regular school day, there are many opportunities to enhance your child’s education, including:

- **Afterschool Programs** – All branches of the military offer afterschool programs for military-connected students. Information about these services, such as after school care can be most often found from the local school and through community directories of programs.
- **Extracurricular Activities** – School Websites, directories, and information boards offer opportunities for students to participate in structured extracurricular activities across a variety of interests, such as sports or band. Schools may have special programs and activities to welcome and involve new military students. Occasionally, schools partner with outside organizations to provide extracurricular activities.
- **Tutoring/Academic Support** – The military sponsors a variety of academic remedial support and challenges, such as tutoring and Advanced Placement options. Fee-for service tutoring programs are also often advertised in local newspapers or community directories.

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## Parental Involvement

**Being a successful advocate for your child’s education involves more than just awareness.** Actively participating in a parent group at school can result in better operations and services for your child. For a newly relocating military family, this can also mean better support systems to guide your child’s experience. Additional ways families can get involved include:

- Volunteering in your child’s school or early learning program;
- Maintaining lines of communication with teachers about your child’s learning experience through face-to-face interactions, phone conversations and online communication; and
- Participation in parent-teacher conferences.

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## More About Family Advocacy

For more information about how to be a successful advocate for your child’s education, visit the Army Family Advocacy Program at [http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/mhf/MHF/MHF\\_HOME\\_1?section\\_id=20.80.500.188.0.0.0.0.0](http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/portal/page/mhf/MHF/MHF_HOME_1?section_id=20.80.500.188.0.0.0.0.0). To learn more about the importance of School Connectedness, visit the Military Child Initiative at <http://www.jhsph.edu/mci/>.