SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF LIMITED PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT FOR RESERVE COMPONENT MILITARY FAMILIES DURING DEPLOYMENT

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of limited parental involvement for military-connected students of reserve component (RC) military-connected families during periods of deployment at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania and to formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, was used. Five teachers who had a military-connected student, whose parent deployed while a student in their class participated in semistructured interviews. Five non-deployed parents and five teachers participated in a focus group. Fourteen teachers completed surveys. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews and focus groups and the survey questions were analyzed through summaries and percentages, depending on the wording. The themes derived from the qualitative analysis of the focus group were communication and information sharing, access to resources, expectations. The survey results supported a decrease in parent involvement during the deployment period, evidence of less frequent notes/email from parents during the deployment, and a lack of attendance at scheduled PTA meetings throughout the deployment period. The results of this study provided substantial information to inform the problem and provided the researcher with valuable data to develop a reasonable solution to solving the problem of limited parental involvement during deployment at Sunshine Elementary.

Keywords: Parental involvement, military-connected, non-deployed parent, reserve component (RC) military deployment
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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my incredible boys. Thank you for patiently allowing me to build a better future for you. Your love, support and encouragement are irreplaceable.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my Dissertation Chair, Dr. McClendon, and my research Methodologist, Dr. Pritchard. Thank you for your time and talents and for guiding me throughout this remarkable journey. I am truly grateful.
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American Association of School Administrators (AASA)

Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA)

Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The military life experience exerts unique demands on all members of the family, which exposes individual members to multiple stressors (Fairbank, et al., 2018). Military-connected children (MCC) often attend civilian operated public schools and can endure challenges that are not experienced by their nonmilitary peers (Baptist, et al., 2015). Most notable of these challenges are deployments or mobilizations, resulting in the absence of a parent (Military Child Education Coalition, 2016). Military service, therefore, is not limited to only the service member, but is instead an experience shared by all members of the family unit (Park, 2011).

Staff members of a small elementary school in southwestern Pennsylvania have brought to attention concerns regarding a decrease of non-deployed parent involvement during their spouse’s deployment period associated with a reserve component of the military. A deployment period is marked by the absence of an active component (AC) or Reserve Component (RC) service member who is mobilized in support of a mission (peace-keeping or combat) that may last anywhere from 90 days to 15 months (GoArmy, 2018). Administrators, teachers, and staff noticed a trend of decreasing parent involvement of the non-deployed parent during the deployment period, which they have observed can have a negative impact on the military-connected child’s school experience. School administration, teachers, and staff suggested that parents are less responsive to communications, attend fewer school events, are less involved in homework, school projects and activities, and are less likely to ask for help or seek resources available through the school during the deployment period. In addition, teachers reported the non-deployed parent is often more difficult to get in touch with via email, phone calls, or via communication tools like ClassDojo during the deployment period than they were prior to the
deployed parent absence. School staff and teachers also noted that military-connected children, especially those experiencing the stresses associated with their parent’s first deployment, were more withdrawn and more emotionally reactive than they were prior to the deployment. Teachers did not feel that there was a drastic academic decrease among military-connected children during the deployment, however they did indicate that their students often required more time on task regardless of subject. The concerns brought forth by administrators, teachers, and staff at this small elementary school in southwestern Pennsylvania provides the basis for this study.

The positive influences of parental involvement have an impact on a student’s emotional and academic well-being (Gordon & Cui, 2012; Jeziorski & Wall, 2017; Ohye, et al., 2016). This chapter will provide a background of information related to reserve component military service when the servicemember is called to active duty for deployment and the implications that deployment has for the military-connected child, non-deployed parent, and school administrators, teachers and staff. The experiences of the military-connected child and family alongside the degree of military knowledge, interaction with the military-connected child and non-deployed parent and level of intervention that school staff have during the deployed period. To inform the problem and seek to increase involvement of the non-deployed parent, this chapter will carefully examine the problem of limited non-deployed parental involvement including supporting information from a historical, social, and theoretical perspective.

**Background**

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of limited parental involvement of the non-deployed parent for military-connected families serving in the United States military reserves who have been called to active duty (Army, Navy, Airforce, Marines, or Coast Guard). This study focuses exclusively on reserve component (RC) service members who are activated
for deployment with dependent children attending a small elementary school in southwestern Pennsylvania. The problem informing this study arose when staff at the elementary school brought to attention concerns regarding a notable decrease of non-deployed parent involvement during the reserve component (RC) spouse’s call to active duty and subsequent deployment period. The research will be examined in the following sections from a historical, social, and theoretical perspective.

**Historical Context**

Historically, men and women of the United States military have been called to service as a result of a declaration of war or other conflict. Members of the United States military, regardless of component (Active, Reserve or National Guard) have experienced significant increases in overseas deployments as a result of the tragedies that befell the United States on September 11, 2001. When called to duty, these service men and women must leave behind their families and often report to areas of imminent danger. With such a small portion of the American population serving in the military, the experiences shared by this small subset of the population is indeed unique. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) as of February 29, 2020 there were 804,235 total service members, including both officers and enlisted, serving in reserve components (RC) of the U.S. military and a total of 1,336,555 serving in the active component (AC) of the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines. The reserve components (RC) of the U.S. military include the Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve, and Coast Guard Reserve (DMDC, 2020). A preponderance of research on the challenges of military life has grown from the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly as it pertains to the military-connected child (DePedro, et al., 2011). Military-connected children face their own set of challenges because they are located far
from military posts or bases, unfamiliar with standard military institutions, and overlooked in their schools and communities (Kudler & Porter, 2013; Schuh, et al., 2016).

Since 2002, over a million children have experienced parental absence due to deployment, and approximately 1.4 million are of school age, largely due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other global military operations (DePedro, et al., 2011). Of that 1.4 million, only roughly 86,000 attended a school operated by the Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) (DePedro, et al., 2016). All other military-connected dependent children attended civilian operated schools, which served an estimated 1.3 million children of reserve component (National Guard or Reserve) military families (Brendel, et al., 2014; Gorman, et al., 2011; Ohye, et al., 2016). Deployments for both reserve component (RC) and active component (AC) are positively associated with greater instances of family dysfunction and have historically led to greater instances of family instability (Lester, 2016).

**Social Context**

Military-connected children represent an overlooked at-risk population in civilian school environments due to multiple stressors from military-connected life events that result in unusual shifts in household roles and responsibilities as a result of temporary parental separation for deployment (Astor & Astor, 2012; Astor, et al., 2013; Brendel, et al., 2014; Lester, et al., 2017). Researchers indicated that military-connected families with children are interdependent relational units that navigate deployment related stressors within the family unit (Astor & Astor, 2012; Astor et al., 2013; Brendel, et al., 2014; Lester, et al., 2017). Military-connected students are at a greater risk for experiencing psychosocial problems than are their nonmilitary connected peers, which includes an increase in stress or behavioral disorders, higher levels of risk-taking behaviors, and more experiences of sadness or depressive symptoms (DePedro, et al., 2018; Thompson, et al., 2017). Although there are several resources that exist to help military-
connected children adjust to military stressors and parental absence, there is a remarkable absence of evidence based in-school supports, which could include programs, resources, teacher’s continuing education coursework (Ohye, et al., 2016). Additionally, evidence suggests that there is a lack of knowledge and training on how school staff can and should support the military family and in particular the military-connected student (Ohye, et al., 2016). Every military-connected reserve component dependent child will have a slightly different experience during the deployment period as a result of differences in the available resources based on those present within the individual community (Baptist, et al., 2015). A number of studies have suggested that children of deployed parents are prone to experiencing more internalizing and externalizing behaviors compared to other non-military connected children (Creech, Hadley, & Borsari, 2014; Lester, et al., 2017). Externalizing behaviors are expressed through aggressive or agitated behaviors whereas internalizing behaviors are expressed through depressive or anxious type behaviors (Creech, Hadley, & Borsari, 2014).

Research conducted by Paley, Lester, and Mogil (2013) described the military-connected child’s reliance on their non-deployed parent as a source of support, comfort, and reassurance. These researchers further indicated that an unresponsive non-deployed parent can increase the child’s stress and anxiety and furthermore influence the child’s ability to self-regulate. Younger children lack the verbal skills to effectively communicate their emotions and older children, though able to understand the impact of the deployment, are often prone to increased stresses and anxieties (Heubner, et al., 2007). A child’s family expectation, their previous experience with deployment, and the child developmental aptitude all impact the experience of the deployment (O’Grady, et al., 2018).
Additionally, the “weekend warrior” families of the reserve components (RC) are unaccustomed to routine/regular military stressors as a result of part-time service experienced one weekend per month and two or three weeks out of the summer, until these members are called to active duty and are deployed (Kudler & Porter, 2013). Children of military reserve component (RC) soldiers are spread out across the country and are enrolled in countless districts across a state or commonwealth. As a result, they often go unnoticed or unidentified as a unique population (Ohye, et al., 2016). Post 9/11 wartime service estimates that nearly 41% of service men or women who were mobilized for deployment were parents (Lester, et al., 2017).

It is undeniable that military deployments have an effect on children and families of the deployed service member (O’Grady, et al., 2018). Research indicated that wartime parental deployment results in an increase of healthcare visits for psychological problems some of the negative emotional reactions include, among other things, fear, confusion, hurt and withdrawal (Lester, et al., 2017).

Parental behavioral health was found to play a significant role in overall family functioning and wellness (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; O’Grady, et al., 2018). When parents manage their stress, have well established coping mechanisms and normal routines, family functioning is improved despite parental absence and changes in family structure (O’Grady, et al., 2018; Lester, 2016). The social implications are quite substantive as gaps in current research reveal under-recognized social needs of the military-connected child (Ohye, 2016).

**Theoretical Context**

The conceptual framework for this research rests upon Epstein’s Spheres of Influence (2011) theory and six types of parental involvement along with the communities of care concept in an effort to illustrate the influence that the school, family and community have on a child’s
education. Increased collaboration between these spheres results in a greater benefit to the child’s overall learning and development (Epstein, et al., 2011).

Military-connected children and families do not exist in a vacuum, but instead interact heavily with numerous systems, both directly and indirectly, within their environments. These interactions include a distinct relationship between home, school, and community (Epstein, 2011). Parents play a critical role in helping their children successfully navigate their environments. The framework of Epstein’s (2010) spheres of influence theory is supported by six different types of parental involvement which include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community (Epstein, 2011). One key environment is school, where parental involvement has proven undeniably important to student success (Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017). Epstein (2011) described a parental partnership involving educators and families, which is critical for a military family, especially during deployments because this is a highly influential period of time impacting the entire family and quite impactful on the military-connected child and non-deployed parent. A demonstrated lack of non-deployed parent involvement and significant decrease in meaningful communication with school administration and teachers can exacerbate the problem (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Adjustment during and immediately following extended parental absence as a result of deployment is especially challenging for children in a military family (Lester & Flake, 2013; Thompson, et al., 2017). Challenges for the military-connected child and the non-deployed parent are not isolated to a single phase of the deployment cycle (O’Grady, et al., 2018). Research of military-connected school-aged children and adolescents suggested an increased likelihood exists for behavioral, emotional and academic difficulties. Military families during
deployment, especially reserve component (RC) families, require additional supports from their respective schools, families, and communities (Astor et al., 2013; Thompson, et al., 2017).

**Problem Statement**

The problem reported by administration, teachers, and staff at a small elementary school in southwestern Pennsylvania is a noticeable decreased in parent involvement of the non-deployed parent during the deployment period of their reserve component (RC) spouse. Military-connected students were reported exhibiting more withdrawn symptoms, more complaints of physical ailments (headaches, stomach aches, etc.), and an increased number of trips to the nurse or school counselor during the deployment period. This reduced level of parental involvement may inadvertently have a negative impact on the elementary aged military-connected child’s emotional well-being (Lester, et al., 2017; Piehler, et al., 2018; Thompson, et al., 2017). As a result, the military-connected children at this elementary school are potentially at an increased risk of experiencing behavioral, emotional, and academic difficulties, especially during times of extended parental/caregiver absence (DePedro, et al., 2011; 2011; Engel, Gallagher & Lyle, 2010; Lester, et al., 2017).

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this applied study is to solve the problem of limited parental involvement for military-connected students of reserve component (RC) military-connected families during periods of deployment at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania and to formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design will be used consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The first approach will be semi-structured interviews with teachers who have had a military-connected student who has experienced an extended absence of the co-parent due to mobilization or deployment within the last six months. The second approach will
be a focus group comprised of teachers and parents to address what factors may positively influence or limit parental involvement. The third and final approach will be quantitative and in the form of a Likert-based survey, which is intended to provide additional information from parents, teachers, and school staff.

Significance of the Study

The number of total deployments, frequency of service members deploying, and length of deployment is currently the highest in U.S. history (Cuniz, et al., 2019). This means that there are a significant number of military-connected children and non-deployed parents who are impacted by military deployments. Improving parental involvement for the non-deployed parent during the deployment period has significant implications. First, intervening in instances of decreased parental involvement has the potential to improve the experience for the military-connected student who is prone to experience an increase of internalizing and externalizing behaviors in response to stress caused by deployment (De Pedro, et al., 2018; Piehler, et al., 2018). Second, the literature on negative impacts of military deployments on the non-deployed parent suggests that military stressors impact parenting skills and result in less family involvement (Cuniz, et al., 2019). Furthermore, the nondeployed parent has been shown to experience greater incidences of depression, anxiety, and stress (Piehler, et al., 2018).

While there may be a preponderance of research on the benefits of parental involvement (Jeynes, 2016a; Jeynes, 2016b) and there are numerous studies on the effect that deployment has on military-connected children (De Pedro, et al., 2018), there is a lack of empirical evidence examining the indirect impact that non-deployed parent functioning has on their ability to remain involved and engage in responsive parenting (Cuniz, et al., 2019).
The purpose of this study is to explore the problems experienced by the non-deployed parent and military-connected family during the deployment period that limit parent involvement for military-connected students. It further seeks to utilize the protective role of the school environment to help mitigate the risks associated with the military life experience during a deployment period.

Research Questions

Central Question: How can parental involvement be improved for deployed military families at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?

Sub-question 1. How would educators in an interview solve the problem of limited parental involvement during deployment at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?

Sub-question 2. How would parents and educators in a focus group solve the problem of limited parental involvement during deployments at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?

Sub-question 3. How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of limited parental involvement during deployments at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?

Definitions

1. Parental involvement – A unique and dynamic relationship between home and school that fosters learning and promotes academic success (Jezierski & Wall, 2016).

2. Military-connected child – A dependent child or a military service member (Ohye, et al., 2016).

3. Type 1 (Parenting) - involves parents’ responsibility to create environments at home that support their children as students (Epstein, 2010).
4. *Type 2 (Communication)* emphasizes the criticality of effective communication between the home and school regarding programs and updates on student progress (Epstein, 2010).

5. *Type 3 (Volunteering)* not only solicits parental involvement, but it works to organize parents and establish support partners (Epstein, 2010).

6. *Type 4 (Learning at Home)* aims to provide information on grade level skills for all subjects as well as strategies for helping parents engage their learners at home and have meaningful discussions regarding school related tasks (Epstein, 2010).

7. *Type 5 (Decision Making)* encourages schools to proactively develop parent leaders and representatives and give them voice in making school decisions (Epstein, 2010).

8. *Type 6 (Collaborating with Community)* seeks to strengthen school programs through collaboration with community resources by identifying and integrating essential services (Epstein, 2010).

**Summary**

Parent involvement in learning exerts significant influence on school success. Parental behavioral health was also found to play a significant role in overall family functioning and wellness. When parents manage their stress, have well established coping mechanisms and normal routines, family functioning is improved despite parental absence and changes in family structure (Lester, 2016). There are many factors that influence resilience. Children who experience warm responsive parenting and positive support from the school environment are more protected from the stress evoking experiences of military life and extended parental absence than those denied such attention, care and concern. A strong sense of community in the classroom, coupled with warmth, civility and safety can provide the necessary protective
contextual and environmental support necessary to help military-connected students overcome the challenges associated with parental absence. Teacher support is an important part of creating a safe and protective environment for the military-connected student. Finally, parental involvement during times of mobilization or deployment is important for not only the military-connected student, but for the parent as well. Resilience plays a crucial role in the overall health and well-being of the entire military-connected family who regularly deals with military-related stressors like deployments and mobilizations.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Parental involvement in learning exerts significant influence on school success (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011). Parental involvement has also been shown to have an overall positive effect on the academic and socioemotional wellness of the child (Boonk, et al., 2018). According to Boonk, et al. (2018), parents who are actively involved in their children’s education are thought to actively promote emotional, social, and academic wellness and growth. The positive influence of parental involvement is critical for all children, but especially important for military-connected students and families who are experiencing military stressors due to extended parental/caregiver absence because of a deployment or a mobilization. Deployment can be thought of as a family stressor due to prolonged absence. Statistics indicated that every school district throughout the entire United States serves military-connected youth albeit in varying numbers, with nearly 80% of active duty military-connected children educated in military-connected public school districts surrounding the largest military posts and joint bases (Berkowitz, et al., 2014; DoDEA, 2018; Esqueda, Astor & DePedro, 2016; Garner, Arnold, & Nunnery, 2014). Additionally, according to the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) there are well over 443 thousand more reserve component (RC) K-12 students attending public schools throughout the United States (DoDEA, 2018). National Guard families experience unique challenges that are different from their civilian peers as well as children and families of active duty personnel (Baptist, et al., 2015).

The nation has been at war over the last decade and unfortunately, not all civilian schools have been able to successfully meet the needs of military children (Esquesa et al., 2014). Research is limited, to a degree, in examining the supportive context of the school environment
and further identifying why military-connected students continue to have unidentified and
ultimately unmet needs within the public school setting (Berkowitz et al., 2014; Castro et al.,
2015; De Pedro, et al., 2018; Garner et al., 2014). Civilian operated public schools can, however,
serve as part of a necessary support structure for military-connected students and help children
manage deployment-related stressors and cope with the challenges associated with parental
absence (Esqueda, Astor & DePedro, 2012). The purpose of this study is to explore the problems
associated with deployment that limit parent involvement for military-connected students and
seek to utilize the protective role of the school environment to help mitigate the risks associated
with the challenges associated with the military life experience.

This chapter will provide an explanation of the theoretical framework guiding this study
through an examination of Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence and types of parent
involvement, along with the influence of the community of care concept. These guiding
principles will draw upon the interconnectedness between the school, family and community.
Additional explanation of related literature pertaining to the military-connected child will include
a description of military service with a deliberate emphasis on the deployment cycle as it pertains
to the psychological and emotional impact deployment has on the military-connected child and
non-deployed parent. This chapter will also define and describe the positive influence of parental
involvement and further detail the positive and promotional influence of support in the school
environment.

Theoretical Framework

Described by Epstein (1995), the overlapping spheres of influence framework focuses on
the way in which a school cares for students is reflected through the ways in which the schools
care, and an authentic way, about the student’s family. There is a level of interconnectedness
between the school, family, and community with the student at the center, which represents the external model of overlapping spheres of influence theory and provides one part of the overarching theoretical framework for this research. The school, family and community represent the three major spheres in which students develop. These varying levels of influence are nested within one another and play a critical role in the experiences of military-connected family with the school environment (Farrell & Collier, 2010). Active partnerships between schools and families may work to engage, energize and motivate students to actively advocate for their own academic successes (Epstein, 1995). Developing school, family and community partnerships, according to Epstein (2011), are necessary in order to improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills and establish meaningful connections among families within the larger community. This is of critical importance as it pertains to this study because the lack of parental involvement during the deployment period suggests a disrupted partnership between school and family for the military-connected child and family.

**Overlapping Spheres of Influence**

At the core of overlapping spheres of influences theory is the desire to create a partnership between levels where teachers and administrators create a more family-like school and simultaneously parents are actively working to create a more school-like family (Epstein, 2010, p. 83). A family-like school, as Epstein (2010) described, is one in which individuality is celebrated and accepted and all families are made to feel important. In tandem, a collaborative relationship exists when the parents work to create a school-like family that acknowledges the importance of the child as a student. Emphasis is placed on the importance of doing well in
school, completing homework and engaging in activities that build students skills and confidence, but most importantly resilience.

Parent’s expectations are a hallmark of parental involvement promoting academic achievement. Parental involvement is most often linked to higher student achievement was linked to general supervision over their child’s learning (Castro, et al., 2015). Communities are also critical within the sphere of influence and serve to support families by providing opportunities that help parents support and encourage their children. The overlapping spheres of influence are especially critical for military-connected families during extended periods of parental absence because they can positively influence the across dimensions of family (home), school and community (Astor, et al., 2013).

Epstein’s (2010) family-like school concept aligns well with the Kudler and Porter (2013) argument calling on the development of communities of care for military children and families. In a call to action, they described the importance of taking the initiative to determine which children or families are service connected. Furthermore, they recommended that schools, communities, and families take a proactive approach to creating supportive environments that meet the needs of military-connected children.

**Communities of Care**

A community of care is a public health concept that evolves around the military child and family specific to region or time (Kudler & Porter, 2013). A community of care integrates the theoretical underpinnings presented as a basis for this study and supports the conceptual framework. A well-developed community of care works across individuals, families, and communities to promote wellness. Building a supportive environment is one small part in developing a community of care for military children and families (Kudler & Porter, 2013).
Military children and their families are dynamic participants in their environments, so for a community of care to be established it is imperative to consider all of the interactions that extend across multiple systems and also those that include families and communities across time (Epstein, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Kudler & Porter, 2013). It is also important to reflect on the fact that a community of care evolves around the military child and family specific to region or time and is not a one-size-fits-all model (Kudler & Porter, 2013). This is of critical importance when examining the situation occurring at the elementary school in this study.

**Types of Parent Involvement**

The framework of Epstein’s (2010) six different types of parent involvement include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Each type of parent involvement describes the ways in which responsible parenting practices can produce meaningful outcomes. Collectively, each type of involvement forms the theory and illustrates the dynamic interconnectedness of the school, home and community environments in which children grow, learn and thrive. Each sphere is described below both in definition and as it pertains to the unique needs of the military-connected student.

Type 1 (parenting) involves parents’ responsibility to create environments at home that support their children as students. In practice, this involves parent education regarding grade level requirements as well as other more general support programs regarding health, nutrition, and other services (Epstein, 2010). During times of deployment, this environment may be strained more than usual as a result of changes with the family dynamic due to temporary parent absence (Rodriguez & Margolin, 2015). Military deployment is an undeniable stressor responsible for disrupting parenting and negatively impacting child adjustment, often as a result of higher reported incidences of depression, anxiety and acute stress reactions in the non-
deployed parent (Piehler, et al., 2018). Research indicates that a highly stressed non-deployed caregiver is not only more likely to have difficulties maintaining family functioning but also unable to adequately provide emotional support to their children (Sigelman, et al., 2018).

Type 2 (communication) emphasizes the criticality of effective communication between the home and school regarding programs and updates on student progress. Parent-teacher communication is critical and should occur no less than one time a year as part of an in-person conference but can include as many follow-ups as needed throughout the school year. Notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters and emails are all examples of communication tools (Epstein, 2010). Communication is especially critical during deployment between both school and home and teacher and parent (Baptist, et al., 2015; Kudler & Porter, 2013). The stress of the non-deployed parent leads to less open and supportive communication among families (Sigelman, et al., 2018).

Type 3 (volunteering) not only solicits parental involvement, but it works to organize parents and establish support partners. Volunteer programs are beneficial to teachers, administrators, students and other parents and make good use of available talents from within the pool of parents (Epstein, 2010). Parental involvement of this time may be difficult for the non-deployed parent to navigate, especially during the initial phases of the deployment where much time is spent adjusting to the new normal as roles and responsibilities are renegotiated, which occurs during the Emotional Disorganization phase of The New Emotional Cycle of Deployment, (Morse, 2006).

Type 4 (learning at home) helps families be actively engaged in their student’s learning by providing information and ideas on how families can be involved in their child’s learning. Similar to Type 1 (parenting), Type 4 (learning at home) aims to provide information on grade
level skills for all subjects as well as strategies for helping parents engage their learners at home and have meaningful discussions regarding school related tasks (Epstein, 2010).

Type 5 (decision making) encourages schools to proactively develop parent leaders and representatives and give them voice in making school decisions. This includes prompting parent organizations like a PTO/PTA and can include special advocacy groups specifically for military families (Epstein, 2010). Military-connected parent groups and other peer support programs are a fundamental need for the military-connected family and can effectively serve to reduce the stress burden (Esqueda, et al., 2012).

Finally, Type 6 (collaborating with community) seeks to strengthen school programs through collaboration with community resources by identifying and integrating essential services. This can include community health information, recreational activities and cultural support. Collaboration with community resources is especially important for Guard and Reserve families since they do not have access to co-located resources available to active duty service members (Brendel, et al., 2014). Collaboration within the community is a hallmark of building a community of care and provides an essential framework through which to support the military-connected family. Through successful collaboration, a community of care can effectively promote wellness across individuals (military-connected child), families (military-connected family), and communities (military-connected experience in the larger civilian community) (Kudler & Porter, 2013).

**Related Literature**

The life of the military family is complex and demanding (Ruff & Keim, 2014); therefore, there is an undeniable need to provide appropriate attention to the thoughtful implementation of in-school supports for military-connected students and families, especially
during times of parental absence due to deployment (Astor, et al., 2013). Military-connected children may have a parent serving full-time in an active component (AC) of the armed forces or part-time in a reserve component (RC) of the armed forces, both of which are equally called upon for military deployments (Naifeh, et. al., 2019; Ursano, et al., 2018) While service men and women of the active component often live on or very near to a military post or base, reserve component (RC) service members typically live much farther away from military specific resources available on a post or base and are often unevenly dispersed throughout each state or commonwealth (Naifeh, et. al., 2019). This means that neither the service member nor their families benefit from access to support resources in the same way that military-connected children and families of active duty service members located on or near a major military post would (Baptist, et al., 2015; Gordon, et al., 2011). Youth of reserve component (RC) families may be especially vulnerable because they lack access to Family Resource Centers located on military posts or bases (Thompson, et al., 2017). In addition, military-connected children may attend a public school with few if any other military-connected children (Baptist, et al., 2015). As a result, decentralized concentrations of military-connected children are educated in civilian operated public schools (as opposed to DoDEA operated schools) which are routinely ill-equipped to respond to the challenges that military families experience preceding, during, and following the deployment period (Astor, et al., 2013; Baptist, et al., 2015).

The elementary school at the base of this study presently has no known military-connected students whose parents serve in an active component of the military. The elementary school is geographically distant from any active military posts or bases, with the nearest military post approximately 300 miles away. The school does, however, have a substantial number of military-connected students whose parents serve in a reserve component (RC) (Reserves or
National Guard) who have been activated, mobilized, or called to active duty military service for deployment. Administrators, teachers and staff were not aware of the number of military-connected students within the school prior to the deployment because there are no tracking mechanisms in place to identify students with a parent serving in the military. In a 2018-2019 school year professional development presentation, in response to a higher than usual number of students with a reserve component (RC) parent mobilized for deployment, administrators, teachers, and staff were introduced to the Staying Strong with Schools programming (Ohye, 2016). The course material included a pre- and post-survey, provided important information regarding the challenges faced by military-connected children and families during the deployment period, and elaborated on the importance of utilizing the school environment as a protective mechanism for military-connected students. This prompted the administrators, teachers and staff to reflect upon their general lack of knowledge regarding military-connectedness as well as their lack of preparedness and ability to effectively respond to the needs of their reserve component (RC) military-connected students especially during periods when the reserve component (RC) service member was deployed.

During the deployment periods, teachers at this elementary school noticed more withdrawn symptoms, more complaints of physical ailments (headaches, stomach aches, etc), an increased number of trips to the nurse or guidance counselor and a remarkable decrease in parent involvement. According to the American Association of School Administrators (2016), military stress-related issues are often noticed by teachers in the classroom when military-connected children experience bouts of anxiousness, excessive worry or frequent crying (AASA, 2016). Due to the uncommon stressors placed on the military family as a result of deployment, military-connected children are also reportedly more prone to experiencing sadness or hopelessness
(Cederbaum, et al. 2014). This is especially true and of significantly greater concern for military-connected children who are naturally more temperamentally shy and anxious (Ohye, 2016). According to DePedro, et al., (2018), military-connected children have higher incidences of negative mental health outcomes as a result of military life events.

A fact sheet published by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 2016) revealed that military-connected children are prone to experiencing bouts of anxiousness, worrying, and crying. Repeated exposure to extended separations and deployment can compound the stressors present in military-connected children’s lives (Gilreath, et al., 2013). A positive school environment, however, has been shown to have an overall positive academic, social-emotional and behavioral impact (DePedro, et al., 2018). School environments, if structured in an appropriate way, can promote healthy development of military-connected children by reducing the student’s feelings of alienation, lack of a sense of belonging, potential for risky decision making and help them cope with depression and anxiety. (Chandra, et al., 2009; Esqueda, Astor & DePedro, 2012; Park, 2011).

Temporary parental absence during deployment results in the reorganization of family relationships which can serve as an additional source of risk for military-connected children and subsequently impede the functioning of the family unit (Rodriguez & Margolin, 2015). Even though the parental absence caused by the deployment is temporary, it is a potentially recurrent concern throughout the length of the service member’s military career. As a result, this generates an unavoidable and continuous stressor present within the family unit. Although different in many ways, administrators, teachers, and staff are familiar with sudden absence because it is remarkably similar to the experiences of other single-parent homes resulting from incarceration or divorce (Rodriguez & Margolin, 2015).
Education aims to encourage success for all students regardless of the conditions that they experience or the circumstances in their lives (No Child Left Behind). Therefore, it is important for educators to understand the dynamics of military service and the impact that military service and deployment has on military-connected students (Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010). Increasing knowledge and awareness while simultaneously improving communication gaps between teachers, parents, and students of deployed service members can exponentially improve a student’s chances for success (De Pedro, et al., 2016; Flake, et al., 2009; Lester, et al., 2010). In 2012, the United States Secretary of Education, Arnie Duncan called for all military-connected children to have fair and equal opportunity for academic success and all individuals within the education system to better understand the unique situation that children of service members experience (Ohye, Rauch, & Bostic, 2016).

Deliberate efforts to encourage parental involvement of the non-deployed parent can improve the experiences of military-connected children and their families when their reserve component (RC) parent is mobilized for a deployment (Thompson, et al., 2017). Increasing involvement of the non-deployed parent can have an overall impact on student motivation, academic success (Jeynes, 2016a; Jeynes, 2016b), and the social, emotional and psychological wellbeing of the military-connected child (Chandra, et al., 2009; Cozza & Lerner, 2013; De Pedro, et al., 2011; Lester, et al., 2010; Thompson, et al., 2017). Increased participation and involvement in school related activities can help military-connected youth achieve a sense of balance and maintain a sense of normalcy during their parent’s deployment (Thompson, et al., 2017). Encouraging parental involvement during the deployment period may encourage wellness in the non-deployed parent as well, thus mitigating some of the known risks associated with the deployment cycle, especially for the non-deployed parent. Furthermore, a recent study of reserve
component (RC) families indicated that children often model behaviors based on their perceptions of their non-deployed parents’ abilities to manage and navigate through the changes brought about as a result of the deployment (Thompson, et al., 2017; Lester, et al., 2010). Members may benefit from risk mitigation, thus improving the experience for all members of the military family. Administrators, teachers and staff must be familiar with the challenges and stressors associated with military life and be willing to serve as a resource for both the student and the parent (Ohye, et al., 2016).

Military Service

The United States military is comprised of five distinct branches. Each service or branch is responsible for completing the missions required of that branch. The distinctive identity of each branch of service is expressed through unique sets of training requirements, specific equipment, duty locations and cultural identity (USA.gov). The mission of the United States Army, for example, is to “deploy, fight, and win our nation’s wars by providing ready, prompt, and sustained land dominance” (Department of Defense, United States Army).

United States Military

Branches of the United States military include Army, Navy, Airforce, Marines, and Coast Guard. Military service members can serve full-time (active duty) or part-time (Reserves or National Guard) in an all-volunteer force. The all-volunteer force was instated on July 1, 1973, and the draft was abolished in the post-Vietnam war era (Corbett, 2011). Each branch of the United States military has its own unique culture, traditions, histories and service roles that influence the training and deployment experienced by the service member and the military family (Lester & Flake, 2013). The experiences of the military service member can vary based on branch of service, whether the member serves in an active component (AC) or a reserve...
component (RC), individual rank or grade, total length of service and the number of deployments. These factors and the factors impacting the individual members of each military family all contribute to a wide range of experiences shared by only a few others.

Operation Enduring Freedom began in October of 2001, and service men and women from every branch were deployed to an increasing number of regions around the world. In the days following September 11, 2001, a Reserve Call-Up was authorized by President George W. Bush and within less than six months there were more than 80,000 reserve component (RC) service members (of the Reserves and National Guard) called to active duty (Pavlicin, 2003). The attack on American soil that occurred on September 11, 2001 sent the United States military into a wartime period (Global War on Terrorism) of service that ultimately changed the dynamics of both duty and deployment (Lester, et al., 2016). American servicemen and women work diligently to sustain freedom and promote peace through selfless service and self-sacrifice.

Part-time Military Membership

The National Guard is a reserve component (RC) of the United States military, which includes both Army and Airforce, with service to both state and country. The National Guard began as colonial militias in Massachusetts with unbroken histories dating back as early as 1636 (Corbett, 2011). The National Guard’s Citizen Soldiers can be activated by order of the governor or president at any time to perform domestic operations, respond to domestic emergencies (floods, hurricanes, blizzards, pandemics, etc.), perform counter drug missions, or serve overseas as part of a combat or peace keeping mission. National Guardsmen and women serve as part-time military personnel with typical duty occurring one weekend each month and roughly 15-21 days of additional annual training each fiscal year (The Department of Defense fiscal year runs from 1 October thru 30 September). The nature of part-time service can pose
challenging for some members, especially those who are suddenly activated by order of the governor, mobilized for a stateside mission or those called to active duty for an overseas deployment (Baptist, et al., 2015).

The Army Reserve became an official organization complimentary to the regular active component (AC) and is divided into the Ready Reserve, Standby Reserve, and Retired Reserve (Corbett, 2011). While the National Guard is considered a reserve force of the United States of America, the Reserves can be considered a reserve force of the United States Army. Reserve component (RC) forces are present in other branches as well and include the Navy Reserve, Airforce Reserve and Air National Guard, Marine Corps Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve. If asked, most reserve component (RC) service members would argue that part-time military service really is not a thing. The operational tempo of today’s military is far more demanding than in years past and this includes more deployments, longer military schools, longer field training exercises and ultimately more time away from home (Pavlicin, 2003).

Military Family

The military-family, according to Department of Defense policy, includes the spouse and all authorized dependent children of a service member (Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System). An authorized dependent child may be biological, adopted, fostered or stepchild. In the United States, there are roughly four million military-connected children with a parent serving on active duty or in the Reserves or National Guard (DePedro, et al., 2016).

Routine military life is characterized by frequent change, inconsistent stability and long periods of separation, sometimes with little to no advanced warning making the military/family balance an often difficult and ongoing challenge. When one member of the family serves, the entire family shares membership in the military organization (Rowe, et al., 2014). It has been said jokingly that if a service member was “meant to have a family, then it would have been
issued to you”, likening family to an initial issue of military gear. While this may seem harsh, it is an unspoken reality for many of today’s service men and women when faced with routine stresses or the military life experience or subsequent overseas missions or deployment (DePedro, et al., 2016).

Membership in the military community is limited to a comparatively small subset of the country’s total population. Military families carry with them a sense of pride and obligation and appreciate their community’s understanding of their decision to serve (Ohye, Rauch & Bostic, 2016). The service men and women of today are career soldiers with families. Despite challenges, however, military family life provides each member with a unique and meaningful identity associated with long history of strength, selfless service, and sacrifice (Lester & Flake, 2013). Capitalizing on this sense of membership pride could provide an effective avenue of approach for teachers, school staff and administrators who interact with the military family during the deployment period.

**The Deployment Cycle**

The attacks on September 11, 2001, led the United States into the longest ongoing war in history. As a result, an unprecedented number of reserve component (RC) service members were called to service in support of the war effort (Atuel, Esqueda, & Jacobsen, 2011). Deployment of reserve component (RC) service changes their status from that of a part-time service member to an active duty Title 10 status, which ultimately means that they are considered part of the active component (AC) (Corbett, 2011). The challenges of war time service are well known and well documented and the last two decades have only added to our understanding of the impact that war time activation of reserve component (RC) service members has on the military-connected child and family.
Researchers have expanded their knowledge and understanding of the impact of deployment on the military-connected child and non-deployed parent in recent years having built upon a few of the lessons learned during the Gulf War conflicts (DePedro, et al., 2016; Lester & Flake, 2013; Ohye et al., 2016; Piehler, et al., 2018; Zimmerman, & Buhler, 2019). Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, however, were considerably shorter than the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan marked the longest war in United States history and while separation from a parent is challenging at any age, coupled with the heightened dangers associated with wartime service, military-connected families face added challenges unknown to non-service connected families (Chandra et al., 2009; Chandra, et al., 2010; Cozza, 2015; Cuniz, et al., 2016; Lester & Flake, 2013; Ohye et al., 2016; Piehler, et al., 2018; Zimmerman, & Buhler, 2019).

According to Lester and Flake (2013), the deployment cycle is characterized by five distinct phases including: predeployment, deployment, sustainment (during deployment), redeployment, and postdeployment. Each phase is categorized by a unique set of challenges and experiences. The predeployment phase is often associated with emotional withdrawal due to the anticipation of absence which is then followed by the actual deployment (Lester & Flake, 2013).

The length of absence and location are often determined based on the branch of service and mission. The deployment phase involves a renegotiation of household roles for the family at home as they cope with the absence of the deployed caregiver (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Hollingsworth, Dolbin-MacNab & Marek, 2016). Later, when service members return home, the post deployment phase begins with reintegration. For a time, families feel excitement and relief during the honeymoon period, which is then followed by the challenges of reintegration. The challenges associated with a deployment do not magically disappear upon the return of the
absent parent. The post deployment phase is one of the most challenging experiences for all family members as they try to settle into a new normal all the while renegotiating roles and responsibilities (Lester, et al, 2016). The experiences of deployment are not unique to active or reserve but reflect a shared experience by all servicemembers who are called to active duty for a deployment.

Military deployments have significant implications for all members of the family and because the deployment cycle is filled with numerous challenges occurring at varying points it is imperative to consider the entire deployment cycle (O’Grady, et al., 2018). The reorganization of the family unit causes strain while the rebalance occurs and is made all the more difficult if the parent returns with a deployment related illness or injury (Gewirtz et al., 2017; Lester & Flake, 2013). Approximately two million military-connected children have experienced extended parental absence, often on more than one occasion, due to deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan in recent years (Gorman, et al., 2011). Each phase of deployment has unique stressors that impact each military-connected family in different ways. Factors influencing and affecting the amount of parent involvement at home and at school are influenced throughout the entire deployment cycle so for the purposes of this study it is important to examine the entire deployment period (O’Grady, et al., 2018).

**Psychological, Emotional and Behavioral Effects of Deployments**

In 2006, The New Emotional Cycle of Deployment, developed by retired Navy Captain Jennifer Morse, M.D., was published by the Department of Defense: Deployment Health and Family Readiness. This new model contains 7-stages and replaces the previous 5-stage model. The emotional stages of deployment include:
Stage 1: Anticipation of Departure

This initial phase includes feelings of denial that the spouse/parent will be separated from the family. Emotions are often high as responsibilities are accounted for and roles are renegotiated and redistributed. Families are also determined to schedule or make time for memorable family moments in anticipation of the separation. Identifying military-connected children early in the deployment experience may enable teachers, staff and administrators to create a meaningful school-family connection in an effort to influence the degree of parent involvement throughout (Epstein, 2010).

Stage 2: Detachment and Withdrawal

Detachment and withdrawal occur as the service member readiness himself/herself for the deployment and begins to shift priority of focus to the military unit and impending mission. Tensions are critically high during this stage as the service members distances themselves emotionally from the family in preparation and even though physically present are psychologically distant or unavailable (Wiens & Boss, 2006). This often causes confusion for the spouse and family and is often a result of a preference for numb instead of sad according to Morse (2006). This period may begin the noticeable change in parent involvement and expressed internalizing/externalizing behaviors of military-connected children as a result of the emotional disorganization present in the home environment. The capacity of the school environment to acknowledge and subsequently intervene may mitigate some of the stressors associated with this particular period of deployment related stress.

Stage 3: Emotional Disorganization

Emotional disorganization involves feelings of loneliness and adjustment to new responsibilities as a result of the deployment and parent/spouse absence. At this point, the non-deployed military spouse and family are getting their first true taste of what their new normal
will look like over the length of the deployment. The degree of emotional disorganization and mental health status of the non-deployed parent all contribute to their ability to engage in meaningful and responsive parenting and furthermore indicates their ability to remain involved in the military-connected child’s school experience (O’Grady, et al., 2018).

**Stage 4: Recovery and Stabilization**

During this stage, the military spouse and family acknowledge their resilience and strength and reach a period of increased confidence and positive outlook. The family unit finally begins to settle into a new normal of family functioning and roles and responsibilities become clearer. There is once again comfort in routine, albeit altogether different those established prior to the deployment. This stage occurs when a semblance of balance is evidenced among logistical, relational, and emotional issues (Pavlicin, 2003).

**Stage 5: Anticipation of Return**

As the deployment period draws nearer to the end, the military family is buzzing with excitement and eagerness for the return of the deployed spouse/parent. It is critical during this stage to maintain realistic expectations of the return and reunion.

**Stage 6: Return Adjustment and Renegotiation**

Although the family has reached a balance, roles and responsibilities will once again need to be upon the return of the absent parent. Communication is critical during this stage. This is especially true when the service member has experienced a physical or physiological injury.

**Stage 7: Reintegration and Stabilization**

The final stage in this new emotional cycle of deployment is reintegration and stabilization. This stage can take as many as 6 months to occur. The returned family member must be reintegrated into their role and the non-deployed parent and child(ren) can relinquish
some of the additional responsibilities that they have been dealing with throughout the deployment period.

When one member of a family serves in the armed forces, everyone in the family shares the burden and responsibility. Military life and deployment related stressors can contribute to poor mental health outcomes for military families (Baptist, et al., 2015; DePedro, et al., 2016). Prolonged separation, anxiety of the non-deployed parent/caregiver, household financial stresses and exposure to war related trauma all contribute to poor functioning (DePedro, et al., 2016). A child’s functioning and ability to cope are affected by a parent’s deployment (Huebner, et al., 2007; Lester, et al., 2016). Military-connected children experience significant disruptions in family functioning as a result of deployment that can place them at an increased risk of victimization (Engle, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010; Gilreath et al., 2016).

A child whose parent deploys as a member of the National Guard or Reserve is most often the only child in the class who has a parent serving (Baptist, et al., 2015). The isolation of being the only student can add to the stress of the deployment experience. The military does provide a number of services and outreach options to help families cope with the stresses of deployment, but unfortunately access varies and is inconsistent across all service member families (O’Grady, et al., 2018).

Children of all ages experience disruption, but in a study of medical records of children ages three to eight who were separated from their parent due to deployment had an 11% increase in mental and behavioral health visits to their pediatrician (Gorman, et al., 2010). In a study involving students attending Department of Defense Educational Activity (DoDEA) schools, students six to twelve years of age were found to have the greatest overall patterns of maladjustment to parental absence (Engel, et al., 2010). Emotional and behavioral difficulties
may be quite problematic during the deployment period with non-deployed parents and school staff reporting a noticeable increase in behavioral problems (Chandra, et al., 2010; Esqueda et al., 2014). Military-connected students’ academic performance is also negatively impacted when compared to their non-military peers (DePedro, et al., 2011). This is of particular importance and concern as it suggests the overwhelming impact it has on elementary aged students.

**Non-deployed Parent**

Parental behavioral health was also found to play a significant role in overall family functioning and wellness. The non-deployed parent’s overall mental health during the deployment period has been shown to significantly impact the military-connected child’s overall emotional well-being (Thompson, et al., 2017). When parents manage their stress, have well established coping mechanisms and normal routines, family functioning is improved despite parental absence and changes in family structure (Ohye, et al., 2016). The non-deployed, left-behind, or non-deployed parent/caregiver experiences added stresses, anxieties and challenges as they solely assume the responsibility of caring for the household demands during the deployment period (Chandra, et al., 2010; Chandra, et al., 2009). Non-deployed parents experience increased distress and worry resulting in difficulties coping with their own emotional imbalance as they place their life on hold during the deployment period (O’Grady, et al., 2018).

Research conducted by Cozza and Lerner (2005), in the midst of the war in Iraq/Afghanistan, pointed out a disturbing transference of non-deployed parent stress to the child. The functioning of the non-deployed parent was shown to directly correspond to the overall functioning of the child at home and at school. The connection between the non-deployed parent’s overall responsiveness and children’s behaviors was examined in a study conducted by O’Grady, Whiteman, Cardin and Wadsworth (2018). Their investigation of the interdependence
between the non-deployed parent mental health issues and child internalizing/externalizing behaviors was consistent with previous findings and suggests that professionals working with military families must integrate meaningful approaches to targeting children’s problematic behaviors as well as influencing parenting behaviors. Deployment produces a temporary single-parent home situation which dramatically alters the family structure and non-deployed parent-child relationship (Rodriguez & Margolin, 2015). Research indicates that a highly stressed non-deployed caregiver is not only more likely to have difficulties maintaining family functioning but also unable to adequately provide emotional support to their children (Sigelman, et al., 2018).

In a study addressing non-deployed parent mental health and parenting practices researchers also discovered that not only does parental responsiveness decrease during the deployment, but reduced parental responsiveness continues through the reunion period (O’Grady, et al., 2018). This study also illuminated the fact that the return of the deployed service member may reduce depressive symptoms of the non-deployed parent but does not produce a noticeable improvement in reported parental responsiveness, suggesting the need for evidence based programs specifically targeted to military families (Piehler, et al., 2018).

Research reveals that reserve component (RC) caregivers reported higher numbers of household challenges, poorer emotional well-being and higher rates of relationship issues (Chandra et al., 2010). The stress of the non-deployed parent leads to less open and supportive communication among families (Sigelman, et al., 2018). Numerous studies have identified and supported the assertion that military-connected children are more negatively impacted by deployment related stressors when the non-deployed parent is overstressed and functioning poorly (Chandra et al., 2010, DeVoe; et al., 2018; Gewirtz, et al., 2017). In research conducted by Sigelman, Friedman, Rohrbeck, and Sheehan (2018) findings related to caregiver stress was
shown support this. Evidence of poor non-deployed parent functioning and the impact it has on the military-connected child has important implications for this study as it suggests that improvements in parental functioning may improve overall family functioning and subsequently result in increases in parental involvement.

Informed by the theoretical framework of Epstein (1995; 2009), support for the military family may be improved by providing more substantial opportunities for parental involvement, especially during times of extended absence. Children who experience warm responsive parenting and positive support from the school environment are more protected from the stress evoking experiences of military life and extended parental absence than those denied such attention, care and concern (Ohye, 2016).

**Parent Training**

There are a significant number of military-related stressors impacting healthy family functioning, however parenting interventions have been shown to mitigate known risks associated with deployment by fostering positive peer adjustment in children (Piehler, et al., 2018). Preventive interventions with at-risk populations, like military-connected children and families, offer a valuable and unique opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of mechanisms that may ultimately promote functioning and overall well-being. An example of such a program was developed by Piehler, Ausherbauer, Gewirtz and Gliske (2018) to improve child peer adjustments in military families through impactful parent training on the mediational role of the parental locus of control children. While many evidence-based programs have been employed, few have specifically targeted the military family (Gewirtz, et al., 2011). In their research, Piehler, et al., (2018), sought to identify the benefit of ADAPT (After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools) and determine the role of the LOC (Parental Locus of Control) as is specifically pertains to National Guard/Reserve military families. The ADAPT program was designed to
encourage parental involvement, improve skills, and further develop problem-solving and appropriate discipline for military families (Forgatch & Gewirtz, 2017). The ADAPT program is the first military parenting program of its type to be exposed to rigorous evaluation in a randomized controlled trial and outcomes suggest that the risks associated with parental deployment may be mediated through interventions such as this (Piehler, et al., 2018).

**Promotional Role of the School Environment**

Military students represent an underserved at-risk population in civilian school environments due to multiple stressors from military connected life events, parental separation, and unusual shifts in household roles and responsibilities (Astor et al., 2013; Brendel, et al., 2014; (De Pedro, et al., 2016). Primary support for the identification of this research gap acknowledges that most research on military dependent children was conducted in clinical settings and failed to provide any substantive attention to the potential supportive role of the school setting (Astor et al., 2013). Evidence suggests that school environments, if structured in an appropriate way, can promote the development of military connected students by reducing the military student’s feelings of alienation, lack of a sense of belonging, help coping with depression and anxiety, as well as reduce the potential for risky decision making (Esqueda, Astor & DePedro, 2012). Civilian operated public schools can serve as part of a necessary support structure for military-connected students and help children manage deployment-related stressors and cope with the challenges associated with parental absence (Esqueda, Astor & DePedro, 2012).

In-school resources can be utilized to encourage success and maintain motivation for students experiencing parental absence and other military related stressors (Esqueda et al., 2012). To improve the lives of Soldiers and their families, tools that facilitate communication between
parents, teachers, students and military service member and provide teachers, school staff, and admin with psychoeducational resources and general information on deployment/parental absence for reserve component (RC) military service are important and essential; assistive strategies to mitigate risk factors due to parental absence and bolster resilience through positive approaches and healthy coping/communication strategies are necessary to maintain student motivation and performance throughout the period of parental absence (Astor, et al., 2013; DePedro, et al., 2011). There is not a one size fits all model, but a well-informed basis of approach can provide effective tools so that educators can effectively respond to the challenges experienced by the military-connected child and family.

**School Environment**

Research has shown that caring and supportive school climates yield positive academic, social, emotional and psychological results for students in kindergarten through 12th grade (Astor, 2013, p. 236; Zullig, et al., 2010). In addition to positive results, supportive school climates have also been shown to reduce negative outcomes (Zullig, et al., 2010. A positive school climate for the military-connected child, according to Astor, et al., (2013) can be surmised as “one where students experience caring relationships with peers and adults, participate meaningfully in school activities, report strong sense of belonging and feelings of personal safety, and have limited exposure to risky behavior” (p. 236).

More importantly, however, is the deliberate acknowledgement of the fact that a positive school climate is one in which school staff understand the unique issues and experiences surrounding family-life. This is especially critical for military-connected students because of the challenges associated with military life (Astor, et al., 2013; Brendel, et al., 2014; Zullig, et al., 2010). Dimensions of school climate include caring relationships, which have been shown to
promote social and behavioral adjustment (Zullig, et al., 2010). De Pedro, et al., (2016) provides substantive argument for the benefits of promoting school climate for the wellbeing of both military and nonmilitary students. The school environment is particularly pertinent in this study as it provides the location through which meaningful connections are established and maintained in order to effectively promote the successful development of the military-connected student.

Developing school, family and community partnerships, according to Epstein (2011) are necessary in order to improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills and establish meaningful connections among families within the larger community.

**In School Resources**

There are many factors that influence resilience, such as the temperament and intellect, as well as parent’s ability to set clear expectations, community support and safety. Children who experience warm responsive parenting and positive support from the school environment are more protected from the stress evoking experiences of military life and extended parental absence than those denied such attention, care and concern.

In 2003, the then Deputy Under Secretary of Defense John Molino addressed his concerns that educators in public schools were largely unaware of the unique challenges and stresses experienced by military-connected children. Harrison and Vannest (2008) were among the first researchers to specifically address the concerns educators had regarding the academic, emotional, and behavioral well-being of reserve component (RC) military-connected students. Fast forward to today, and the concerns remain. This has much to do with the fact that reserve component (RC) service members are being deployed at the same rate as active component (AC) service members. Reserve component (RC) service members’ part-time service does not
adequately prepare them or their families (dependent military-connected children and non-deployed parent) for the stresses associated with extended absence due to deployment. Deployed reservists’ children experience unique stressors that are different than their active component (AC) counterparts and non-military connected peers. Much of the earliest research focused on the active component (AC), however as the war effort continued greater numbers of reserve component (RC) service members (Reserve and National Guard) were called upon and deployed resulting in significant challenges for the traditionally part-time military family.

To meet the needs of military-connected students administrators, teachers and staff should be prepared with both school wide and classroom level supports (Harrison & Vannest, 2008). The approach must be multifaceted and include teacher-focused, student-focused and parent-focused supports. Teacher-focused supports can engage teachers and provide them with a greater understanding of the deployment related stressors experienced by the military-connected child and the non-deployed parent. The school environment can effectively provide a safe, secure, supportive and predictive atmosphere of continuity and normalcy during of high stress and chaos (Harrison & Vannest, 2008).

Staying Strong with Schools is a program specifically designed to support military-connected families living in civilian communities and attending civilian schools. The curriculum of this program was specifically designed to help parents and educators of the military-connected student. Decades of research contributed to the development of this program, which was initially implemented in two northeastern schools, where the results of its effectiveness were shown to be quite promising. Staying Strong with Schools was launched in 2010 and is one of the most comprehensive tools available to both parents and educators. The core components of the Staying Strong with Schools are on-site trainings, presentations on military culture related
information, documentaries describing the experiences of military-connected families, and formal explanation of the resource kits. Although only one study has been conducted to validate its effectiveness, this is a quality product that is empirically based and designed specifically to help the military-connected family (Oh ye, 2016). This tool and the initial research supporting the project serve as a strong basis of support for the development and evaluation of in-school resources.

The educator toolkit created by Oh ye et al., (2012) is an incredibly comprehensive tool specifically designed for educators. It includes an overview on how to use it to be successful, a much-needed fact sheet to familiarize teachers with military related terminology and an exposition of unique challenges faced by the military family and military-connected student. This resource kit includes a conversation starter for teachers as a means to open the lines of communication and bridge the gap between the civilian and military frames of reference. Included in the toolkit are methods for advising the military parent and student as well as a note on special curriculum considerations. This resource has existed since 2012 and based on initial review appears to have significant value to the reserve component (RC) military family. This resource kit, along with the teacher education that accompanies the implementation of this program is of significant value. It proves to be the most current and comprehensive toolkit available with the only downside being the need for further research on its utility and overall reliability.

Educator’s Perspective on Military Families. Research conducted by Chandra, Martin, Hawkins and Richardson (2010) revealed that school staff generally felt as though they were not adequately prepared to respond to the needs of all students and while some military-connected children were coping well and appeared to be just fine, others were adjusting poorly. Even
though a significant portion of military-connected students attend civilian operated public
schools, research conducted by Garner, Arnold and Nunnery (2014) indicated that nearly half of
teachers and other school staff reported that they were not formally educated on the dynamics of
the military family. According to Kranke (2019), civilian educators reportedly do not feel as
though they understand the military life experience or military culture. This is not unlike the
experience of teachers, staff and administrators at elementary school in this study. Some teachers
reportedly understand, while others are unaware of the challenges of military life.

Teachers serve as the greatest gatekeepers in terms of their ability to observe behavioral
changes and connect students and families to meaningful resources at school or in the
community (Kranke, 2019). Teachers who possess a strong sense of awareness and military-
cultural awareness will promote wellness by fostering caring relationships and creating a safe
school climate (De Pedro, et al., 2016). Additionally, it is also increasingly important for the
educator to understand the distinction between support for the war versus support of the warrior
and the warrior family (Ohye, Rauch, & Bostic, 2016).

Parental Involvement

A review of the literature on parental involvement reveals a general lack of consensus on
the definition of the construct (Boonk, et al., 2018). The definition falls on a continuum ranging
from broad and inclusive to narrow to specific so that a clear definition of term is not available.
This is especially troublesome when so much emphasis is placed on the benefits of parental
involvement and yet the term is so broad and multidimensional. In the most general sense,
parental involvement is used to describe parents’ active participation in all aspects of their
children’s social, emotional and academic development and wellness (Castro, et al., 2015).
Parental involvement has been shown to have both home-based and school-based components (Boonk, et al., 2018; Epstein, 2010; Wang & Sheikh-Khalili, 2014). Based on an overview of the most prominent characteristics of parental involvement by Boonk, et al., 2018, indicators of parental involvement were divided among home-based parental involvement and school-based parental involvement. Home-based parental involvement includes all activities that parents do at home to promote their children’s learning. Some examples of home-based involvement include reading with children, assisting with homework, parental support and encouragement. School-based on the other hand refers to all activities and behaviors that involve engagement between parent and school. Examples of school-based involvement include volunteering at school, attending special events, and teacher-parent communications about academic performance or problems or difficulties. For the purposes of this study, parental involvement will be operationally referred to as: “parents’ participation in their children’s school education through communication with school personnel, discussions about school-related topics with children, attendance at school activities, and cultivation of child behaviors that promote educational success” (Lv, et al., 2019, p.175).

**Parent Involvement and Academic Achievement**

Parental involvement in education has been shown to have differing levels of effect on academic achievement (Lv, et al., 2019). Parent-child communication has been shown to positively correlate with positive academic outcome (Castro, et al., 2015). Positive outcomes in student achievement have been shown to be improved by parental involvement in parent-child communication (Castro, et al., 2015). Furthermore, parental academic encouragement and support provides positive outcomes in academic achievement (Gordon & Cui, 2012).
Castro, et al., (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of 37 studies conducted between 2000 and 2013 on the impact parent involvement has on academic achievement. Their research indicated that parental involvement was most often linked to higher student achievement as a result of general supervision that a parent has over their child’s learning. In their analysis, they determined that the strongest associations linking parental involvement and academic achievement were a result of high expectations, consistent communication between students and families regarding school activities and encouraging and supporting good reading habits. These findings are especially critical when considering the impact that deployments have on the non-deployed parent. According to DePedro, et al., (2016), the non-deployed parent is often left alone to raise the children, manage household responsibilities, and serve as the only educational advocate for their child(ren) during the deployment. These unusual demands place added stress on the non-deployed parent, which can interfere with parental involvement. Deployment renegotiates roles and responsibilities within the home environment and may consequently result in reduced parental supervision of school activities (Engel et al., 2010).

Parent involvement and the role it plays in academic achievement for the military-connected child may be impacted most significantly by the decrease in parental responsiveness throughout the course of the deployment and lasting well into the reunion phase (O’Grady, et al., 2017). This is best shown in research addressing the simultaneous changes that occur for the parent and military-connected child. Children’s adjustment throughout the deployment phase was shown to be indirectly affected by the non-deployed parent mental health status and effectiveness in parenting (O’Grady, et al., 2017).
Parental Involvement and Student Emotions

While much of the focus on parental involvement has been centered on academic achievement some researchers have drawn attention to the emotional wellbeing of the child (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011; Lv, et al., 2019; Yap & Baharudin, 2016). Parental involvement may serve to fulfill the basic psychological demands of autonomy, competence, and relatedness according to (Lv, et al., 2019). Parental involvement can improve emotional well-being of students by promoting autonomy, improve feelings of control over their environment, and finally parents are able to convey their sense of care and concern to their children. Children develop their sense of security and capacity for self-regulation through regular interactions with caregivers according to attachment theory which indicates that secure attachment relationships contribute to the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development (Lester & Flake, 2013).

Military-connected children have been shown to experience greater instances of internalizing and externalizing behaviors as a result of a parental deployment (O’Grady, et al., 2017). Challenges with emotional regulation reveal increases in aggressiveness, anxiety, depression and agitation during the deployment cycle (Lester & Flake, 2013). Increases in non-deployed parent stress and maladaptive coping are felt across the family unit (Baptist, et al., 2015; Lester & Flake, 2013; White, et al., 2011)

Impact of Deployment on the Military Family

The family unit that is emotionally interconnected where the change in one person’s functioning is predictable of reciprocal change in the functioning of another member of the family (Baptist, et al., 2015; Lester & Flake, 2013). Research conducted by Cozza and Lerner (2005), in the midst of the war in Iraq/Afghanistan, pointed out a disturbing transference of non-deployed parent stress to the child. There is a level of emotional interdependence that exists
within a family that is purposeful in promoting cohesiveness and cooperation. This is pertinent to the military family as reactions to the military life experience will be experienced throughout the entire system. The interconnectedness is further supported within the theoretical framework and basis of this study as described by Epstein (2011).

The deployment cycle requires significant changes to roles and routines, which can adversely impact family stability (Lester & Flake, 2013). Boundaries, according to Minuchin (1974), define the relationships within a family system and are strongly associated with the overall functioning. Boundaries during the deployment are often renegotiated, especially for adolescents who assume more responsibilities; this is referred to as boundary ambiguity (Hollingsworth, et al., 2016). This role contributes to greater confidence and competence but can also provide more challenges when the absent parent returns because the child may not want to give up their assumed duty (Lester & Flake, 2013). This is especially true for adolescents who may become resentful of losing their presumed power and influence in the post deployment family system. Boundary ambiguity is a contributing factor, especially following the return of the deployed parent, as the family system is reestablishing roles and responsibilities (Huebner, et al., 2007).

**Family Life**

Emerging as a significant theme in the work of Baptist, et al., (2015), the family life experience plays a critical protective factor in overall well-being and resilience of reserve component (RC) military-connected children and families. Using a phenomenological approach, their research consisted of interviews with 30 adolescent children of National Guard service members who volunteered to participate while attending an Operation Military Kids’ summer camp in the Midwest. During their research and data collection, sub-themes of the National
Guard family life experience emerged, which include parentification, worry, conflicting emotions, family support and family pride (Baptist, et al., 2015). Parentification occurs as a result of assumed or assigned responsibilities that would not have otherwise been a factor if it were not for deployment. For example, the eldest children take on the duties of caregiver, helping with household chores and activities, serving as emotional confidants to younger siblings and withholding emotions in order to appear “strong” for the family.

Conflicting emotions, according to the data collected, was described by participants as feeling a sense of internal confusion while navigating feelings of concerns for the deployed parent and guilt for enjoying their time while their parent is deployed (Baptist, et al., 2015). Conflicting emotions over both the presence and the absence of the deployed family member can produce added stress to military-connected adolescents. Adolescents reported feeling conflicted between concerns toward the absent parent and feelings of guilt when experiencing good times with the stay-behind family. Extraneous sources of support for the reserve component (RC) family were reported as neighbors and other supplemental support resources formally offered by the National Guard (Baptist, et al., 2015). Their research also indicated that participant families lacked a connection to community, which is surprising because National Guard families are not routinely exposed to frequent moves or changes to duty locations in the same way as their Active service component counterparts. This fact is important for the purposes of this study because it further suggests that conscious effort and attention must be given to promoting the protective role of community within the school environment. According to their investigation, a lack of deliberate effort from the school and community results in less access to the protective influence that these systems can offer (Baptist, et al., 2015).
Related Studies

There is a lack of current research on the effectiveness of parental involvement and the role of the school environment during the deployment period. The shared family life experience plays a critical protective factor during the deployment cycle because of the significant changes to roles and routines. (Baptist, et. al., 2015; Lester & Flake, 2013). Additionally, there is a disturbing transference of non-deployed parent stress to the child (Cozza & Learner, 2005; Piehler, et al., 2018).

O’Grady, Whiteman, Cardin, and Wadsworth’s (2017) findings provided significant implications for how individuals working with military-connected children should include targeting parenting behavior changes during the deployment in addition to addressing the child’s problem behavior. Their study, which included 114 families of the Indiana National Guard, assessed the non-deployed family functioning at six points throughout the deployment cycle. Interviews conducted with the non-deployed parent ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours and the information obtained was used to measure parent’s responsiveness, non-deployed parent self-report of depressive symptoms, and the non-deployed parent’s assessment of their child’s overall adjustment. Statistical analysis of data collected across the deployment cycle revealed a significant link between the changes in non-deployed parent depressive symptoms and parental responsiveness to changes in internalizing and externalizing behaviors in the military-connected child (O’Grady, et al., 2017).

The family-centered public health approach, like establishing a community of care, provides a promising preventive intervention for military-connected children and the non-deployed parent (Lester, et al., 2017). Membership in a community is especially critical for non-deployed parents and military-connected children during the deployment because it may better
assist with coping and resilience during times of significant stress (O’Neal, Mallette & Mancini, 2018). Communities have critical influence and routinely support the reorganization of family units during times of significant change and challenge. The school environment is nested within the framework of the community.

Baptist, et al., (2015) used a phenomenological approach in their research, which consisted of interviews with 30 adolescent children of National Guard service members who volunteered to participate while attending an Operation Military Kids’ summer camp in the Midwest to gain a better understanding of resilience building in military-connected children. The researchers were interested in how children of National Guard service-members experience deployment and what factors contribute to the well-being and resilience of National Guard families. Data were collected on the second day of the camp following an exercise they participated in that helped them recall the time during which their parent was deployed. Each participant was then interviewed for 20-40 minutes and were provided access to counselors following the interview period. Data were recorded and transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was used to form themes and sub-themes. The findings revealed five themes that captured the experience of adolescents during the deployment period and included, which include self-reliance, family life, friends and school, community connection, and society and media. Self-reliance refers to the military-connected child’s feeling more grown up compared to their non-military peers and includes feelings of aloneness and maturation. Family life describes the support received and given during and included sub-themes of worry, conflicting emotions, parentification, and added responsibilities, multiple losses, family support, and family pride. Friends and school were shown to play a critical role in offering reprieve from the stresses of the home environment during deployment. Community connections, through interactions with
neighbors and use of other resources offered by the National Guard, were the only noticeable considerations that emerged in this theme. Finally, society and media that were perceived as negative in nature were met with defensive posture from military-connected adolescents who perceived them as derogatory.

Research conducted by O’Neal, Mallette and Mancini (2018) included a sample of 273 military families and measured indicators of community connections, resilient coping, individual well-being of youth, parenting quality and family functioning within the military context. These results concluded that elements of community are significant to the individual and family-life experience of military families (O’Neal, Mallette & Mancini, 2018). The source of data for their study included a 14 item Community Connections Index designed to allow participants to define “community” in their own terms. The index utilized a 4-point scale to indicate the degree of community connection experienced by the military-connected family. Data were analyzed using a structural equation model based on information collected on resilient coping, youth well-being, parenting quality, and family functioning. Community connections were measured as a latent construct of community engagement and sense of community for the military-connected family. Community engagement reflected formal interactions with organizations and professionals in the community, whereas sense of community related items reflects upon the informal network of friends, neighbors, and extended family. Unsurprisingly, their findings revealed that military families, with substantial connections to the community, were reportedly more resilient and effective in coping with stressors.

Piehler, Ausherbauer, Gewirtz and Gliske (2018), sought to identify the benefits of the ADAPT (After Deployment Adaptive Parenting Tools) and determine the role of the LOC (Parental Locus of Control) as is specifically pertained to National Guard/Reserve military
families. The ADAPT program, developed by Gewirtz, DeGarmo, & Zamir (2017), was designed to encourage parental involvement, improve skills, and further develop problem-solving and appropriate discipline for military families. The ADAPT program is the first military parenting program of its type to be exposed to rigorous evaluation in a randomized controlled trial and outcomes suggested that the risks associated with parental deployment may be mediated through interventions such as this (Piehler, et al., 2018). Using a social interaction learning framework, Gewirtz, DeGarmo, & Zamir (2017) hypothesized an indirect effects model that suggested improvements in parenting would improve child outcomes. Their sample included 336 Reserve component (RC) participant families from the midwestern United States comprised of middle-income, well-educated married families. Data collection included parent, teacher, and child self-report measures.

Developed by Ohye, et al., (2016), Staying Strong with Schools is a web-based resilience platform available to parents and educators and was developed to develop a partnership and shared understanding between the military-connected family and school environment. The parent curriculum contains 16 short videos and the educator portal include a documentary describing the experiences of military-connected families, a tool kit for educators and school nurses, and a classroom activity guide. This program is presented as a low-cost method to promoting resilience among military-connected students by utilizing existing resources. A pilot of the program was implemented into two civilian elementary schools in Massachusetts to determine the feasibility and acceptability of the training program and included a pre- and post- training questionnaire. Data were collected on Likert scale and analyzed using a one-sample t test and McNemar test to compare outcomes on the assessments. Results revealed statistically significant increases in confidence from pre- to post- questions. Despite a small sample size and although only one study
has been conducted to validate its effectiveness, this product is empirically based and designed specifically to help the military-connected family (Ohye, 2016). This tool and the initial research supporting the project serve as a strong basis of support for the development and evaluation of in-school resources.

While there may be a general lack of consensus on the definition of parent involvement, previous research suggested the positive impact it has on a range of dimensions, both in home and at school (Boonk, Gijselars, Ritzen & Brand-Gruwel, 2018; Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017). Parents, teachers, administration, and staff must work together to help non-deployed parents remain involved during the deployment period and mitigate the deployment related stressors experienced by the military-connected child. Civilian operated public schools can serve as part of a necessary support structure for military-connected students and help children manage deployment-related stressors and cope with the challenges associated with parental absence (Esqueda, Astor & DePedro, 2012).

**Summary**

This chapter provides a review of the literature regarding the military life experience, with particular focus on the impact that extended parental absence has on the military family, especially the military-connected student. In addition, components of effective parental involvement and the promotional role of the school environment were explored. Deployments are shown to have a negative impact on the overall functioning of military-connected students, whereas effective parental involvement is shown to have an overall positive impact on student achievement and performance.

In a review of the literature through the lens established by theoretical framework supported by Epstein (2011) there is evidence of the dynamic interplay between the family,
school and community environments. As support from school and family grows, students feel significantly more secure and believe that they are cared for in a deliberate and authentic way (Epstein, 2010). Parental involvement has been shown to have a positive impact on students despite a number of varying definitions of the term.

Since National Guard military-connected children spend the majority of their day within the school environment, it is not unreasonable to presume that bolstering protective factors within that environment will improve their overall experience, academic success and overall wellbeing during periods of extended absence due to deployment. All of which is evidenced through the review of the literature concerning the protective nature of the school environment.

Military families, especially military-connected children, experience a number of unique stressors related to the military life experience that are often compounded during periods of parental absence due to military deployment or mobilization. A strong sense of community in the classroom, coupled with warmth, civility and safety can provide the necessary protective contextual and environmental support factors necessary to help military-connected students overcome the challenges associated with parental absence (DePedro, et al., 2018). Teacher support is an important part of creating a safe and protective environment for the military-connected student. Finally, parental involvement during times of mobilization or deployment is important for not only the military-connected student, but for the parent as well. Resilience plays a crucial role in the overall health and well-being of the entire military-connected family who regularly deals with military-related stressors like deployments and mobilizations.

There is an undeniable level of interconnectedness between the school, family and community with the student at the center, which represents the external model of overlapping spheres of influence theory and provides one part of the overarching theoretical framework for
this research. The school, family and community represent the three major spheres in which students develop. These varying levels of influence are nested within one another and play a critical role in the experiences of military-connected family with the school environment (Farrell & Collier, 2010). Active partnerships between schools and families may work to engage, energize and motivate students to actively advocate for their own academic successes (Epstein, 1995).

Due to the complicated roles and responsibilities associated with the military-life experience, much attention must be given to bolstering the protective factors while mitigating risks associated with extended parental absence. A review of the literature provides sufficient support for the benefits of the parental involvement for all students and may prove especially protective for military-connected students experiencing an extended absence of a primary caregiver.

The military life experience exerts unique demands on all members of the family, which exposes individual members to multiple stressors (Fairbank, et al., 2018). Military-connected children (MCC) often attend civilian operated public schools and can endure unique challenges that are not experienced by their nonmilitary peers (Baptist, Barros, Cafferky, Johannes, 2015). Most notable of these challenges are deployments or mobilizations, resulting in the absence of a parent (Military Child Education Coalition, 2016).

A fact sheet published by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 2016) revealed that military-connected children are prone to experiencing bouts of anxiousness, worrying, and crying. Repeated exposure to extended separations and deployment can compound the stressors present in military-connected children’s lives (Gilreath, Cederbaum, Astor, Benbenishty, Pineda, & Atuel, 2013). While limited exposure to infrequent stressors are typically
well-tolerated by most children, military-connect children, on the other hand, frequently experience sustained stress evoking experiences and often find themselves struggling to deal with the circumstances that most civilian operated public schools are ill-prepared to adequately address (Ohye et al., 2016). Regrettably, research specifically examining the experiences and outcomes of military children in a supportive public-school environment is limited (DePedro et al., 2014).

A positive school environment, however, has been shown to have an overall positive academic, social-emotional and behavioral impact (DePedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty & Berkowitz, 2018). School environments, if structured in an appropriate way, can promote healthy development of military-connected children by reducing the student’s feelings of alienation, lack of a sense of belonging, potential for risky decision making and help them cope with depression and anxiety. (Chandra, et al., 2009; Esqueda, Astor & DePedro, 2012; Park, 2011).

This study will focus on how promoting increased parental involvement can benefit the entire military family, whereby increasing the psychological, social, emotional and behavioral well-being of the military-connected student, family and non-deployed/non-deployed parent.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Since the beginning of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, more than two million military-connected children have experienced the extended absence of a parent as well as other military related stressors (Esqueda et al., 2012). The service members of the National Guard and reserve are geographically dispersed throughout each state or commonwealth and neither they nor their families benefit from equal access to resources or support, which quite apparent from the communication gaps between teachers, parents, and students of activated reserve component (RC) Soldiers (De Pedro et al., 2016).

To improve the lives of dependent military children of reserve component (RC) service members and their families, who are called to active duty for an extended period, more attention must be given to school reform and the implementation of evidence-based practices (Astor et al., 2013). Experiences are different for everyone, but there are contextual influences like classroom and school climate, teacher support, and parental involvement that play important protective roles for the military connected students (De Pedro et al., 2016). Efforts to mitigate the risks associated with the military life experience can have an overall impact on student motivation, academic success, and social, emotional and psychological wellbeing of the military child.

Parental involvement in learning exerts significant influence on school success (Hamlin & Flessa, 2018). Parental involvement during times of mobilization or deployment is important for not only the military-connected student, but for the parent as well. Children who experience warm responsive parenting and positive support from the school environment are more protected from the stress evoking experiences of military life and extended parental absence (Ohye et al., 2016). The problem is that military-connected school aged children are at an increased risk for
experiencing behavioral, emotional, and academic difficulties, especially during times of extended parental/caregiver absence and a lack of parental involvement and meaningful communication with school administration and teachers can exacerbate the problem.

The purpose of this study is to determine the factors that may impact parental involvement for military families and to formulate a solution to the problem. The significance of this study is that it can increase parental involvement for military families. Specifically, the findings may provide beneficial information for school administration, teachers and military family program directors. Potential strategies can be used through State Family Program outlets and incorporated into Yellow Ribbon programs. This chapter will include a discussion on the design based on the research questions, along with discussions regarding setting, sampling, and participants as well as a discussion on the data collection and data analysis procedures.

**Design**

A multimethod research design was used for this applied study and included both qualitative and quantitative methods to include semi-structured interview, focus groups and survey. A multimethod research design is best suited because it involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analytic techniques (Goertz, 2016). Using multiple methods helps researchers gain complementary views of the same phenomenon (Bickman & Rog, 2009). Semi-structured interviews are best suited to describe the common meanings found in the shared experiences of a group of individuals through conversation. This study will specifically address how parental involvement can be improved for non-deployed parents in military families with a reserve component (RC) service member who has been called to active duty for a deployment having one or more dependent children that attend a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania. Additionally, this research seeks to understand, through
interviews, how teachers would solve problems inhibiting meaningful parental involvement of the non-deployed parent during periods of extended absence as a result of the deployment. This study also aims to determine how parents and educators in a focus group would collaboratively seek to improve conditions impeding meaningful parental involvement for the non-deployed parent during the period of activation, which will be informed by data from a quantitative survey distributed to service member families having experienced a deployment period with a dependent child or dependent children in kindergarten through 3rd grade.

**Research Questions**

**Central Question**: How can parental involvement be improved for deployed military families at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?

**Sub-question 1**. How would educators in an interview solve the problem of limited parental involvement during deployment at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?

**Sub-question 2**. How would parents and educators in a focus group solve the problem of limited parental involvement during deployments at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?

**Sub-question 3**. How would quantitative survey data inform the problem of limited parental involvement during deployments at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?

**Setting**

The setting for this study was an elementary school located in a rural community in southwestern Pennsylvania. The elementary school is comprised of approximately 497 students in grades kindergarten through third grade and recently underwent a consolidation with another elementary school within the district. The site was selected because 63 reserve component (RC) military-connected students are enrolled and 21 military-connected students have experienced
the deployment of a family member in the last five years. This school is part of a small rural school district covering 106 square miles. Census data from 2010 indicated that the communities making up this school district had a residential population of 19,000. Primary sources of employment for residents, according to the district website, include mostly health care, retail, professional, legal, accounting, construction and self-employed small business owners. There are no Active military installations within 300 miles of the school, however there is one reserve component (RC) (National Guard) armory within the district. This school has 497 students, 41 teachers, 8 staff, and 1 principal, including 1 male teachers and 40 female teachers. According to the building principal, this school enrolls 221 Economically Disadvantaged Students, 257 Male Students, 240 Female Students, 1 Asian (not Hispanic), 3 Black or African American (not Hispanic), 4 Hispanic (any race), 26 multi-Racial (not Hispanic), and 463 White (not Hispanic). In order to protect the confidentiality of the school and all participants, pseudonyms will be used to identify all.

Participants

Participants for this study included five non-deployed parents in military families with a reserve component (RC) service member who was called to active duty for a deployment teachers. Five teachers were interviewed. The focus group consisted of five non-deployed military parent participants and five teacher participants who had a student who experienced the deployment of a parent within the last five years. The sample included 14 survey participants (teachers and principal) who have had a military-connected student whose parent has experienced a deployment within the past five years. The survey was sent out to all 41 teachers at the elementary school, which includes one male teacher and 40 female teachers. Demographic information was collected on the survey.
The Researcher’s Role

I have been an Active Duty Service Member in a Reserve component (RC) since 2009. As a wife and mother of two boys, a teacher, coach and mentor in the military and local community, I acknowledge the importance of bracketing out my own personal connection and experience with the topic so as to not allow my personal beliefs or feelings to influence my perspective. I serve no immediate or personal connection to any of the military families. I do however, work directly with the school principal and interact regularly with a number of the teachers as a substitute teacher for the district. I am motivated to conduct this study because of numerous conversations with school staff regarding the concerns and issues that they experience working with military families during extended parental absences due to deployment or mobilization.

Procedures

A complete research proposal was prepared, and IRB approval deemed unnecessary since the results of the study are specific only to this location and not generalizable. (See Appendix A for notice from Liberty University IRB). Additionally, formal written permission was obtained from the district superintendent, district coordinating principal, and the building principal at Sunshine Elementary (See Appendix B for permission request letter and corresponding permissions). Once permission to proceed with data collection was received, an informational notice regarding the study and an invitation to participate was emailed to all teachers and the building principal at the school using their school email address and an additional copy of the invitation to participate was placed in their individual mailboxes. All teachers and principal were invited to participate in the semi-structured interview, survey and/or a focus group. Interested participants were asked to respond via email within 10 days of receiving the study information.
Teachers with current or previous military-connected students having a reserve component (RC) service member who was called to active duty within the last five years were asked to identify potential non-deployed parents to participate in a focus group. Study information was provided to the military-connected student’s teacher and the invitation to participate in the focus group was sent home for the parent to review. Non-deployed military-connected parents were asked to respond to the researcher via email with their interest in participating in the focus group. This approach was required to establish a sample pool of non-deployed parents since no formal mechanism is in place to identify the military-connected students within the school who have a parent currently deployed or who have had a parent deploy within the last five years.

Interested participants who responded to the email were provided with digital copy of the informed consent form. Hard-copy consent forms were provided to the participant at the beginning of the data collection activity (survey, interview, or focus group). Completed informed consent forms were collected prior to the collection of any data. With permission from the building principal, surveys were distributed to all teachers and principal at a regularly scheduled monthly faculty meeting. All surveys were collected, including from those individuals who elected to not participate, immediately following the meeting. All surveys are maintained in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s home.

Interviews with teachers were scheduled within five days of receiving the informed consent form. Interviews were conducted in person, in accordance with all COVID-19 risk mitigation policies and procedures. In-person semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Participants were furnished with an electronic copy of the transcribed interview via email within five days of the interview for member checking.
Participants had no less than one week to review the transcription and respond by email to the researcher.

Finally, a focus group with parents and educators met to solve the problem of limited parental involvement during deployments for non-deployed parents at this school. The focus group was conducted in-person, in accordance with all COVID-19 risk mitigation policies and procedures. The focus group was recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Participants were furnished with a copy of the transcribed group dialogue within five days of the focus group meeting.

Data collection is a critical aspect of applied research and should be rigorous and include a variety of collection techniques. The study included three methods of data collection, these include interviews, survey/questionnaires and a single focus group comprised of parents, teachers, and school administration. All electronic and hardcopy data are secured in locked filing cabinet and will remain password protected for one year. All hardcopy data will be shredded, and electronic data will be purged.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

An applied approach was selected due to the lack of information regarding the specific factors influencing the various levels of parental involvement for military-families during periods of extended parental absence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Site authorization for data collection was received, however no data collection began before IRB review. Data was collected via interviews, focus group, and survey. Purposeful sampling was used to gather information. Criteria for inclusion included teachers and principal who have had a military-connected student whose parent has experienced a deployment within the past five years and
non-deployed spouses of a reserve component (RC) service member who have experienced a deployment greater than six months within the last five years.

Interviews

The first sub-question for this research study explored how teachers in an interview would solve the problem of limited parental involvement at this elementary school located in rural southwestern Pennsylvania. Teachers were recruited to participate in semi-structured interviews, which were conducted in person, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Interviews with teachers were scheduled within five days of receiving the informed consent form. Interviews were conducted in person, in accordance with all COVID-19 risk mitigation policies and procedures. All semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were furnished with an electronic copy of the transcribed interview via email within five days of the interview for member checking. Participants had no less than one week to review the transcription and respond to the researcher.

The semi-structured interview questions were derived from the Educator Toolkit to Increase Awareness and Support to Military Children in Schools (2012), which describes four factors that can and should be assessed regarding the impact the deployment has on the military-connected child and family (Ohye, Rauch & Bostic, 2012). These factors include: “Family Before, During, or After Deployment; Signs Affecting Children or New Difficulties; Treatment or Help in Resolving Difficulties; Home Orderly or Are Major Changes Going On?” (Ohye, Rauch & Bostic, 2012, p. 11).

Question 1 provided participants the opportunity to discuss how prepared they felt to respond to the notification of a parental deployment and further allow them to expound upon how they learned of the deployment, how that information was communicated, and allow them to
broadly express their experience with a military-connected student in their class as it pertains to the factors described by Ohye, Rauch & Bostic, (2012). Question 2 gave the participants the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and challenges and provide general thoughts on their degree of preparedness to face the challenges of a military deployment and what steps they were able to take in order to improve communications and involvement. Military-connected children frequently experience sustained stress evoking experiences and often find themselves struggling to deal with the circumstances that most civilian operated public schools are ill-prepared to adequately address (Ohye et al., 2016). Question 3 allowed the participant to reflect on any changes that they noticed in the military-connected student’s behavior during the month leading up to, during or immediately following the deployment. A positive school environment has been shown to have an overall positive academic, social-emotional and behavioral impact (DePedro, Astor, Gilreath, Benbenishty & Berkowitz, 2018). Question 4 gave the participant the opportunity to share their experiences with varying communication tools used before, during and after the deployment and describe any changes that they may have noticed in the communication before, during and after the deployment.

Question 5 pertained to the participant’s perspective on the non-deployed parent coping, involvement, communication and overall impact of the deployment before, during, and after the deployment. O’Grady, Whiteman, Cardin, and Wadsworth’s (2017) findings provide significant implications for how individuals working with military-connected children should target parenting behavior changes during the deployment in addition to addressing the child’s problem behavior. Question 6 provided the participant the opportunity to address the level or degree of involvement and change noticed during the deployment cycle. Based on an overview of the most prominent characteristics of parental involvement by Boonk, et al., 2018, indicators of parental
involvement were divided among home-based parental involvement and school-based parental involvement. The non-deployed parent’s overall mental health during the deployment period has been shown to significantly impact the military-connected child’s overall emotional well-being (Thompson, et al., 2017). Question 7 gave the participants the opportunity to elaborate on the greatest challenges faced by the military-connected student and ultimately allow the participant the opportunity to describe the impact the deployment had on the academic, social-emotional and behavioral wellness of the student since increases in at-home parent stress and maladaptive coping are felt across the family unit (Baptist, et al., 2015; Lester & Flake, 2013; White, et al., 2011).

Question 8 required participants to elaborate on the tools, knowledge, and resources used to help the military-connected family through the deployment. Teachers serve as the greatest gatekeepers in terms of their ability to observe behavioral changes and connect students and families to meaningful resources at school or in the community (Kranke, 2019). Question 9 asked participants to describe what they did to increase or maintain parent involvement throughout the deployment cycle. According to DePedro, et al., (2016), the at-home parent is left alone to raise the children, manage household responsibilities, and serve as the only educational advocate for their child(ren) during the deployment. These unusual demands place added stress on the at-home parent and can interfere with parental involvement. Parental involvement may serve to fulfill the basic psychological demands of autonomy, competence, and relatedness according to (Lv, et al., 2019).

Question 10 asked the participant to describe their overall assessment of the impact that the deployment had on the military-connected family. The military life experience exerts unique
demands on all members of the family, which exposes individual members to multiple stressors (Fairbank, et al., 2018). Table 1 includes the questions.

**Table 1**

*Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Interview Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>How are you informed when a military-connected student in your classroom has a parent that is or will deploy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>What steps do you take to prepare yourself, the military-connected student, and non-deployed parent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>What changes in the military-connected student’s behavior did you notice in the months leading up to, during or immediately following the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>How often and to what degree did the non-deployed parent communicate with you and the school during the time leading up to the deployment, during the deployment, and immediately following the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Can you describe the non-deployed parent’s ability to cope with the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>How involved was the non-deployed parent with organized school-related activities before, during and immediately following the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Describe the most challenging part of the deployment experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>What tools, knowledge, and resources did you use to help the military-connected child and family through the challenges of the deployment cycle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>What did you do to increase or maintain parent involvement in the weeks leading up to, during, or immediately following the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>How would you describe the impact that the deployment had on the family as a whole?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inductive thematic analysis was used as the method to identify and analyze the interviews and focus groups using Braun and Clarke’s (2013) six phases of analysis, which include: familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the results. The researcher became familiar with the data, listened to the recordings, read transcripts over and over, and annotated observations and made notes. All sources of data were read multiple times to gather a sense of what the participants said.

The initial, open coding was conducted manually and involved the use of multi-colored highlighters and pens. The data corpus, comprised of data from all three sources, was systematically reviewed to account for all possible codes. Sentences, phrases and paragraphs
were coded to illustrate the emergence of patterns. The researcher gave particular attention to relevant sentences, phrases and paragraphs that aligned with the research questions and showed patterns. The list of codes is extensive and accounts for all codes present in the data set. Once the initial open coding was complete, a code book was developed based on all of the collated codes or data extracts.

A theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2013), is an emerging idea that captures important information from the data in relation to the stated research questions. Themes emerge from coherent and meaningful patterns in the data. The researcher actively reviewed all codes and searched for themes in a deliberate and methodical manner using a table to provide a visual representation of emerging themes or sub-themes. During the searching for themes phase, the researcher grouped the codes into categories based on similarities. During the reviewing theme phase, the researcher reviewed all themes to determine if they accurately reflected the codes and larger data set as a whole by rereading the data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher grouped initial themes or mid-level categories into themes that are phrases that directly answer the research questions.

During the defining and naming themes phase, all coded data was reviewed to ensure the data fit coherently into each theme and formed an articulate pattern. Based on the review, the researcher determined that some of the themes needed combined. Furthermore, the researcher developed a thematic map to represent the relationships between the themes. The researcher proceeded in defining and naming the themes when the thematic map indicated that the themes accurately reflected the meaning of the data as whole (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Next, the researcher defined and described the essence of each theme and the individual narrative that emerged from the theme.
The researcher reviewed each theme carefully and determined if there were any overlooked mid-level categories before moving to developing a concise and informative name. The researcher replaced working titles given to the themes with official names in order to provide the reader with a concise and immediate understanding of what the theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Finally, the researcher wrote the analytic narrative and presented a clear conceptualization of the data in relation to existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher carefully and methodically wrote a coherent and logical account of the collected data. Each theme was supported with specific and direct evidence from the data.

Thematic analysis is a highly useful tool that effectively allowed the researcher to richly express the complexities of the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as the method for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data” (p.79). Techniques used throughout the data analysis process to improve reliability involved triangulating multiple data sources by comparing evidence across multiple sources (teachers). Trustworthiness describes the level of reliability and dependability, which is accomplished through triangulation. The second technique involves the participant lens and involved layers of member checking and feedback to improve credibility. This deliberate and methodical approach generated a rich, thick description of the teachers experience with non-deployed parents’ involvement during the deployment period. The third and final technique involved reflexivity and assessed the degree to which the researchers’ subjectivity influenced the production and final text. A reflexivity exercise involved a two-step process. The researcher began by identifying assumptions held on the topic of non-deployed parent involvement, which was followed by an assessment of life values and life experiences that may shaped how the data was read and ultimately interpreted (Clarke & Braun, 2013). A structured reflexivity exercise allowed the researcher to gain deeper insight and provide
greater analytic depth (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In addition, peer feedback was used from the very beginning of the research to help identify and articulate patterns.

**Focus Group**

The second sub-question for this research study explored how teachers and families in a focus group would solve the problem of limited parental involvement for military families during periods of extended parental absence at the elementary school located in rural southwestern Pennsylvania. The basis for focus group questions were derived from the Educator Toolkit to Increase Awareness and Support to Military Children in Schools developed by Ohye, Rauch and Bostic, which described four factors that can and should be assessed regarding the impact the deployment has on the military-connected child and family (2012). These factors include:

“Family Before, During, or After Deployment; Signs Affecting Children or New Difficulties; Treatment or Help in Resolving Difficulties; Home Orderly or Are Major Changes Going On?” (Ohye, Rauch & Bostic, 2012, p. 11). Focus groups are flexible and provide an opportunity for participants to “react to and build” upon the contributions of others (Bickman & Rog, 2009, p. 594). The focus group questions were aligned with the Educator Toolkit to Increase Awareness & Support to Military Children in Schools and designed to elicit responses pertaining to the factors listed above: Questions 1-2 (Family Before, During, or After Deployment) aimed to encourage conversation about the similarities and differences experienced by all participants before, during, or after deployment.

Discussions amongst all invested participants provided insight into the shared challenges and afforded participants the opportunity to describe their unique and individual experiences throughout the deployment cycle. Change is difficult and what is viewed as the most challenging differs from person to person, but these challenges present opportunities for growth (Ohye,
Rauch & Bostic, 2012). Question 3-4 (Signs Affecting Children or New Difficulties; Treatment or Help in Resolving Difficulties) aimed to elicit responses relative to the presence of helpful supports and networks and further the discussion on school resources that may encourage resilience for all members of the military-connected family, and finally Question 5 (Treatment or Help in Resolving Difficulties) sought to encourage discussions regarding the most helpful skill: communication. This question was designed to encourage discourse on effective strategies for maintaining parent involvement before, during, or after the deployment (Ohye, Rauch & Bostic, 2012, p. 11). The list of Focus Group questions can be found below in Table 2.

**Table 2**

**Focus Group Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Focus Group Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>How do the challenges faced by the military-connected children and non-deployed parents differ from the challenges faced by the teacher, school staff and principal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>As a parent at this school, what do teachers, school staff and administrators need to know about deployment, the deployment experience, the military-connected student and non-deployed parent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>As teachers, school staff and administrators at this school, what should the family know and understand about the schools available supports and resources for the military-connected family during deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>How do we maintain effective and meaningful communication with the non-deployed parent in the weeks leading up to, during, or immediately following the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>How do we maintain or increase diminishing non-deployed parent involvement in the weeks leading up to, during, or immediately following the deployment?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data analysis for the focus group was completed using Braun and Clarke’s (2013) six phases of analysis, which include: familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the results. The researcher first became familiar with the data, listened to the recordings, read the transcripts over and over, and annotated observations and made notes. All sources of data were read multiple times to gather a sense of what the participants said.
The initial, open coding was conducted manually and involved the use of multi-colored highlighters and pens. The data corpus, comprised of data from all three sources, was systematically reviewed to account for all possible codes. Sentences, phrases and paragraphs were coded to illustrate the emergence of patterns. The researcher gave particular attention to relevant sentences, phrases and paragraphs that aligned with the research questions and showed patterns. The list of codes is extensive and accounts for all codes present in the data set. Once the initial open coding was complete, a code book was developed based on all of the collated codes or data extracts.

A theme, according to Braun and Clarke (2013), is an emerging idea that captures important information from the data in relation to the stated research questions. Themes emerged from coherent and meaningful patterns in the data. The researcher actively reviewed all codes and searched for themes in a deliberate and methodical manner using a table, which provided a visual representation of emerging themes or sub-themes. During the searching for themes phase, the researcher grouped the codes into categories based on similarities.

During the reviewing theme phase, the researcher reviewed all themes to determine if they accurately reflected the codes and larger data set as a whole by rereading the data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher grouped initial themes or mid-level categories into themes that directly answered the research questions.

During the defining and naming themes phase, all coded data was reviewed to ensure the data fit coherently into each theme and formed an articulate pattern. Based on the review, the researcher determined that some themes may needed combined. Furthermore, the researcher developed a thematic map to represent the relationships between the themes. The researcher defined and named the themes which accurately reflected the meaning of the data as whole.
(Braun & Clarke, 2013). Next, the researcher defined and wrote a detailed analysis to capture the essence of each theme and the individual narrative that emerged from the theme.

The researcher reviewed each theme carefully to determine if there were any overlooked mid-level categories before moving to develop a concise and informative name. The researcher replaced working titles given to the themes with official names that provide the reader with a concise and immediate understanding of what the theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Finally, the researcher will wrote the analytic narrative and presented a clear conceptualization of the data in relation to existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher carefully and methodically wrote a coherent and logical account of the collected data. Each theme was supported with specific and direct evidence from the data.

**Survey**

The third sub-question for this study explored how quantitative survey data informed the problem of limited parental involvement at Sunshine Elementary School located in southwestern Pennsylvania. A modified version of The Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire was used to survey teachers at this school. Written permission from the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group (CPPRG) to utilize this tool was granted. The survey included a 5-point Likert scale response and is a modification on the original Fast Track version of the measure. The wording of the questions was changed to target responses from teachers in regard to their experiences with military-connected children in their classroom who has experienced the deployment of a parent or guardian during the school year. A detailed description of all changes can be referenced, along with a copy of the original measure in Appendix D.

Each question was analyzed through summaries and percentages, depending on the wording. Questions 1-4 was used to gather basic information from the participant to determine:
grade taught, length of time teaching, number of military-connected students in the class, and number of previous student’s they have known to have a parent deploy during the school year. These questions are presented in summary form. Questions 5-11 used the following scale: 1-Never, 2-Once or Twice a Year, 3-Almost Every Month, 4-Almost Every Week, 5-More than Once per Week. These questions are presented with percentages. Questions 12-21 used the following scale: 1-Not at All, 2-A Little, 3-Some, 4-A Lot, 5-A Whole Lot. These questions are presented with percentages. The quality of data from a survey depends on the extent to which the questions can be considered good measures (Bickman & Rog, 2009). A good question, according to Bickman and Rog (2009), must be easily understood, allow participants to respond in a way that reflects what they have to say, and evoke reflections on the information required to answer the question. The Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire is a reliable and valid tool already used to elicit responses from teachers regarding parent involvement, so modifications to the original measure were only made to tailor the measure more appropriately to teacher’s experiences with a military-connected student and non-deployed military parent during a deployment cycle.

Table 3

Survey Questions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Survey Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>How often did this child’s parent call you throughout the deployment cycle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>How often did you call this child’s parent during the deployment cycle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>How often did this child’s parent send in a note or email you during the deployment cycle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>How often did you email or send notes home to this child’s parent during the deployment cycle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>How often did this child’s parent stop by to talk to you during the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>How often was this child’s parent invited to visit your school for a special event during the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>How often did this child’s parent visit your school for a special event during the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>How often was this child’s parent invited to attend a parent-teacher conference during the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>How often did this child’s parent attend a parent-teacher conference during the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>How often was this child’s parent invited to attend PTA meetings during the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>How often did this child’s parent attend PTA meetings during the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>How much was this parent interested in getting to know you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>How well do you feel you could talk to and be heard by this parent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>If you had a problem with this child, how comfortable did you feel talking to his/her parent about it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>How often did this parent ask questions or make suggestions about his/her child throughout the deployment cycle?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>How much do you feel this parent had the same goals for his/her child that the school did?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>How often did this parent send things to class like story books or objects?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>To the best of your knowledge, did this parent do things to encourage this child’s positive attitude towards education throughout the deployment cycle (e.g. take him/her to the library, play games to teach child new things, read to him/her, help him/her make up work after being absent)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>How often did this parent volunteer at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>How involved was this parent in his/her child’s education and school life prior to the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>How involved was this parent in his/her child’s education and school life throughout the deployment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>How important is education in this family?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations for this study will be discussed in this section. All data were stored in the researcher’s home in a locked filing cabinet. All electronic files were password-protected. To protect participants’ confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned. I am a parent in the school where data collection occurred, so potential coercion may have been a factor in recruitment. I made every effort to not recruit individuals I knew. I did interview one person I knew. To avoid
bias, I kept a journal of my thoughts during data collection. These factors may have affected the trustworthiness of the results.

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that may impact parental involvement for military families and to formulate a solution to the problem. The significance of this study is the potential to increase parental involvement for military families. The study included three methods of data collection. These included interviews, a focus group, and a survey that with parents and teachers from an elementary school located in a rural community in southwestern Pennsylvania.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of limited parental involvement for military-connected students of reserve component (RC) military-connected families during periods of deployment at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania and to formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, was used. One source of data was semi-structured interviews with teachers who had a military-connected student who experienced an extended absence of a co-parent due to mobilization or deployment. The second source of data was a focus group comprised of teachers and parents and directly addressed the factors may have positively influenced or limited parental involvement. The third and final approach was a survey, which provided additional information from teachers to inform the problem.

The aforementioned data collection methods and purpose of this applied study was to address the problem of a noticeable decreased in parent involvement of the non-deployed parent during the deployment period of their reserve component (RC) spouse. This reduced level of parental involvement may have inadvertently had negative impact on the elementary aged military-connected child’s emotional well-being (Lester, et al., 2017; Piehler, et al., 2018; Thompson, et al., 2017). As a result, the military-connected children at this elementary school were potentially at an increased risk of experiencing behavioral, emotional, and academic difficulties, especially during times of extended parental/caregiver absence (DePedro, et al., 2011; 2011; Engel, Gallagher & Lyle, 2010; Lester, et al., 2017). This chapter presents the results of the data collection and analysis during this applied research study and further discuss these results.
Participants

All teachers meeting inclusion criteria of having at least one military-connected student whose parent deployed during the school year were invited to participate in the survey, interview, and focus group. The researcher emailed information about the study to each teacher’s school email address, found on the school website, and the building secretary placed a in each teacher’s mailbox. Teachers who had a military-connected student, whose parent deployed while a student in their class, were asked to respond with their interest in participating to the researcher via email. Surveys were distributed to all teachers at a regularly scheduled faculty meeting and collected immediately following the meeting. At the meeting, surveys were distributed to a total of 38 teachers, with 14 of them reporting having a military-connected student in class whose parent deployed during the school year within the last five years. Five teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. Teachers who participated in a semi-structured interview were asked to send an invitation to previous non-deployed parents and invite them to participate in the focus group. A total of eight focus group invitations were sent home to non-deployed parents, and five non-deployed parents agreed to participate. Pseudonyms were randomly assigned to all participants to protect their confidentiality.

Interview Participants

Five teachers were interviewed face-to-face. The interviews were conducted in person, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher immediately following the interview. Each interview was conducted at the school, at the conclusion of the school day, during the regular and extended school year at the elementary school. All district safety policies and procedures were strictly adhered to. All transcripts were returned to the participant within five days of the interview for member checking. Participants were provided no less than one week to review the transcription
and respond to the researcher by email with any changes. Each participant responded within three to five days and none of the participants requested any changes. All interview data, including audio recordings and transcriptions, were kept on the researcher’s password protected laptop computer. Printed copies of the transcribed interviews used for hand-coding were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s home. Teacher participants had an average of 17.8 years of teaching experience and an average of ten total years teaching at Sunshine Elementary.

**Teacher 1**

The first interview participant was Mrs. Martin. She has taught at the elementary level for the past 23 years and is certified to teach PK-4 and special education. She is the lead teacher and works with guidance counselors, school psychologists, and social workers on emotional support programs for students throughout the district. She is considered a resource to other teachers. She was the first to respond with interest in participating in the research and eager to help improve the experience for both military-connected students and families during deployment. Mrs. Martin has had four military-connected students, two from the same family, who experienced the deployment of their father.

**Teacher 2**

The second interview participant was Mrs. Snyder. She is a second grade teacher at the school with 21 years of experience teaching at the elementary level. She serves as a volunteer coach/sponsor for the middle school cheerleading squad and community club. Her room is filled with posters encouraging service to others and supporting the community. She organizes the Veteran’s Day assembly program hosted by the school and works with community organizations to encourage participation by veteran members of the community. Her father served in the military for a short time prior to her birth.
Teacher 3

The third interview participant was Mrs. Miller. She has been teaching for the last 16 years and spent most of that time at a small private school in the area. She has been at Sunshine elementary for the last six years. Mrs. Miller felt completely unprepared for her experience with a military-connected student in her classroom whose parent deployed during the school year. She felt strongly that more resources should be available to students who experience this type of parent separation.

Teacher 4

The fourth interview participant was Mrs. Jones. She has been a teacher at Sunshine Elementary for the 18 years. Throughout her career, she has taught at the elementary and middle school levels but prefers elementary grade level instruction. She currently teaches third grade. She has had numerous military-connected students in her classes over the years, but only one child whose parent deployed in the last five years.

Teacher 5

The fifth interview participant was Mrs. Hall. She served as a first grade teacher at Sunshine Elementary for the last 11 years. She does not have any immediate family members currently serving in the military, but her brother previously served on active duty for four years. She conveys a strong commitment to helping families through the difficulties of deployment.

Focus Group Participants

The focus group consisted of five non-deployed military parent participants and five teacher participants with a child(ren)/student(s) who experienced the deployment of a parent. The focus group was conducted in person, recorded, and transcribed by the researcher immediately following the meeting. The focus group was conducted at the school, at the
conclusion of the school day and all district safety policies and procedures were strictly adhered to. Transcripts of the focus group were returned to the participants for member checking. Participants were provided no less than one week to review the transcription and respond to the researcher by email with any changes. Each participant responded within five days and none of the participants requested any changes. All focus group data, including audio recordings and transcriptions, were kept on the researcher’s password protected laptop computer. Printed copies of the transcribed focus group used for hand-coding were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher’s home.

**Parent 1**

Mrs. George is the wife of an Army National Guard service member and mother of three. She experienced two deployments. At the time of the first deployment, her youngest was in kindergarten. Her experiences between the deployments were quite different and each was reported as a very new and different learning experience for her and her family.

**Parent 2**

Mrs. Harrold is the wife of an Army Reserve service member and mother of one. She has experienced one deployment. She described her family as proud of the service and sacrifice and identified her role as a military spouse. She seemed to grasp the challenges and hardships associated with the military life experience and seemed to take on her role with a sense of pride and obligation.

**Parent 3**

Mr. Frank is the husband of an Army National Guard service member and father of two. He experienced one deployment, multiple mobilizations, and three extended absences while his wife attended a military-job related school. He spoke candidly about his experiences and offered
a remarkable insight into the challenges faced by a father in the non-deployed parent role. He was good humored about his lessons learned and his input was respected and echoed in the group despite the difference in role.

**Parent 4**

Mrs. Mark is the wife of an Army National Guard service member and mother of three girls. Her husband has served over 20 years and deployed three times. She became an active member of the military readiness group at her husband’s unit after the first deployment because of the challenges she faced and the lessons that she learned. She proved to be a wealth of knowledge when it came to services and resources available to families and communicated her desire to share all that she had learned with other families experiencing deployment.

**Parent 5**

Mrs. Robert is the wife of a now retired Army Reservist and mother of two. Her husband deployed once before the children were born and again four years ago. She is an advocate to other military-connected families based on the lessons she learned from the differences of deployment with and without children. She provided considerable insight into the challenges of navigating the deployment experience as a parent and showed a strong desire to help ease the burden for other families going through the same experience.

**Teacher 1**

Mrs. Martin has taught at the elementary level for the past 23 years and is certified to teach PK-4 and Special Education. She is the lead teacher and works with guidance counselors, school psychologists, and social workers on emotional support programs for students throughout the district. She is considered a resource to other teachers. She was the first to respond with interest in participating in the research and eager to help improve the experience for both
military-connected students and families during deployment. She does not have any immediate family members who served in the military. Mrs. Martin also participated in the semi-structured interview.

**Teacher 2**

Mrs. Snyder. She is a second grade teacher at the school with 21 years of experience teaching at the elementary level. She serves as a volunteer coach/sponsor for the middle school cheerleading squad and community club. Her room is filled posters encouraging service to others and supporting the community. She organizes the Veteran’s Day assembly program hosted by the school and works with community organizations to encourage participation by veteran members of the community. Her father served in the military for a short time prior to her birth. Mrs. Snyder also participated in the semi-structured interview.

**Teacher 3**

Mrs. Miller. She has been teaching for the last 16 years and spent most of that time at a small private school in the area. She has been at Sunshine elementary for the last 6 years. Mrs. Miller felt completely unprepared for her experience with a military-connected student in her classroom whose parent deployed during the school year. She felt strongly that more resources should be available to students who experience this type of parent separation.

**Teacher 4**

The fourth interview participant was Mrs. Jones. She has been a teacher at Sunshine Elementary for the 18 years. Throughout her career, she has taught at the elementary and middle school levels, but prefers elementary grade level instruction. She currently teaches third grade. She has had numerous military-connected students in her classes over the years, but only one child whose parent deployed in the last five years.
**Teacher 5**

The fifth interview participant was Mrs. Hall. She served as a first grade teacher at Sunshine Elementary for the last 11 years. She does not have any immediate family members who served in the military but conveys a strong commitment to helping families through the difficulties of deployment. Her brother served on active duty for four years.

**Survey Participants**

The survey was distributed to 38 teachers who attended a regularly scheduled faculty meeting at the elementary school, three teachers at the school were not in attendance. All surveys were returned. Fourteen of the surveys collected met the screening criteria of having a military-connected student with a parent who deployed within the last five years and were, therefore, included in the study. The purpose of the survey was to assess how teachers observed the degree of impact that the deployment had on the non-deployed parent involvement and further support the qualitative research data derived from the interview and focus group. Demographic information was collected on the survey and shown below in Table 4. All participants were female, average age 40-49 years, and had an average range of 10-20 years of teaching experience.

**Table 4**

Survey Participant Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Grade Taught</th>
<th>Time Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>More than 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>More than 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>1-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Second Grade</td>
<td>More than 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>First Grade</td>
<td>10-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Third Grade</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers from the elementary school in order to find themes related to their experiences with the involvement of non-deployed military-connected parents during deployment. Several themes emerged from the qualitative analysis. Second, a focus group was conducted with teachers and parents in order to find themes related to their experiences at this school. Finally, a quantitative survey was administered to teachers and was used to corroborate the themes.

Sub-question 1

Sub-question one for this study was, “How would educators in an interview solve the problem of limited parental involvement during deployment at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?” Interviews were conducted with five teachers from Sunshine Elementary in order to find themes related to their experiences with non-deployed parent involvement during deployment. The themes uncovered in the qualitative analysis were communication and information sharing, problem based solutions, and access to resources. Table 5 shows codes that
were identified and the frequency of the codes from Interviews. Additionally, codes listed below were first placed into mid-level categories (see Appendix F).

**Table 5**

*Frequency of Codes - Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistent/Deliberate/Effective communication</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting military-connected child</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent check-in with family</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending/Receiving Notes, Emails, Phone Calls</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing for limited time/resources</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time to prepare</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited interactions with non-deployed parent</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Strategies to involve parents</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking a lot of questions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to be helpful</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of not doing/helping enough</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping/over-helping</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing who to ask for help</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing where to go for help</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy for family</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what to say</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective involvement/support (teachers, staff, and admin)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to others w/experience or expertise</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family dynamic before, during, and after deployment</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in experiences</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in the student during deployment</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in family during deployment</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme #1. Communication and Information Sharing

The first of the three themes identified from the interviews was the importance of consistent, deliberate, and effective communication and information sharing throughout the entire deployment cycle. Teachers reported having little to no advanced notice of the deployment and were often uninformed that they even had a military-connected student in their classroom. Mrs. Martin explained that prior to a deployment that “usually the parents inform us before anyone else,” but according to Mrs. Snyder that may not occur until the child is observed “acting
differently or has a problem or seems distracted.” Mrs. Miller indicated that while the school does not discourage families from sharing information about military status, she did not believe they “go out of the way to acknowledge it.”

The first concern appeared to arise from a lack of communication regarding military-connectedness and furthermore teachers revealed a lack of communication surrounding the pending deployment. Communication during the deployment with the non-deployed parent was viewed as critically important by all teachers who were interviewed. Mrs. Martin explained that “keeping in touch – touching base” was one of the best and most effective ways to maintain consistent parent involvement throughout the deployment cycle. Mrs. Hall echoed these sentiments by further explaining that “the family situation at home is so unique and different that it is… is almost impossible to know what’s going on without checking in often”. Information sharing regarding the specifics of the deployment were shown to be helpful to, for example, “knowing dates of the deployment, where the parent will be, and when they are supposed to be home” are all considered helpful bits of information to share with teachers.

**Theme #2. Problem-Based Solutions**

The second of the three themes to emerge from the interviews was the importance of problem-based solutions and developing creative strategies to help the non-deployed parent (family) and military-connected child. Mrs. Martin revealed the “here you go, they’re leaving, now deal with it” reality of the deployment requires creative solutions to overcome the challenges experienced by all parties involved, both in and out of the classroom. A problem based solution strategy is effective in targeting and overcoming deployment challenges unique to each situation, each family, and each military-connected child. Teachers reported that there was no “one-size-fits-all” solution to every problem, and Mrs. Hall explained that “proper assessment
of needs and available resources” can help teachers get much closer to a solution and ease the burdens brought on by the deployment. Teachers revealed that “every family is remarkably different” in their experiences but overcoming the challenges impeding non-deployed parent involvement requires creative strategies mainly because the challenge is “temporary” and “unique to each person and experience”.

During the interviews, teachers acknowledged that there were things outside of their traditional “job” that they were fully prepared to do in an effort to reduce the stress on the child and family. Notably the military-student was their primary responsibility, however they each responded with ideas that extended beyond the classroom environment. Some examples provided during the interviews included: “inviting [the non-deployed parent] to the classroom to read a story”, hosting “lots of activities to encourage support”, “family journaling packets” that can be sent home and are worked on at school too, and other activities that “have meaning and value and help families work together” while a parent is deployed. Furthermore, teachers recognized the need and even encouraged the support of extended family, particularly as it pertained to invitations to “aunts, uncles, grandparents” to help with “career days, reading programs, book fairs, and special presentations”. In the interviews, teachers viewed their military-connected students more like extended family members and expressed a responsibility to care for them as a sort of temporary pseudo-caregiver looking out for their overall well-being.

Theme #3. Access to Resources

The third of the three themes to emerge from the interview was overcoming limited time and available resources. Teachers revealed that they struggled with competing for the non-deployed parents’ time and failed in their ability to immediately access necessary resources to assist the family through the challenges of the deployment. Teachers expressed great concern
over the lack of information from the military service/branch, the general lack of knowledge
about programs and resources available in the community and were disappointed that they
“didn’t know who to call” or “who they could talk to about resources” in the area.

Teachers indicated that being involved was “much harder” for the non-deployed parent
while the co-parent was deployed, and all teachers seemed to echo this sentiment. Teacher’s
accounts were in agreement that it wasn’t necessarily an intentional or deliberate lack of
involvement or interest, but more so a lack of time since the non-deployed parent “didn’t have
the same amount of time that they did before”. Deployments “shocked the whole system” and
Mrs. Jones said that she learned to send home “extra reminders and give more time” to return
items to school. There were more follow-up phone calls and communication during irregular
hours because of the non-deployed parent’s work schedule. Teachers also revealed that resources
were scarce as the non-deployed parent tried to take on all household duties and responsibilities
– “doing more, with less”. Teachers viewed parents as having fewer opportunities for
involvement, especially noting those parents who experienced scheduling challenges, work
conflicts, and lack of available transportation resources.

Sub-question 2

Sub-question two for this study was, “How would parents and educators in a focus group
solve the problem of limited parental involvement during deployments at a small elementary
school in rural Pennsylvania?” A focus group was conducted with five non-deployed military
parents and five teachers of military-connected students who experienced the deployment of a
parent during the school year at Sunshine Elementary. Data was collected and analyzed in order
to find themes related to the experiences of both the teacher and non-deployed and the impact on
non-deployed parent involvement and inform the problem. The themes uncovered in the
qualitative analysis were communication and information sharing, access to resources, and expectations. Theme #1 and Theme #2 were consistent with the interviews and Theme #3 arose out of the conversation between teachers and parents regarding the challenges faced throughout the deployment experience.

**Table 6**

*Frequency of Codes – Focus Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistent/Deliberate/Effective communication</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting military-connected child</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent check-in</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending/Receiving Notes, Emails, Phone Calls</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing for limited time/resources</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time to prepare</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/transportation conflicts impeding involvement</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too busy/Not enough time</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to manage without help</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanting to be helpful</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of not doing/helping enough</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping/over-helping</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing who to ask for help</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing where to go for help</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing what to say</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective involvement/support (teachers, staff, and admin)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme #1. Communication and Information Sharing

Unsurprisingly, the first of the three themes identified from the focus group was the importance of consistent, deliberate, effective communication and information sharing throughout the entire deployment cycle. Teachers and parents commiserated on their lack of advanced warning/notice of the deployment but agreed that “talking about things early” was the best possible way to get ahead of problems. Teachers and parents were in agreement that information sharing was one of the best ways to keep parents on track throughout the deployment because, as Mrs. Frank mentioned, “there’s way too much going on at first, my house was chaos, and I lost track of everything in the beginning.” Focus group participants were
in agreement that more information made for better more informed decision. Parents and teachers shared their experience with access to limited information regarding the deployment and military-related information. Through the discussion, teachers and parents revealed that they both shared a similar disadvantage when it came to “knowing what to expect”. Furthermore, they discussed things that they learned from the deployment experience that they wish they had known prior to the experience. Resources, particularly the advantages of community support programs, and service-related programs were discussed.

**Theme #2. Access to Resources**

The second of the three themes to emerge from the focus group was overcoming limited time and accessing available resources. Teachers again reported that they struggled with competing for the non-deployed parents’ time. In agreeance, the non-deployed parent participants echoed the challenges that they faced to “be everywhere and do everything” and often struggled to manage the day to day at the beginning of the deployment. Mrs. Harrold said “trying to make time, the right amount of time, for everything was hard to figure out” which further suggests that parent involvement declines may be directly related to lack of available time and not necessarily a result of personal choice. Being involved was significantly more challenging for the non-deployed parent while the co-parent was deployed. Teachers agreed that it never “really seemed intentional” or was observed as a “deliberate” lack of involvement or interest, but more so a lack of time or access to available resource(s). Participants all agreed that the top priority for them was reducing the stress of the military-connected child both in the classroom and at home.

Parents were surprised by the number of community supports and resources that were “out there”, but participants agreed that they weren’t aware that any of them existed until the
problem or issue was significant and often “out of hand”. Likewise, teachers were also surprised by the number of supports and services that existed for military-connected families that they did not know existed. Among these, parents and teachers discussed websites, like Military OneSource, and the work of National Guard family support assistants. With experience, these parents and teachers developed a degree of “expertise” in managing and navigating the challenges of time and resource management, as well as learned how and where to access important resources to improve the overall experience. Their experiences together provide a remarkable network of knowledge and suggest the relevance of establishing a support group to help parents navigate the challenges of the deployment cycle. Mrs. Robert explained that she would be “willing and more than happy to “sponsor” other military moms/dads through the deployment” and parents were in agreeance that it would have been “pretty nice to have someone to talk to who knew what to expect” from the deployment experience.

**Theme #3. Expectations**

The third of the three themes to emerge from the interview was the fear of not satisfying/meeting expectations. This is perhaps the most interesting of the themes to emerge from the focus group. Responses from parents and teachers revealed a consistent concern to satisfy and meet expectations and, in some cases, unrealistic ones. Parents reported concern about appearing “too needy” and felt that they should be able to effectively “manage everything” with little to no outside help. They even reported a degree of shame when needing to ask for help and at times felt “judged” when they were not able to “keep everything straight”. Mrs. Mark explained that her own mental health suffered a great deal during the deployment as she desperately tried to satisfy the expectations that she held over herself, that she believed her husband and everyone around her over held over her, but in reality “weren’t really there”.

Teachers, however, reported concern about appearing “too overbearing” and were consistently fearful of not being helpful enough. During the interview, and then reiterated in the focus group, teachers expressed the concerns they had that they were going to “fail the family” or accidently “miss something” that would ultimately help decrease the stresses experienced by the military-connected student and family. Teachers expressed a responsibility to their students and to helping the family. Mrs. Hall expressed how connected she felt to the sacrifice of the family and how much she wanted to express “gratitude and say thank you” by supporting them in any way possible.

Parents reported feeling like they should be able to “keep everything going” and that asking for any help reveals a sign of weakness, all the while teachers were seeing parents as “guarded” and “closed off” despite their sincere willingness to do anything to help. In direct correlation to Theme #1, which suggests the importance of consistent/deliberate/effective communication and information sharing throughout the entire deployment cycle, Theme #3 emerged as evidence that parents and teachers strongly desire the same positive outcome, yet both have expectations of themselves that the other does not equally hold. What was missing and what was revealed through the conversation was very telling about the disconnect between teachers and the non-deployed parent. Communication proved again a strong overarching theme.

**Sub-question 3**

The third sub-question for this study explored how quantitative survey data informed the problem of limited parental involvement at Sunshine Elementary School located in southwestern Pennsylvania. A modified version of The Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire was used to survey teachers at this school. The wording of the questions was changed to target responses from teachers in regard to their experiences. The measure was used to capture the
teacher’s experiences with a military-connected student and non-deployed military parent during a deployment cycle. On average, parents of military-connected children called their classroom teacher once or twice per year, but teachers reported calling the non-deployed parent on average monthly. The majority of teachers reported that they emailed or sent notes home almost every week during the deployment cycle, but parents emailed or sent notes less frequently. Parents rarely, one or twice a year, stopped by to talk with the teacher or to visit the school for a special event during the deployment. Teachers reported that parents attended as many parent-teacher conferences as they were invited to attend, at a rate of once or twice per year. Additionally, parents were invited to attend PTA meetings, but only three of the 14 non-deployed parents attended once or twice. On average, teachers reported that the non-deployed parent was interested in getting to know them and they felt comfortable talking to the non-deployed parent if there was a problem. Parents were reported to often make suggestions about their child throughout the deployment cycle and share a lot of the same goals that the school had for the child. Parents were reported to be involved prior to the deployment, but only somewhat involved throughout the deployment. Teachers reported that education was important to the family and that the parent encouraged the child’s positive attitude toward education a lot. Results of the survey data are shown below on Table 7.
Table 7
Frequency and Average of Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or Twice a Year</th>
<th>Almost Every Month</th>
<th>Almost Every Week</th>
<th>More Than Once Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often did this child’s parent call you throughout the deployment cycle?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>64.29%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did you call this child’s parent during the deployment cycle?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did this child’s parent send in a note or email you during the deployment cycle?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did you email or send notes home to this child’s parent during the deployment cycle?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did this child’s parent stop by to talk to you during the deployment?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>92.86%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often was this child’s parent invited to visit your school for a special event during the deployment?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did this child’s parent visit your school for a special event during the deployment?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>85.71%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<tr>
<td>How often was this child’s parent invited to attend a parent-teacher conference during the deployment?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did this child’s parent attend a parent-teacher conference during the deployment?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>92.86%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUESTION</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
<td>A Little</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>Interested</td>
<td>Very Interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much was this parent interested in getting to know you?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>A Little</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Comfortable</th>
<th>Very Comfortable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How well do you feel you could talk to and be heard by this parent?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you had a problem with this child, how comfortable did you feel talking to his/her parent about it?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>7.14%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
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<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often did this parent ask questions or make suggestions about his/her child throughout the deployment cycle?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often did this parent volunteer at school?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
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<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often did this parent send things to class like story books or objects?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUESTION</td>
<td>Not At All</td>
<td>A Little</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>A Lot</td>
<td>A Whole Lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do you feel this parent had the same goals for his/her child that the school did?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>92.86%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the best of your knowledge, did this parent do things to encourage this child’s positive attitude towards education throughout the deployment cycle (e.g. take him/her to the library, play games to teach child new things, read to him/her, help him/her make up work after being absent)?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is education in this family?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>A Little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Involved</th>
<th>Very Much Involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How involved was this parent in his/her child’s education and school life prior to the deployment?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>64.29%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How involved was this parent in his/her child’s education and school life throughout the deployment?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>64.29%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
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Discussion

Staff members of a small elementary school in southwestern Pennsylvania expressed concerns regarding a decrease of non-deployed parent involvement during the deployment period for reserve component service members. School administration, teachers, and staff suggested that parents were less responsive to communications, attended fewer school events, were less involved, and less likely to ask for help or seek resources available through the school during the
deployment period. The data collected during interviews, from a focus group, and from a teacher survey is consistent with these observations.

The positive influences of parental involvement have an impact on a student’s emotional and academic well-being (Gordon & Cui, 2012; Jeziorski & Wall, 2017; Ohye, et al., 2016). Active partnerships between schools and families may work to engage, energize, and motivate students to actively advocate for their own academic successes (Epstein, 1995). Developing school, family, and community partnerships, according to Epstein (2011), is necessary in order to improve school programs and school climate, provide family services and support, increase parents’ skills, and establish meaningful connections among families within the larger community. Researchers indicated that military-connected families with children are interdependent relational units that navigate deployment related stressors within the family unit (Astor & Astor, 2012; Astor et al., 2013; Brendel, et al., 2014; Lester, et al., 2017).

Theoretical Literature

The major themes identified through the research were Communication and Information Sharing, Problem-Based Solutions, Access to Resources, and Expectations. These themes were supported directly through Epstein’s Spheres of Influence, Epstein’s Types of Parent Involvement, and finally through the Community of Care concept. This section provides a discussion of the theoretical literature

**Epstein’s Spheres of Influence**

Military-connected children and families do not exist in a vacuum, but instead interact heavily with numerous systems, both directly and indirectly, within their environments. Military children and their families interact as dynamic participants in their environments, and these interactions include a distinct relationship between home, school, and community (Epstein,
2011). There is a distinct level of interconnectedness between the school, family, and community, with the student at the center. This interconnectedness is what Epstein (2010) described as a family-like school, one in which individuality is celebrated and accepted and all families are made to feel important. Teachers in this study specifically indicated there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution and each student and each family have unique differences that influence the ways in which the student/family interacts with the school and community.

During the focus group, parents and teachers shared their experience with access to limited information regarding the deployment and military-related information. Through the discussion, teachers and parents revealed that they both shared a similar disadvantage when it came to “knowing what to expect.”

A collaborative partnership exists when the parents work to create a school-like family that acknowledges the importance of the child as a student. Emphasis is placed on the importance of doing well in school, completing homework, and engaging in activities that build students skills and confidence, but most importantly resilience. The results of this study illustrate the importance of teacher support (school), non-deployed parent support (home), and access to resources (community). The burden of the deployment on all involved is manageable, but only when teacher, parent, and community work together to support the military-connected student and non-deployed parent. In this study, teachers expressed how they often stretched beyond their traditional roles to provide meaningful support. Parents in the focus group discussed how important school and community involvement was in “sharing the burden.” Teachers and parents alike acknowledged the importance of proper communication and frequent information sharing.

Communicating often and with a deliberate intent was shown as one of the best and most effective ways of maintaining consistent parent involvement throughout the deployment cycle.
The overlapping spheres of influence are especially critical for military-connected families during extended periods of parental absence because they can positively influence across dimensions of family (home), school, and community (Astor, et al., 2013). The school, family, and community represent the three major spheres in which students develop. These varying levels of influence are nested within one another and play a critical role in the experiences of military-connected family with the school environment (Farrell & Collier, 2010). Based on analysis of the data in this study, non-deployed parents and teachers want the same things for the military-connected student.

Participants in the focus group all agreed that the top priority for them was reducing the stress of the military-connected child both in the classroom and at home. During the interviews, teachers frequently reported serving in pseudo-family roles and indicated that they “felt a responsibility to look out for military-connected students” and monitor overall well-being as they would for their own children. Teachers and parents alike reported the importance of sharing information and communicating on a regular basis.

At the core of overlapping spheres of influences theory is the desire to create a partnership between levels where teachers and administrators create a more family-like school and simultaneously parents are actively working to create a more school-like family (Epstein, 2010, p. 83). Based on the data collected in this study, it appears that once parents and teachers overcome the barriers in communication, there is a natural propensity to want to create a more family-like school during the deployment in an effort to mitigate the stresses brought on by the deployment.
Epstein’s Six Types of Parental Involvement

The framework of Epstein’s (2010) six different types of parent involvement include parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Each type of parent involvement describes the ways in which responsible parenting practices can produce meaningful outcomes. Additionally, themes derived from the qualitative data are supported directly by Epstein’s Types of Parent Involvement, Type 2 (communication), which emphasizes the importance of effective communication between the home and school. Parent-teacher communication is critical and should occur at frequent intervals throughout the deployment. Notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters and emails are all examples of tools and the results of the data analysis further supports the use of multiple communications tools (Epstein, 2010). Teachers indicated the importance of consistent, deliberate, and effective communication during the interviews. Furthermore, teachers and parents agreed during the focus group that communication was critical to successfully navigating the challenges of the deployment cycle. Communication is imperative during deployment between both school and home and teacher and parent (Baptist, et al., 2015; Kudler & Porter, 2013).

Communities of Care

A community of care evolves around the military child and is family specific to region or time (Kudler & Porter, 2013). A well-developed community of care works across individuals, families, and communities to promote wellness and building a supportive environment is one small part in developing a community of care for military children and families (Kudler & Porter, 2013). Military children and their families are dynamic participants in their environments, so for a community of care to be established it is imperative to consider all of the interactions that extend across multiple systems and also those that include families and communities across
time (Epstein, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Kudler & Porter, 2013). During the interviews, teachers pointed directly to the importance of creating a “supportive environment” to promote wellness and mitigate the challenges associated with deployment related stressors. The community of care evolves around the military child and family specific to region or time and is not a one-size-fits-all model (Kudler & Porter, 2013). Again, teachers explicitly addressed the “uniqueness” of each family and each situation, noting that every experience is different and responding to the needs of the military-connected family varied greatly depending on the specific needs or challenges at that time. This is of critical importance when examining the situation occurring at the elementary school in this study. The data analyzed in this chapter highlighted the importance and significance of the relationship between the home, school, and community environments and illustrated the varying degrees of interconnectedness between environments. The data collected and analyzed in this study aligns with the theoretical framework presented and no evidence was collected that directly contradicted the theoretical basis.

**Empirical Literature**

This study corroborated previous research on the stresses of the military life experience during periods of absence due to deployment. Furthermore, the results of this study, as evidenced by the themes above, suggest that the decreases in non-deployed parent involvement may not be intentional or deliberate, but more so a result of lack of time and resources which naturally become strained with the absence of a co-parent. Teachers and parents wanted the same thing, but a degree of pride seems to impede the non-deployed parent’s ability to ask for or seek help when it is needed. Teachers wanted to help in any way that they could but lacked a thorough understanding of exactly how they could best assist. This aligns with previous research, which
suggests that there is a lack of knowledge and training on how school staff can and should support the military family and military-connected student (Ohye, et al., 2016).

Breaking down the communication barriers, getting teachers and non-deployed parents together, seems to be the most reasonable way to address decreases in parent involvement. These barriers are overcome through regular communication and in-person meetings. Research conducted by Paley, Lester, and Mogil (2013) described the military-connected child’s reliance on their non-deployed parent as a source of support, comfort, and reassurance. The findings in this study supported this assertion as parents described the demands placed on them throughout the deployment cycle. Parents indicated that they routinely struggled to be “everything, to everyone, all the time” and reported feeling overwhelmed with the demands of the deployment and particularly overwhelmed by the direct needs placed on them by the military-connected child. During the focus group, parents discussed how their child/children seemed to need a “strong example to follow” throughout the deployment cycle. In an effort to mitigate the challenges, teachers employed creative strategies to assist parents in an effort to reduce stress, which supports previous research indicating that when parents manage their stress, have well established coping mechanisms and normal routines, family functioning is improved despite parental absence and changes in family structure (O’Grady, et al., 2018; Lester, 2016). Teachers in this current study increased their communication, encouraged participation by hosting career days, reading programs, book fairs, and special presentations.

Summary

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of limited parental involvement for military-connected students of reserve component (RC) military-connected families during periods of deployment at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania and to
formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, was used. The first approach utilized semi-structured interviews with teachers who had a military-connected student who experienced an extended absence of a co-parent due to mobilization or deployment. The second approach utilized a focus group comprised of teachers and parents and directly addressed the factors that may positively influence or limit parental involvement. The third and final approach was quantitative and in the form of a survey, which provided additional information from teachers and school staff. This chapter included an overview of the data collection and analysis procedures, a description of participants, a list of codes from the focus group and interview, and a discussion of the themes. The themes derived from the qualitative analysis of the interviews were communication and information sharing, problem based solutions, and access to resources. The themes derived from the qualitative analysis of the focus group were communication and information sharing, access to resources, expectations. The survey results supported a decrease in parent involvement during the deployment period, evidence of less frequent notes/email from parents during the deployment, and a lack of attendance at scheduled PTA meetings throughout the deployment. The results of this study provided substantial information to inform the problem and provided the researcher with valuable data to develop a reasonable solution to solving the problem of limited parental involvement during deployment at Sunshine Elementary.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this applied study was to solve the problem of limited parental involvement for military-connected students of reserve component (RC) military-connected families during periods of deployment at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania and to formulate a solution to address the problem. A multimethod design, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, was used. The first source of data was semi-structured interviews with teachers who had a military-connected student who experienced an extended absence of a parent due to mobilization or deployment. The second source of data was a focus group comprised of teachers and parents and directly addressed the factors that positively influenced or limited parental involvement. The third and final approach was a survey, which provided additional information from teachers to inform the problem. This chapter will present a restatement of the problem, proposed solutions to the central research question, describe roles and responsibilities, provide a timeline for implementation, and discuss a plan to evaluate the implementation of the solution.

Restatement of the Problem

The problem reported by administrators, teachers, and staff at Sunshine Elementary School in southwestern Pennsylvania was a noticeable decrease in parent involvement of the non-deployed parent during the deployment period of their reserve component (RC) spouse. This reduced level of parental involvement has been shown to have a negative impact on the elementary aged military-connected child’s emotional well-being (Lester, et al., 2017; Piehler, et al., 2018; Thompson, et al., 2017). The qualitative and quantitative data collected and analyzed in this study supported the assertion. The multimethod approach consisted of interviews, a focus
group, and a teacher survey, all of which informed the problem of limited non-deployed parent involvement at the school.

**Proposed Solution to the Central Question**

The central research question for this applied study was “How can parental involvement be improved for deployed military families at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?” Previous research illustrates that parental involvement has proven undeniably important to student success (Haskins & Jacobsen, 2017). Deliberate efforts to encourage parental involvement of the non-deployed parent can improve the experiences of military-connected children and their families when their reserve component (RC) parent is mobilized for a deployment (Thompson, et al., 2017). Increasing involvement of the non-deployed parent can have an overall impact on motivation, academic success (Jeynes, 2016a; Jeynes, 2016b), and the social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of the military-connected child (Chandra, et al., 2009; Cozza & Lerner, 2013; De Pedro, et al., 2011; Lester, et al., 2010; Thompson, et al., 2017). Based on an analysis of the data presented in Chapter 4, the solution to this problem is derived from a proactive, rather than reactive, approach and involves deliberate and purposeful planning, resource collection, and the development of a structured support network at the school for military-connected students and families. The primary goal of this solution is to first establish a method for identifying students with a service connection, select an ambassador to sponsor a military support program who will actively collect and disseminate information and resources, and finally provide ongoing continuing education to teachers, staff, and administrators. Identifying the military-connected student begins the conversation with the family, acknowledges military-connectedness, and further establishes the much needed communication,
which was shown to be imperative to improving parent involvement and a critical theme in this study.

Goal #1 is to distribute a survey to all students to give parents the chance to voluntarily provide information regarding their military status and/or degree of military-connectedness. At the beginning of each school year, a survey could be provided to all students, at which time parents may indicate the terms of their service (branch, status, etc.) and deployment status in the military. Services can be targeted more directly when the members of the population is known. Additionally, the survey should also indicate that parents may notify the school of any changes to military status during the school, particularly when a parent or guardian is scheduled for deployment/mobilization. Identifying the military-connected student and family is important for a number of reasons. Epstein’s (2010) family-like school concept aligns well with the Kudler and Porter (2013) argument calling on the development of communities of care for military children and families. In a call to action, they described the importance of taking the initiative to determine which children or families are service connected. Furthermore, they recommended that schools, communities, and families take a proactive approach to creating supportive environments that meet the needs of military-connected children.

Goal #2 is to establish a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison to serve as a point of contact for all military-connected students and families at the school. This position could be filled with a teacher who has experience working with military-connected students or service connected families. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison will sponsor a group for military-connected students and facilitate support meetings for students and families impacted by deployment during the school year. Epstein’s parent involvement of Type 6 (collaborating with community) seeks to strengthen school programs
through collaboration with community resources by identifying and integrating essential
services. This can include community health information, recreational activities, and cultural
support. Collaboration with community resources is especially important for Guard and Reserve
families since they do not have access to co-located resources available to active duty service
members (Brendel, et al., 2014). Collaboration within the community is a hallmark of building a
community of care and provides an essential framework through which to support the military-
connected family. Through successful collaboration, a community of care can effectively
promote wellness across individuals (military-connected child), families (military-connected
family), and communities (military-connected experience in the larger civilian community)
(Kudler & Porter, 2013). Establishing a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network
Liaison or committee will directly address this need.

Goal #3 is to provide continuing education opportunities that directly address military-
connectedness and provide resources that teachers can access throughout the deployment period.
The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison will also provide education on
tools, services, and resources available to military-connected families during deployment,
activation, or call to active duty. Although there are many resources that exist to help military-
connected children adjust to military stressors and parental absence, there is a remarkable
absence of evidence based in-school supports, which could include programs, resources,
teacher’s continuing education coursework (Ohye, et al., 2016). The Military-Student
Ambassador/Community Network Liaison can communicate directly with Department of
Military and Veteran’s Affairs representatives, Family Support Assistants, and other community
groups or organizations that provide direct services to military members and families. It is
recommended that this position be filled with a teacher (or teachers) with experience working
with military-connected students or service connected families. Furthermore, this person(s) should be prepared to serve as a group sponsor for military-connected students and facilitate during deployment support meetings for students. If the work required of the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison is too much for a single person to reasonably manage, the recommendation is made to share the responsibility with a volunteer school based committee.

Goal #3 is in direct correlation to known legislation Pennsylvania House Bill 2052 (Printer’s No. 3593), effective October 2018, which provides “Military Parent Student Support” for parents or guardians of a student who is called or ordered to active duty. The legislation provides the student and parent/guardian with access to certified school counselors, psychologists, school social workers or home visitors, and is supposed to also provide the student and parent/guardian with information regarding existing federal and state military support services and “any other service, agency, or resource necessary to support or provide assistance to the student, parent, or guardian” (HB 2052).

Per the legislation, the Department of Education is to coordinate with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to carry this out; however, little to no information is available on the ways in which the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania manages and promotes this degree of support. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or committee should serve in a role to promote this cross-agency collaboration and ensure that students and families receive the programs and services to which they are entitled. The school liaison or committee is responsible for ensuring that the basic requirements of this legislation are fulfilled. At this time, no known processes are in place to support the parameters established in HB 2052.

Goal #4 involves the successful implementation of a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). Upon notification of deployment, the school will host an in-person
meeting with the parents, classroom teacher, principal, school counselor, and Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison to review available resources and establish a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). Generally, the initial meeting should occur prior to the actual mobilization; however, if the deployed parent is not able to attend as a result of pre-deployment training, then a videoconference will satisfy this requirement. The Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) is a deployment specific individualized education plan and should be used to establish the needs and expectations of all parties involved. The initial needs based assessment will assist families and school staff with accessing appropriate resources and promoting real-time resilience in response to military related stresses. Follow-up meetings should be scheduled at monthly intervals throughout the deployment period, beginning upon notification of the deployment and continuing three months past the deployed parent’s release from active duty.

**Resources Needed**

Goal #1 is to distribute a survey to all students to give parents the chance to voluntarily provide information regarding their military status and/or degree of military-connectedness. Resources for the survey include an individual willing to design the survey with sufficient time and access to a computer-based software program as well as the means of printing and distributing. The survey should be simple, in plain language, and be easily reproducible year after year.

Goal #2 is to establish a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison to serve as a point of contact for all military-connected students and families at the school. This position should be filled with a teacher with experience working with military-connected students or service connected families or committee.
Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or committee will sponsor a group for military-connected students and facilitate support meetings for students and families impacted by deployment during the school year. The researcher will serve as a direct point of contact to this individual/committee and address any questions, concerns, or issues as it may arise. The group should include military-connected students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff along with a special invitation to parents. The liaison or committee will determine the location of the meeting, which is recommended to be held in a common area at the school like the library or cafeteria. The liaison or committee may invite military family readiness specialists or other community military-support organizations. At a minimum, the school should be expected to provide a projector, computer, and access to the internet for each meeting.

Goal #3 is to provide continuing education opportunities that directly address military-connectedness and provide resources that teachers can access throughout the deployment period. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison will also provide education on tools, services, and resources available to military-connected families during deployment, activation, or call to active duty. Staying Strong with Schools is a program specifically designed to support military-connected families living in civilian communities and attending civilian schools. The curriculum of this program was specifically designed to help parents and educators of the military-connected student. It is recommended that all teachers, staff, and administrators participate in the training.

Goal #4 involves the successful implementation of a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). Upon notification of deployment, the school will host an in-person meeting with the parents, classroom teacher, principal, school counselor, and Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison to review available resources and establish a
Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). The Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) is a deployment specific individualized education plan and should be used to establish the needs and expectations of all parties involved.

The resources needed to successfully implement the proposed solution consist of the development and implementation of a data collection tool to determine military-connectedness, the assignment of a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison, and the development and implementation of a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). Procuring the needed resources will also require collecting tangible resources, identifying staff and parent volunteers, and sufficient time to adequately prepare. Professional development is also a much needed resource that will give the administration, teachers, and staff the opportunity to develop a shared knowledge and understanding of both the military-life experience and challenges faced by the military-connected family during times of deployment.

Identifying the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison at the school is the first priority since they are to serve as the primary point of contact and will act as a liaison between the family, school, and community. Additionally, this person is critical in the development of key resources, which will include a data collection tool to determine military-connectedness and the Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP).

**Funds Needed**

At this time, no additional funds are required to support this solution. However, should the budget allow, it is recommended that the teacher volunteering or assigned as the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison be awarded an annual stipend of no less than $1,000 per school year. Decisions to fund this position are left to the school and district and any decisions should be based on budgetary allowances and constraints. Additionally, the stipend
amount is subject to school and district-based approval and the per school year amount is only a recommendation.

To the benefit of all parties involved, all other required resources are publicly available at no cost to the school or military family. These resources are primarily available on online, however some are also available in print. The resources required to best serve families are unique and vary from family to family and deployment to deployment, so no parameters should be set to limit the scope of resources. Proper collaboration with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, military branch specific organizations, and other community-based support agencies will provide the necessary access to these no-cost websites, pamphlets, and training materials.

The Military Child Education Coalition, available at https://www.militarychild.org, seeks to support military-connected children through the challenges of military related stresses by educating, advocating, and collaborating. Military OneSource, accessible at http://www.militaryonesource.mil, is a site providing a range of services and resources for the military-connected family. Military OneSource now also contains all information provided to National Guard Service members through Joint Services Support. The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program is another useful and publicly available website, available at https://www.yellowribbon.mil, that provides helpful information to National Guard and Reserve families and communities. These websites provide numerous links to content and resources that are easily accessible. Additionally, Family Support Assistants are regionally employed to assist in connecting service members and families to essential community based resources. The researcher confirmed that there is a Family Support Assistant that covers the region and has provided the school with the contact information.
Roles and Responsibilities

In order to help improve non-deployed parent involvement, the solution requires collaboration across home, school, and community. The non-deployed parent, classroom teacher, principal, school guidance counselor, and Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison all share responsibility to promote the implementation of these goals. Partnership involving educators and families is critical for a military family especially during deployments (Epstein, 2011). Communities are also critical within the sphere of influence and serve to support families by providing opportunities that help parents support and encourage their children. The overlapping spheres of influence are especially critical for military-connected families during extended periods of parental absence because they can positively influence the across dimensions of family (home), school and community (Astor, et al., 2013). Military children and their families are dynamic participants in their environments, so for a community of care to be established it is imperative to consider all of the interactions that extend across multiple systems and also those that include families and communities across time (Epstein, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Kudler & Porter, 2013).

Goal #1 is to distribute a survey to all students to give parents the chance to voluntarily provide information regarding their military status and/or degree of military-connectedness. The principal, school guidance counselor, and two teachers should share in the role of creating the survey. The principal is responsible for determining the appropriate method for distributing, collecting, and reporting the data. Initial responsibility for creating and distributing the survey is shared, however the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison should expect to manage the responsibility thereafter. It is important to note that the liaison role may be an
individual or committee. If school elects to share the responsibility, it is recommended that the committee include a combination of teachers, staff, and administrators.

Goal #2 is to establish a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or establish a committee to serve as a point of contact for all military-connected students and families at the school. This position should be filled with a teacher or combination of teachers, staff, and administrators with experience working with military-connected students or service connected families. The researcher will serve as a direct point of contact to this individual/committee and address any questions, concerns, or issues as they may arise. The group should include military-connected students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff along with a special invitation to parents.

Goal #3 is to provide continuing education opportunities that directly address military-connectedness and provide resources that teachers can access throughout the deployment period. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or military support committee will provide education on the tools, services, and resources available or facilitate access to these items for military-connected families during deployment, activation, or call to active duty.

Goal #4 involves the successful implementation of a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). Upon notification of deployment, the school will host an in-person meeting with the parents, classroom teacher, principal, school counselor, and Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison to review available resources and establish a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). The Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) is a deployment specific individualized education plan and should be used to establish the needs and expectations of all parties involved.
Timeline

This program should begin during the first quarter of the 2021-2022 school year with the Goal #1 distribution of a form/survey allowing parents to communicate their family’s military status/degree of military-connectedness. Also, during this time, a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or committee should be identified. Immediately following the identification of the military-connected students and Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison, the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison should begin working to gather resource materials through Department of Military and Veterans Affairs representatives and other community based military support organizations, as well as drawing on the knowledge and experience already present within the school. Goal #4 involves the successful implementation of a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) and should be carefully developed after resource materials have been gathered. A detailed timeline is located in Appendix G.

Solution Implications

If proven effective the proposed solution will identify the military-connected student, promote awareness and support, increase communication, promote access to resources, and hopefully reduce the number of military-related stressors experienced during the deployment period. The responsibility to support the military-connected student and family is a shared responsibility that extends across school, home, and community so no single individual will hold all the responsibility. The school will be required to take a more proactive approach, which may be burdensome initially, but following implementation will require little effort to continue to the program and support the student and family.
The resources required to support and implement this proposed solution are all publicly available and free for use. This includes resources made available directly through the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs as well as those available through community-based military support partners. Funding of the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison position will incentivize participation in the program and reward the volunteer for their service to the military-connected student and family, school, and community. There are varying roles and responsibilities that extend across the home, school, and community environments. Individuals across the home, school, and community environments who assume roles and accept responsibilities increases awareness and build a structured platform of support for the military-connected student and family. There is a great opportunity to create a strong collaborative relationship and establish a warm and responsive community of care. The proposed timeline establishes a general framework from which the school may use to target key goals throughout the implementation of the proposed solution. The benefit of adhering to the recommended timeline is that it aligns with the school calendar and provides all invested parties a framework for implementation. The timeline is not rigid or fixed and this flexibility offers the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison a broad avenue of approach to accomplish the proposed tasks, however the available time and resources can be considered negative as well.

The most challenging part of accessing resources will be gathering and compiling the external resources from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and community-based military support partners. The stipend recommended to fund the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison position may place constraints on the available budget, but it is important to note that the funding of this position is not a requirement and
merely serves as a reimbursement benefit for work performed in the role. Finding individuals to serve a role and assume responsibilities to support the military-connected student and family may be a challenge at first, but the proper promotion of this collaborative initiative will effectively get the right individuals in the proper roles. The timeline is plausible, but coordination challenges may delay the proposed plan, which will interrupt the alignment with the current calendar year school schedule. Despite the challenges and risk of pitfalls, the negative implications are not substantive and do not appear significant enough to impede progress.

**Evaluation Plan**

A goal-based evaluation plan should be used to assess the effectiveness of the solution to the problem. The ultimate goal is to improve non-deployed parent involvement so each goal was carefully developed to resolve the problems limiting involvement. The evaluation plan is used to measure the success of implementing the proposed solution by achieving the goals below. Goal #1 is to distribute a survey to all students to give parents the chance to voluntarily provide information regarding their military status and/or degree of military-connectedness. The survey should be evaluated to determine that it is requesting the right information, it is easy to read and respond to, and the methods for collecting and storing the data are adequate. The principal is responsible for assessing the survey and providing permission for distribution. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or committee will determine if survey distribution/collection was successful and evaluate based on the total number of complete and returned surveys.

Goal #2 is to establish a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison to serve as a point of contact for all military-connected students and families at the school. This position could be filled with a teacher with experience working with military-connected students
or service connected families. The principal is primarily responsible for advertising and selecting this person/committee. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison applicants or committee will be evaluated to assess individual qualifications based on the following criteria: previous experience working with military-connected students or families, previous experience having a student whose parent is deployed, basic knowledge of differences in military branches, and a willingness to develop a comprehensive program school based program for military-connected students and families. If a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or committee is successfully chosen then the individual/committee will advance to Goal #3. If no one is selected to serve in this role, the principal will announce the position again and may elect to assign the duty to the school guidance counselor.

Goal #3 is to provide continuing education opportunities that directly address military-connectedness and provide resources that teachers can access throughout the deployment period. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison will also provide education on tools, services, and resources available to military-connected families during deployment, activation, or call to active duty. The principal and Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or committee will be directly responsible for providing continuing education opportunities to all teachers, staff, and administrators. Evaluation of Goal #3 should include no less than a survey of parents and deployed spouses, as well as teachers and other school personnel, to determine the effectiveness of the training, assess the number of education sessions, determine the number of people who attended or participated in each event, and general data collection of unmet/unaddressed needs or concerns. Goal #3 is ongoing and will require continuous evaluation of resources, tools, websites, and contact information. Furthermore, the
liaison or committee should be prepared for continuous evaluations of all resources, tools, websites and contact information to determine effectiveness, appropriateness and overall fit. Since resources change and may improve over time, it is important to reassess no less than once per school year. The principal, Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison or committee should expect to collect and make available no less than 15 resources (websites, guides, checklists, etc.) and schedule a minimum of one continuing education presentation during the school year.

Goal #4 involves the successful implementation of a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). The parents, classroom teacher, principal, school counselor, and Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison all have a direct and vested interest in the deployment and implementation of the Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). The Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) is a deployment specific individualized education plan and should be used to establish the needs and expectations of all parties involved. The principal is the person primarily responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of the DCESP, but considerable input is derived from teachers, counselors, parents, and community partners. The evaluation criteria of the DCESP should include an assessment of the total number of meetings held along with a survey to parents and teachers regarding the overall effectiveness of the DCESP, the appropriateness of the resources offered, and a review of the ways in which the DCESP helped the student during the deployment period. The DCSEP should be reviewed and endorsed by the principal, guidance counselor, school psychologist, and no less than three teachers.

The evaluation plan will be managed directly by the school and district with data collected and analyzed primarily by the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network
Liaison. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison will create a checklist and assessment tool built from proposed timeline and request input throughout the implementation period. The checklist will be developed from the timeline. Feedback will be gathered throughout the implementation of the solution, to include a direct needs assessment, the development of a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP), and monthly meetings scheduled throughout the deployment period. The criterion will follow the timeline and the researcher will be available throughout the implementation process as a resource.

The central research question for this applied study was “How can parental involvement be improved for deployed military families at a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania?”, therefore successful implementation of the proposed solution is designed to show improved parental involvement for military families. The proposed solutions are separated into four goals, further divided into phases, which are evaluated based on achieving the proposed markers of each identified goal. Phase #1 will occur during the first part of the school year (August and September) and be evaluated based on the following criteria: the successful implementation of a survey tool to identify military-connectedness, the identification of a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison, and finally the establishment of a group for military-connected students and facilitate support meetings for students and families impacted by deployment during the school year. Phase #2 will be evaluated based on the successful development of the Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) through working groups held during the months of October, November and December. Additionally, The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison will prepare to provide education on tools, services, and resources available to military-connected families during deployment, activation, or call to active duty.
Phase #3 will occur January – May of the school year and will be evaluated based on the Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison’s degree of communication and collaboration with the Department of Military and Veteran’s Affairs representatives, Family Support Assistants, and other community groups or organizations.

Phase #3 will also include the successful implementation of a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP). The Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) is a deployment specific individualized education plan and should be used to establish the needs and expectations of all parties involved. Successful implementation of the proposed solution should advance consecutively through each of the three phases of the evaluation criteria. The Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison, administration, and school staff will collectively determine the appropriate time to move to the next phase of implementation based on the conditions set forth in the evaluation plan. The researcher will remain available throughout the process to promote successful implementation and help mitigate any challenges identified during each phase.

This study addresses the problem directly, but there are obvious limitations. The first is the inclusion criteria for participants, which was limited to deployments within the last five years. There were many more teachers at this school with military-connected students who had a parent deploy, but most were longer than five years ago. The rationale for using this timeframe was to establish a more recent cohort, however, more could have been learned from the experiences of teachers who had students in the midst of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Any study addressing this in the future should consider including all teacher participants having a military-connected student but separate them into cohorts based on the timeframe or military deployment type and then conduct a comparison of experiences over time.
Much was learned from this study; however, the results are not transferable so additional research, on a broader scale, would inform the problem (should the problem exist), over a greater geographic distance. This study was delimited to one school, an elementary school; therefore, the results may not be applicable to other situations or settings. Furthermore, this study was also delimited to a single geographic area. Additionally, service member data like rank, years of service, and number of deployments may have influenced the manner in which the non-deployed parent experienced the deployment, and therefore not controlling for this may have added variables not accounted for in the analysis. The type of the tour may also influence the experiences of non-deployed parent and military-connected child. The study was limited in that it only included one male participant and data was limited having only one focus group and five interviews. Future research should carefully consider the apparent gaps in communication regarding benefits and available services and more deliberately target this disconnect on a larger broader scale.

**Summary**

The purpose of this applied study was to address the problem of limited parental involvement for military-connected students of reserve component (RC) military-connected families during periods of deployment. A multimethod approach was used to inform the problem and an analysis of the data from interviews, a focus group, and a teacher survey provided the researcher with enough information to propose a solution. Based on the research and proposed solution, Sunshine Elementary has the opportunity to resolve the problem and increase non-deployed parent involvement. This chapter provided a summation of the problem, was informed by the collected data, and recommended a reasonable solution to address the problem.
REFERENCES


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https://doi.org/10.1037/e526242012-001


APPENDIX A. IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 3, 2021

Joanne Toutt
Crisitne McElvany

Re: IRB Application – IRB-21-02-01 SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF LIMITED PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT FOR RESERVE COMPONENT MILITARY FAMILIES DURING DEPLOYMENT

Dear Joanne Toutt and Crisitne McElvany,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46.102(b).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word "research" with the word "project" throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application’s status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MIA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Solving the Problem of Limited Parental Involvement for Reserve Component Military Families During Deployment
Principal Investigator: Jolene M. Trout, M. Ed., ABD

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Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must have/have had a military-connected student whose parent has experienced a deployment within the past five years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

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What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to determine the factors that may negatively impact parental involvement during a deployment and formulate a solution. This study will focus on how promoting parental involvement can benefit the military family during deployment.

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What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a brief 22 question survey, which should take no more than 10 minutes.
2. Participate in a semi-structured interview. The interview would be recorded and a transcript of the interview will be made available to you within 5 days of the interview for you to review. The interview will last no longer than 30 minutes.
3. Participate in a focus group with military-connected parents. The focus group will be recorded and transcribed. The focus group will last no longer than 1 hour.

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How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

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What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.
How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted. All hard copy data will be stored in a locked cabinet and shredded after three years.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- The focus group discussion will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Survey and Interview recording and transcriptions will remain strictly confidential. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Jolene M. Trout. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [email protected] or [phone number]. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. McClelland, at [email protected]
Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_________________  ___________________
Printed Subject Name

_________________  ___________________
Signature & Date
APPENDIX C. PERMISSION

2 March 2021

Jolene Marie Trout
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

[Redacted]

Dear Mrs. Trout:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled Solving the Problem of Limited Parental Involvement for Reserve Component Military Families during Deployment, I grant you permission to conduct your research study at [Redacted] Elementary School in partial fulfillment of the requirements necessary for the completion of your doctoral degree. I have reviewed your proposal as submitted.

In coordinating your efforts with the building principal, you are granted access to the facilities and school building as necessary to conduct your research. The ability for you obtain necessary demographic information for the purposes of this study is also granted through access to with the building principal or his designee. It is also further understood that pseudonyms will be used in identifying the school building and/or district. Any identifying information related to students and/or parents will not be reported within the study but may be retained by you in accordance with Liberty University IRB protocols to aid you in further study if necessary. Summary demographic information is allowable and encouraged in support of your research and findings.

On behalf of the school district and its military connected families, I wish you the best of luck in conducting your research. It would be appreciated that results of your findings be shared with the district at an appropriate time in order to learn from your research and to improve quality of life for the student we serve.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Coordinating Principal

*“Now, Engage and Assess… Every Child, Every Day*
APPENDIX D. ORIGINAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

Parent & Teacher Involvement - Teacher Questionnaire (ORIGINAL)

1. How often has this child’s parent called you in the past year?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

2. How often have you called this child’s parent in the past year?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

3. How often has this child’s parent written you a note in the past year?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

4. How often have you written a note to this child’s parent in the past year?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

5. How often has this child’s parent stopped by to talk to you in the past year?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

6. How often has this child’s parent been invited to visit your school for a special event in the past year?
7. How often has this child’s parent visited your school for a special event (book fair) in the past year?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

8. How often has this child’s parent been invited to attend a parent-teacher conference in the past year?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

9. How often has this child’s parent attended a parent-teacher conference in the past year?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

10. How often has this child’s parent been invited to attend PTA meetings in the past year?
    a. Never
    b. Once or Twice a Year
    c. Almost Every Month
    d. Almost Every Week
    e. More Than Once Per Week

11. How often has this child’s parent been to PTA meetings in the past year?
    a. Never
    b. Once or Twice a Year
    c. Almost Every Month
    d. Almost Every Week
    e. More Than Once Per Week

12. How much is this parent interested in getting to know you?
a. Not At All  
b. A Little  
c. Some  
d. A Lot  
e. A Whole Lot

13. How well do you feel you can talk to and be heard by this parent?  
a. Not At All  
b. A Little  
c. Some  
d. A Lot  
e. A Whole Lot

14. If you had a problem with this child, how comfortable would you feel talking to his/her parent about it?  
a. Not At All  
b. A Little  
c. Some  
d. A Lot  
e. A Whole Lot

15. How often does this parent ask questions or make suggestions about his/her child?  
a. Not At All  
b. A Little  
c. Some  
d. A Lot  
e. A Whole Lot

16. How much do you feel this parent has the same goals for his/her child that the school does?  
a. Not At All  
b. A Little  
c. Some  
d. A Lot  
e. A Whole Lot

17. How often does this parent send things to class like story books or objects?  
a. Not At All  
b. A Little  
c. Some  
d. A Lot  
e. A Whole Lot
18. To the best of your knowledge, how much does this parent do things to encourage this child’s positive attitude towards education (e.g. take him/her to the library, play games to teach child new things, read to him/her, help him/her make up work after being absent)?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. A Lot
   e. A Whole Lot

19. How often does this parent volunteer at school?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. A Lot
   e. A Whole Lot

20. How involved is this parent in his/her child’s education and school life?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. A Lot
   e. A Whole Lot

21. How important is education in this family?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. A Lot
   e. A Whole Lot
APPENDIX E. MODIFIED SURVEY QUESTIONS

Parent & Teacher Involvement - Teacher Questionnaire (MODIFIED)

AGE: _____ MALE/FEMALE: _____

1. What grade do you teach?
   a. Kindergarten
   b. First Grade
   c. Second Grade
   d. Third Grade

2. How long have you been a teacher at this school?
   a. 1 to 5 years
   b. 5-10 years
   c. 10-20 years
   d. More than 20 years

3. During your time as a teacher at this school, how many military-connected students have you had in your class?
   a. None
   b. 1
   c. 2-5
   d. 5 or more

4. During your time as a teacher at this school, how many military-connected students in your class have had a parent deploy during the school year?
   a. None
   b. 1
   c. 2-5
   d. 5 or more

Please respond to the following questions with your most recent experience with a military-connected student in your class:

5. How often did this child’s parent call you throughout the deployment cycle?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

6. How often did you call this child’s parent during the deployment cycle?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
7. How often did this child’s parent send in a note or email you during the deployment cycle?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

8. How often did you email or send notes home to this child’s parent during the deployment cycle?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

9. How often did this child’s parent stop by to talk to you during the deployment?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

10. How often was this child’s parent invited to visit your school for a special event during the deployment?
    a. Never
    b. Once or Twice a Year
    c. Almost Every Month
    d. Almost Every Week
    e. More Than Once Per Week

11. How often did this child’s parent visit your school for a special event during the deployment?
    a. Never
    b. Once or Twice a Year
    c. Almost Every Month
    d. Almost Every Week
    e. More Than Once Per Week
12. How often was this child’s parent invited to attend a parent-teacher conference during the deployment?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

13. How often did this child’s parent attend a parent-teacher conference during the deployment?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

14. How often was this child’s parent invited to attend PTA meetings during the deployment?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

15. How often did this child’s parent attend PTA meetings during the deployment?
   a. Never
   b. Once or Twice a Year
   c. Almost Every Month
   d. Almost Every Week
   e. More Than Once Per Week

16. How much was this parent interested in getting to know you?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. Interested
   e. Very Interested

17. How well do you feel you could talk to and be heard by this parent?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. Well
   e. Very Well
18. If you had a problem with this child, how comfortable did you feel talking to his/her parent about it?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. Comfortable
   e. Very Comfortable

19. How often did this parent ask questions or make suggestions about his/her child throughout the deployment cycle?
   a. Never
   b. Occasionally
   c. Sometimes
   d. Often
   e. Very Often

20. How much do you feel this parent had the same goals for his/her child that the school did?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. A Lot
   e. A Whole Lot

21. How often did this parent send things to class like story books or objects?
   a. Never
   b. Occasionally
   c. Sometimes
   d. Often
   e. Very Often

22. To the best of your knowledge, did this parent do things to encourage this child’s positive attitude towards education throughout the deployment cycle (e.g. take him/her to the library, play games to teach child new things, read to him/her, help him/her make up work after being absent)?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Some
   d. A Lot
   e. A Whole Lot

23. How often did this parent volunteer at school?
   a. Never
b. Occasionally
  c. Sometimes
  d. Often
  e. Very Often

24. How involved was this parent in his/her child’s education and school life prior to the deployment?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Somewhat
   d. Involved
   e. Very Much Involved

25. How involved was this parent in his/her child’s education and school life throughout the deployment?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Somewhat
   d. Involved
   e. Very Much Involved

26. How important is education in this family?
   a. Not At All
   b. A Little
   c. Somewhat
   d. A Lot
   e. A Whole Lot
APPENDIX F: SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

J: Good afternoon Mrs. M. Thank you so much for your agreeing to participate in this research. I will begin with the first question: How are you informed when a military-connected student in your classroom has a parent that is or will deploy?

M: Honestly, it depends – but we usually don’t know anything about it until the parent says something or if the child is acting differently or has a problem or seems distracted. Parents may chose to share that they or the other parent are in the military, a lot of times it doesn’t come up unless there is a reason. It’s almost like a completely separate part of life. We always have a veterans day program in November and invite our local veterans to the school for a presentation. I am usually always surprised by the number of young parents that show up. I.. I don’t think that we discourage families from sharing that they are in the military or are connected to military service in some way, but I definitely don’t think that we go out of our way to acknowledge it. Here we have a lot of reserve units close by and do a lot of parades and things, and celebrate veterans, but I guess, I mean I don’t think its intentional that we don’t pinpoint those with a military connection.

What steps do you take to prepare yourself, the military-connected student, and non-deployed parent?

For the deployment you mean? I think it just depends. Every family and every child are so different. Me knowing basic information about the military… that, that helps me feel more comfortable talking, but I don’t specifics about anything. It is like a totally different world, honestly, I just … I guess I wouldn’t know where to start. Around veterans day we always discuss military service but its always very basic and general information about service and sacrifice. I am always hesitant to ask too many questions because I don’t want to burden the
parents, but there is a lot that I just don’t know. I need to talk to the parent to know what the child is dealing with … and I try to make a point, when I when that they are leaving, to put together a plan and even talk to mom or dad – both if I can get them together and discuss how we are going to handle things and in general how it will work.

*What changes in the military-connected student’s behavior did you notice in the months leading up to, during or immediately following the deployment?*

I have had very different experiences with parents and a lot of very different experiences with the kids in my class who have had a parent deploy. There are so many things that I think go in to how the kid will handle it. I had a boy and I think it was his step-dad that deployed … it was the beginning of the year and I didn’t really know what to expect from the child because I didn’t have enough time to really get to know him very. I spoke with the teacher from the previous year – it helped some I guess, but building a relationship with a student under so much stress was hard. He was withdrawn and seemed to lack interest in just about everything. I was glad that we schedule regular conference in the beginning of the year because I got the chance to talk to mom who told me that dad … well step-dad was getting deployed. The family didn’t get a lot of time to prepare and that really, almost, shocked the whole system. I guess he was an extra or something and wasn’t supposed to go initially, but had been alerted and then someone got hurt or sick or something and couldn’t go so then he had to. I don’t know exactly what the story was, but it was hard on all of them – but most on Nate … well, I guess, I mean it seemed that way.

1. *How often and to what degree did the non-deployed parent communicate with you and the school during the time leading up to the deployment, during the deployment, and immediately following the deployment?*
Well, like I said, it was the beginning of the year so I really didn’t have much to go off of – the communication was normal, it wasn’t anything really – that stuck out to me for any reason I guess. His teacher from last year told me that mom was pretty involved and emailed … so I tried that – I figured that email was probably the easiest for her to deal with on her time – when she had time. I know that she worked a different schedule that probably made it hard for her to reply, but she would usually get back to me pretty quickly. If I didn’t hear from her then I would send a note home in his folder and then I would usually get something back in a day or two. I tried not to call unless I had to – but – but there were times when I needed permission slips or other things were due. I tried to pay attention and send more reminders home – I mean, I know that she was dealing with a lot – so I wanted to just, to I wanted to make sure that he had what he needed and if that meant that I had to send a few more reminders – well, well that’s what I did.

2. Can you describe the non-deployed parent’s ability to cope with the deployment?

I wish I had known her – honestly it was hard to really know. I didn’t interact with her much before the husband got deployed and so I really just didn’t have a lot to go off of. I think she coped alright, but that a hard one. I mean, I don’t really know what life was like for her before – she was seemed guarded, but was there for son. She did try – I really feel like she was making an effort, but it just seemed from whole that there was a lot going on and I know that she was busy and things were – were probably a mess. I mean, I don’t really know what that would be like – I couldn’t imagine having to suddenly deal with all of the things going on at home without having help … just all of a sudden, I mean I know that single parent families do it all the time, but that’s different in a way, I guess – I mean different stress and yea, I guess that being there then being gone and then coming back again would be really hard to deal with – I don’t think that I could deal with that
3. How involved was the non-deployed parent with organized school-related activities before, during and immediately following the deployment?

Like I said, I didn’t get a whole lot of time to get to know her before the deployment and then during she seemed very busy with life in general. There wasn’t much time for her to, you know, do other stuff – which I completely understand. I would think that

4. Describe the most challenging part of the deployment experience?

The most challenging for me, I guess, was just not quite knowing what it was that I could do to be helpful and how I could be most helpful during… during that time to the child. I mean, I would gladly help the whole family if there was something that I could do, but I found myself asking a lot of extra questions trying to make sure that they were ok – but – I mean, it was mostly for me, you know, to see if there was something I could. I guess looking back its just different, you know, now I can see that asking what I could do to help is impossible if you don’t really know what will help. Being in the situation and living through it and working through it – well that helped me understand more and get better with it, but I don’t really know that I could have prepared more because I didn’t know what to prepare for - you know, everyone was very helpful here – I asked some of the teachers who were in military before and they provided insight, but even they said that things change constantly and really to just be prepared for anything, which I mean, that’s really vague – I guess if you are used to change like that it isn’t so bad, but that hard to deal with. I think having dad gone was the most challenging for the family – I think he was pretty involved and that meant that there was a lot of stuff that needed done that had to fall on mom. She was stressed and when I talked to her seemed to be moving in a thousand directions all at once and going full speed – I don’t know if I ever really got a chance to see her when she wasn’t rushing … like she seemed that she just couldn’t get ahead of things in a way, I don’t
know – my interactions were always brief. We had some academic issues and I would send notes home, but I really felt guilty to add on another thing, but I needed some help from home – I really tried everything, but he just wasn’t getting it and I didn’t know what else to do to help him get to where I needed him to be and not fall behind too far. I mean, I guess that was my major concern – that he would fall behind and I didn’t want to see him do that. He was average student to start – wanted to learn, but wasn’t too eager, but when he got distracted I completely lost him and it seemed like that started before he got to school – getting him to focus was hard some days. I would try a lot of different things to get him back on task – the calendar we made seemed to help the most. We tracked important dates and dad coming home was one of them… it was, it was sort of like a goal – getting to dad coming home and that helped when we needed to establish when things were due or set goals.

5. What tools, knowledge, and resources did you use to help the military-connected child and family through the challenges of the deployment cycle?

I relied a lot on the teacher he had the year before – just to gauge what was right and wrong or what seemed off a little. I didn’t really like the idea of not knowing him or the family that well. I cant really say if or even how much he might have changed over the summer – you I just wasn’t too sure what baseline looked like. I also talked to the teachers who had spent some time serving in the military and those that had other military kids or even knew someone who knew someone who was in the military. It was a real struggle though – sometimes, cause I didn’t know really who to talk or even what questions to ask at the time. We had a presenter come a few years ago and talk to the teachers about military service and that was good – it definitely matched what I experienced and I learned a few things, but I wish that was one of the things that was taught sooner.
6. What did you do to increase or maintain parent involvement in the weeks leading up to, during, or immediately following the deployment?

I reached out to mom – I sent notes home, emailed a good bit, and called a few times, but I don’t know if what I was doing was actually helping mom stay involved or want to be involved or any of that. I kinda feel like I walked in half way into the game and I don’t know that I really felt adequate enough to do what I needed to do. I mean, we have kids that have single parent homes, and I know how to navigate that a little better, but something that is short term, but with different types of stress going on – it was just different, I guess.

7. How would you describe the impact that the deployment had on the family as a whole?

It definitely impacted them – I feel like they all felt it, but maybe in a slightly different way. There was a lot of heartache and I know that was hard for them, but I honestly think that mom got stronger through it and well, maybe they all did, but it definitely wasn’t something that was an easy experience. I know that there was certainly a lot of emotions and I saw some at school, but I could just tell it weighing heavy on the whole family. I wanted to do more – I wanted to help more, but I felt caught somewhere in the middle – like mom was afraid to ask for help or maybe thought that I thought less – I am not sure, but I felt stuck somewhere in the middle of being helpful and just adding more stress. I tried my hardest to focus on the family, but really keep him on track. Emotionally we had ups and downs and worked through them and academically we just did what we could to get through it and stay on track. When dad got back though, it seemed like it all bounced back pretty quickly – the mood changed a good bit.
APPENDIX G: SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

P3: Well, well … when my wife deployed, she had a really hard time keeping track of the kids progress… she wanted to see and still know what was going on in school, but it was, it was hard because the security stuff on the internet where she was wouldn’t let her access the school website.

P4: Yea, I know what you mean. We saw a lot of that in general when we tried to communicate early on in the deployment. It improved, but they had server issues or something

P1: I guess for us, it was really hard for me to get my kids to extra-curricular activities cause of transportation issues and non-stop scheduling crap … teachers don’t have to deal with that … I mean the conflicts – they never ended it seemed.

P3: I felt like I was running and never got ahead. Everyone was going in eight different directions all at once and it was hard for me to prioritize and be everywhere and do everything by myself.

P2: Yes!! I know what you mean, it was a race that I never finished … the dumb finish like just kept moving on me. It was so annoying for me – and I only had one kid

P5: Having a parent gone, like that, for so long, for such an extended period of time, oh, it definitely affected our whole family. It was hard for me because, like you said, I had to rearrange my whole schedule – my whole life really --- to fit in full-time work and full-time parenting.

P3: I wasn’t used to it – I mean it eventually got easier, but I think I had to let go of my ego and ask for help. The kids also really missed having mom around for social activities and school projects. I mean, I can glue and stuff, but I am not the parent that they would go to for that stuff.
P1: I was already the main caretaker – I guess you would say, but it was still hard not having my husband around. I guess I took for granted a lot of the things that he did that I didn’t notice. But let me tell you we noticed and my son noticed and he would remind me a lot that “that’s not the way Dad does it”.

P2: I think that the teacher probably notices changes in the child’s behavior, and has to find ways to deal with it, but it is only during school hours – I had a big issue because my husband was always bad cop and so I had to play bad cop and good cop and neutral cop … and it was exhausting.

T1: As a teacher, I think that we are more worried about making sure that the kiddos are ok, but the emotional turmoil and emotional hardship is much more – much worse for the parents and the kids and that’s just on a completely different level.

P4: Yes, the worrying is real. I mean, every deployment is different and some of them I joked that my husband got a vacation because it never seemed like it was so bad, but I know that he also tried to keep me from worrying.

P5: Yea, I know, and I tried to keep the kids from worrying and so I think that no matter what everyone in the situation is trying to make it seem like everything is ok and no one should worry even though deep down you always do.

P4: Yes, I agree. My husband has deployed to very different places over the, over the … the years and some were for combat tours and his life was in danger and the threat was real and I think I got to a point where I just accepted it and went a little numb to how bad it was because I was driving myself crazy … you, I guess, you just don’t can’t think about it all the time. I know my
kids picked up on it and tried… I tried really hard not to let them see that I was scared, but it would hit me

T2: The challenges faced by kids and you guys … the parents, I mean, it does differ from the challenges faced by the teachers, school and staff and … the principal.. in especially when you think about how the deployment affects the day-to-day living stuff. For you and your family … your family, living without the help of a deployed parent can have much bigger effects and make it far more difficult to figure out the day to day stuff … to accomplish the daily tasks and chores and other obligations, especially if young children are involved.

T4: I think that there … there is also often a lot … sometimes a whole lot … more raw emotion and conflict that the family has to face… with deployment… than we have to deal with as teachers. I mean we see it in the classroom for sure, but kids are able to focus on other stuff … and we can distract them with activities or tasks or walks and talks down the hallway, but parents, you all deal with that in a much different way.

T3: Yea, I definitely think it all matters together … though, like the support and counseling or resources or whatever that we can give you help with are incredibly important and honestly necessary to keep everybody on the same page and focused on the same goals … especially when we are talking about the help with emotional, social, and psychological well-being of the child … and our student.

T2: Right, Cause bottom line we care … we really do

P1: oh  I definitely saw that .. I know you cared a lot
T1: Right, I agree, I mean these kiddos are like my own my kids and I always want to make sure that I am here for them and that we’re - - we’re taking care of them the way that we should - you know – getting them all of the things that we need and being there for the parents too.

P4: Yes, yea, I know for us, I appreciated having that from my the teacher - I mean, it was hard for me to admit, but I did need the extra help and extra reminders … and sometimes I just didn’t know what I didn’t know or maybe didn’t even see it cause I was all over the place and just .. just wasn’t thinking right -

As a parent at this school, what do teachers, school staff and administrators need to know about deployment, the deployment experience, the military-connected student and non-deployed parent?

P3: I think it is important to realize that the child may struggle for a long time after the parent deploys… and in a lot of different ways too. Like academically and socially.

P4: My oldest would start the day off great and then it was a quick downhill in the afternoon. He would lose focus and get really distracted in the afternoons – his teacher tried so hard to keep him on track and then my the time he got home, he was all over the place, physically and emotionally.

P2: Honestly, I think that it had a lot to do with the fact that he didn’t have his dad to talk to before bed or in the morning or after school and we could usually be distracted enough in the morning to get the day started pretty good, but then I think it all hit him pretty quickly as the day went on.

P4: Yes, we saw that too, a lot -
P2: His emotions were a mess too – he was somewhere between being a generally happy kid to mad or frustrated with everything to just wanted to go sit in his room and play Legos. I don’t think that his friends understood why he was different sometimes and he had a lot of friend issues cause he was hot and then cold with them.

P4: I definitely agree, I also think it is important, when you talk about all those emotions to understand that kids don’t always show their pain like adults. That isn’t always the case cause my husband still can’t figure out his emotions…no offense…but guys are lumps sometimes …

P3:haha, none taken – you’re right in a lot of ways – as my wife

P4: but I mean kids just don’t have all the tools they need to really understand what they feel and they are terrible at talking about it and even worse if you ask the wrong questions trying to find out what’s wrong.

P5: Haha, I know  I start talking about something – they close up and act like I am a lunatic for even bringing something up and then fast forward out of nowhere 3 hours later my kid is curled up crying on my lap and can’t even figure out exactly what it is that they are upset about.

P1: As a parent it can make you crazy – it like trying to put a band-aid on a boo-boo that you can’t even find and every place you put it your kid says “no mommy, not there” … here?... “no mommy, not there”… here? … “no”.

P4: Deployments or mobilizations or even really long schools are crappy because communication with Joe was sporadic and sometimes didn’t even occur for days or even weeks at time.
P1: If we talked everyday and there was a schedule and we expected the conversation then that was ok, and things were good, but if we went without talking for a while then starting to talk again was hard because there was a whole lot of emotion that neither Bill or I knew exactly how to handle. He felt bad because he felt like the cause of the stress, but at the same time was the relief to the stress and until we finally got it figured out it was really frustrating and chaotic for us all.

T3: There is a lot of fear and sadness and stress and most of the time it is super hard to figure out what is the actual cause and what is just an honest by-stander.

P4: Yes, I completely understand that. It was hard for my kids at first because they fought with each other a lot … they did eventually learn to “fight” together and sort of joined together.

P2: I know being an only child and then being one of the only ones in a class or even in the whole school would be really hard.

P3: My kids had each other, but I know there are some kids who really have to go it alone. I feel like my kids and I – we – we joined together and learned to work together and support each, but it took a while I guess – for us to each learn our place and our part.

P1: I think, I think that the length of the deployment matters too .. and understanding that can help plan because sometimes you have lots of time to plan and other times you don’t and then sometimes … just you know, it’s just different, but I think knowing that would help a little I guess.

T4: I think some teachers are just, I don’t know, maybe a little scared to ask questions or afraid to ask the wrong questions, I’m no too sure but, but I think if you can talk more then you’ll probably understand more, I don’t know
P1: Everybody needs to know what the resources are – who can help and how they can help… there are people and things out there – groups and things like FRGs or those family support people that call you once a month - they can assist the family through deployment and connect them to things – you know -

T3: I think it is important knowing … knowing that a that a child is facing a parent deployment, maybe some of the other students need to have some training, or I don’t know, maybe be given some information about the deployment or the military or something along those lines, and … or maybe receive counseling about how to help a friend going through this.

T5: I think as a teacher, I think that we need to also need to have a certain level of understanding about respecting the family's privacy, but really being able to help and support and just lending help if possible to the family

As teachers, school staff and administrators at this school, what should the family know and understand about the schools available supports and resources for the military-connected family during deployment?

P2: I was unfamiliar with support resources at school. If these resources exist, they should be included in a communication package when a student identifies that they have a parent that is deploying.

P3: If the school has any type of counseling for children dealing with changes in their family unit the school should advertise it not just for children with deployed parents but for any other children whose family unit may be going through some change.

P1: Well, I think, I think that there needs, needs to be a meeting, even if it’s initially just between the teacher, principal, and parent, like “this is what we want to do to help you, we’ll find the
resources, we will help you deal, we’ll get through this together sort of thing … and parents just need to keep us informed and let us know what the needs are.

T3: Right, if there is little or no communication and then if mom or dad isn’t present as much then it is hard to know what’s needed or to even see where the problem is … or problems are.

T4: So I would say, just keep in touch with us and we’ll do the same and know that we are really in this together and that we support you and have no idea how hard it is, but that we want to make sure that you and the kids get through it – not just that you are sending your kids in everyday, but that the school actually cares and wants to help

T2: Yea, definitely communication is key. Like, I think it is important to talk about what you know and maybe even who all in the school do you want to know that mom or dad is deploying. Like, who can we tell, just special class teachers or do you want all the teachers in the school to know and keep an eye out? I think its important to talk about that with the parents.

T4: From the standpoint of the teacher and really all of the school staff, the military family should know that the school has available supports and resources during deployment.

T3: Counselors, our staff … the administration should build a supportive unit to buffer these kiddos against the difficulties the family is going through

T5: I think too, that getting out … networking within the community, we should should have something that supports to the family in all aspects of the deployment… before, during, after … and then that way they can … sort of guide students to help them on a day-to-day basis.

**How do we maintain effective and meaningful communication with the non-deployed parent in the weeks leading up to, during, or immediately following the deployment?**
P2: Email was best for me. Or ClassDojo because I could take it with me wherever I went and I could also respond to it when I had a chance or remembered to. Google reminds you when you haven’t responded to an email in a while and I liked that cause there were times when I would just forget.

P1: I felt like a terrible parent if I forgot to send something in to school or dressed my kid for the wrong special class, but I eventually learned to over–prepare and not make the same dumb mistakes over and over – or at least I tried not to.

P5: Simple things – even small notes that said hey, Tyler is struggling with this or Ethan had a great day were really nice. I felt like I was always so busy that when someone else told me what they saw – it really helped. It made me feel a little less crazy even though I knew I was definitely crazy.

P3: Phone, email, video chats will help, because we may not have much time to visit in person.

T2: Yes, yea, I like email and the remind app works too, probably though phone calls, like you said time is hard to get and it's busy, but I like the idea of a weekly or bi-weekly checkin just to say hello and definitely don’t want to overwhelm, but talk to mom or dad at home and say “hey, I am thinking about you – are you doing alright?” more for reassurance than anything else.

P5: I did like that – when he deployed I needed to know who I could count on and trust and having …or I guess feeling like my kids were being looked out for was good, it meant a lot to me - I mean, I just needed to feel like even though we were going through some stuff and my kids kinda had a, a big flip, that they were still being looked after especially if someone else was seeing something I wasn’t.
P2: I tried to be super-mom … pretty sure I sucked, at it, hahahaha, but seriously I tried to get it all right and it helped that I knew my son’s teacher was helping

T2: For me it was a little different, I worried that I wasn’t doing everything that I needed to help the family – I didn’t want to be a bother or pester them or make it harder than it was and I certainly didn’t want to be too overbearing and burden with extra junk that they didn’t need … or probably want to deal with

T3: Right, I felt the same way and there were times when I got the feeling that the parents resented me a little or that they were extra sensitive and almost didn’t want me to see they were hurting or needed help – and I didn’t always feel right letting it go cause I know that they needed me

T5: I know what you mean – I really felt it hard to find balance

P3: It is really something to hear what it looked like from a different perspective – honestly you guys aren’t all that far off from what I felt … and I know I can’t speak for the other parents … but it was hard and I tried to look a lot stronger than I actually was some of the time

P2: Yea, me too – I wanted to prove I could do it … took me a while to figure out exactly what that really meant

P1: Oh, gee… I don’t know if I ever got it right, haha, just kidding, I did eventually, but it did take a while to sort through

T3: I truly felt like a failure at times and that I was almost going to fail the family and not do what I needed to do or that I was accidently going to miss something major and not be able to
adequately support – that was super hard for me… I think that I eventually found a balance but it did take a really long to figure out – at least in my mind I guess

T5: Right, it definitely challenged me – I felt awkward at times because I didn’t know

T1: All of that really helpful and truly meaningful communication with the parents… with home … all the time but really in the weeks leading up to and during and then after the the deployment … honestly, I feel like that is really important job … to stay in contact and then offer extra help if we can

T4: Right – I agree too, if we can help in different ways – especially in the counseling stuff or even open lines of communication or work to keep them open, honestly just be ready to assist the family whenever or however is needed.

T2: I like the idea of building peer or even small support groups and then hosting things or planning activities to involve the family and then that way everyone is on the same page and we can support the family and show teamwork.

P1: Yea, it helps when you don’t feel alone

P3: Right, I think that’s good for the kids - -

P4: Definitely agree too – I just wanted to not feel alone

*How do we maintain or increase diminishing non-deployed parent involvement in the weeks leading up to, during, or immediately following the deployment?*

P3: Not sure about this question. I have to say my involvement with the school completely diminished while my wife was deployed, I just did not have the time, the time I had I spent it
with my kids to make up for the absence. The teachers contacted me via phone or email and it worked, till it didn’t.

P2: I think this is a tough one … a lot of kids have different dynamics at home – the extended family is really important, but I think it still comes down to communication and just knowing what the heck is going on and then trying as best as possible to stay current and focused

P4: We are a proud military family and I think that this community really supports all of the men and women who serve. I definitely love driving past the memorials and always seeing flags

P5: Right, us too, they always have parades and we see the Legion and the VFW out and about

P1: The programs at the school while my husband was deployed was nice – even the veteran’s day program – my son’s teacher made a point to invite me and include me even though it really wasn’t for me, but she made me feel like I belonged there and that I was supporting my husband by being there in his place

T1: Teachers really have to realize that you aren’t just teaching that kid, but that you sorta get the whole the family – am I right?

T3: Oh absolutely, and I think we did kind of all get a sense of that… I mean, in a way, and if parents were involved but now they aren’t and they are struggling and things don’t seem right then maybe we need to come up with something for them to do … like little jobs… and not to give them something else to worry about, but maybe just something that they can do to feel sort of normal I guess. I don’t know but I think that it’s important.
T4: Yea, I agree, I think that you need to make that effort to keep parents involved and even though technically I guess that’s not really part of our job, but it sort of is, because the family changed and that means that it trickles down to the kids and they feel it all in some way.

T5: I think the school has … the school should keep in touch with the family and we need to watch for and observe behavior changes in our mil-connected kids and then be ready and willing to offer supports or counseling services when needed.

P1: I definitely think that we can do more – but it took me understanding the whole process before I really figured anything out.

P3: Right, I got really good and then everything changed again.

P2: I know what you mean – but that’s how we help each other. Even a small group like this where we sit around and just talk things through.

P4: yea, I wish I knew then what I know now – I would have helped myself a lot more.

P1: haha, yes, me too – If I could travel back in time I would definitely not stress over the stupid stuff like I did.

P2: if I had to do it again – I could – cause I know more now, but I can’t say that I want to.

P3: for me, everything was different and I always wondered what my spouse would say or do if she could see me fumbling through everything.

T1: well I admire all of you for what you did for your family.

T3: yes, I have to say that it definitely takes a strong person and a resilient family to deal with things like that – constant change and dangerous situations.
P2: for as bad as it can be at times, and as much as we went through, I am really proud of what my husband does

P1: yes, me too – it is part of who we are
### APPENDIX H. MID-LEVEL CATEGORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Mid-Level Categories</th>
<th>Initial Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistent/Deliberate/Effective</td>
<td><strong>Communication</strong></td>
<td>Effective and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>Intentional Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td><strong>Share Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending/Receiving Notes, Emails, Phone</td>
<td>Lack of knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls</td>
<td><strong>Barriers</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking a lot of questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not knowing what to say</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Didn’t know family well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting military-connected child</td>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td>Solution Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Strategies to involve parents</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the family</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing support for military</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to others w/experience or expertise</td>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in experiences</td>
<td>Problem-based solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in the student during deployment</td>
<td>Differences in Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in family during deployment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Limited interactions with non-deployed</td>
<td><strong>Limited time</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>parent</td>
<td>Limited resource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family dynamic before, during, and after</td>
<td>Available resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deployment</td>
<td>Access to resource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing for limited time/resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Resources</td>
<td>Providing/Asking for Help</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temporary absence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Degree of helpfulness</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unaware until absence occurs</td>
<td><strong>What is helping?</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wanting to be helpful</strong></td>
<td><strong>Care/Concern for well-being</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of not doing/helping enough</td>
<td><strong>Guilt</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping/over-helping</td>
<td><strong>Confusion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Not knowing who to ask for help</td>
<td><strong>Collective involvement/support</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing where to go for help</td>
<td>(teachers, staff, and admin)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy for family</td>
<td><strong>Military-Family Life Experience</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective involvement/support (teachers, staff, and admin)</td>
<td><strong>Military-Family Life Experience</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Guarded and withdrawn</strong></td>
<td><strong>family experience</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shock to family</td>
<td><strong>Stresses of military service</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended family involvement</td>
<td><strong>Temporary</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporary Caregivers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parentification of older siblings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raw emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Military Culture</strong></td>
<td><strong>Feelings toward military Culture</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Celebrate Veterans and Service Members</td>
<td><strong>Celebration/Sacrifice</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td><strong>Resiliency</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency/ability to adapt and overcome</td>
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APPENDIX I. TIMELINE

August

- Identify a Military-Student Ambassador/Community Network Liaison
- Develop a form/survey allowing parents to communicate their family’s military status/degree of military-connectedness.
- Begin work to gather resource materials through Department of Military and Veterans Affairs representatives and other community based military support organizations

September

- Distribute the form/survey allowing parents to communicate their family’s military status/degree of military-connectedness.
- Continue to gather resource materials through Department of Military and Veterans Affairs representatives and other community based military support organizations
- Identify teachers, staff and administrators who will serve in support of this program and form a committee to develop the Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP)
- Send an invitation to parents and community partners to serve on the committee and invite collaborators to participate in the Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) working group

October – December

- Continue to gather resource materials through Department of Military and Veterans Affairs representatives and other community based military support organizations
- Host a Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP) working group
- Assess progress, resources, and program implications
January – May

- Continue to gather resource materials through Department of Military and Veterans Affairs representatives and other community based military support organizations
- Implement the Deployment Cycle Education Support Program (DCESP)
- Continue to assess progress, resources, and program implications