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# **THE MENTORCONNECTIONS MANUAL**

**School-Based Mentoring  
for Military-Connected  
Students**



**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS:**

Dr. Timothy Cavell, University of Arkansas  
Dr. Renée Spencer, Boston University

**CO-INVESTIGATORS:**

Dr. Carla Herrera, Independent Consultant  
Dr. Amy Slep, New York University

**PROJECT COORDINATOR:**

Dr. Janet Heubach, MENTOR Washington

**ONSITE COORDINATORS:**

Debby Gaffney, MA, Consultant, North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS),  
Lacey, Washington

**PROJECT PARTNERS:**

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Washington,  
NTPS, Lacey, Washington

**PROJECT CONSULTANTS:**

Dr. Michael Lorber, New York University  
Bonnie Campbell, Big Brothers Big Sisters of San Diego County

**GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTS:**

Grace Gowdy, Boston University  
Lauren Mutignani, Michelle Ocampo, Freddie Pastrana, University of Arkansas

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# PREFACE

In 2014, our team received a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences (U.S. Department of Education) to develop, implement, and evaluate a strategy whereby school districts can support military-connected students (aka military students) in the elementary grades through school-based mentoring (SBM). Initial development and evaluation of *MentorConnections* took place in Lacey, Washington, home to the North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS). NTPS is located less than 20 miles from Joint Base Lewis-McChord (Army/Air Force).

We began our project with the assumption that SBM is a practical and beneficial way to support military-connected students: a) if there was an effective strategy for identifying and engaging military families; and b) if SBM was based on the Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring (<https://www.mentoring.org/program-resources/elements-of-effective-practice-for-mentoring/>) in youth mentoring and tailored to fit the needs of military-connected students and families. We called our program *MentorConnections* (or MC). In developing the MC program, we constructed two overlapping models.

One model focuses primarily on the logistics of service delivery and the organizational infrastructure needed to implement MC at the district level. The other model focuses specifically on the approach to school-based mentoring we developed for military-connected students.

This manual outlines the steps for establishing and implementing the MC program in a given school or school district. **Section 1** offers an introduction and overview of the manual, and **Section 2** provides useful information about military-connected youth and their families. **Section 3** focuses on the service delivery aspects of the MC model, especially as it was implemented in the Military Student Mentoring (MSM) project. **Section 4** provides considerable guidance on the specific approach to SBM that was developed for military students.

Our hope is that the MC program can help your elementary school support those students whose parents serve our country through their role in the armed forces.

—The *MentorConnections* Team

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# **SECTION 1**

## **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

# SECTION 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

### Why Mentoring for Military-Connected Youth?

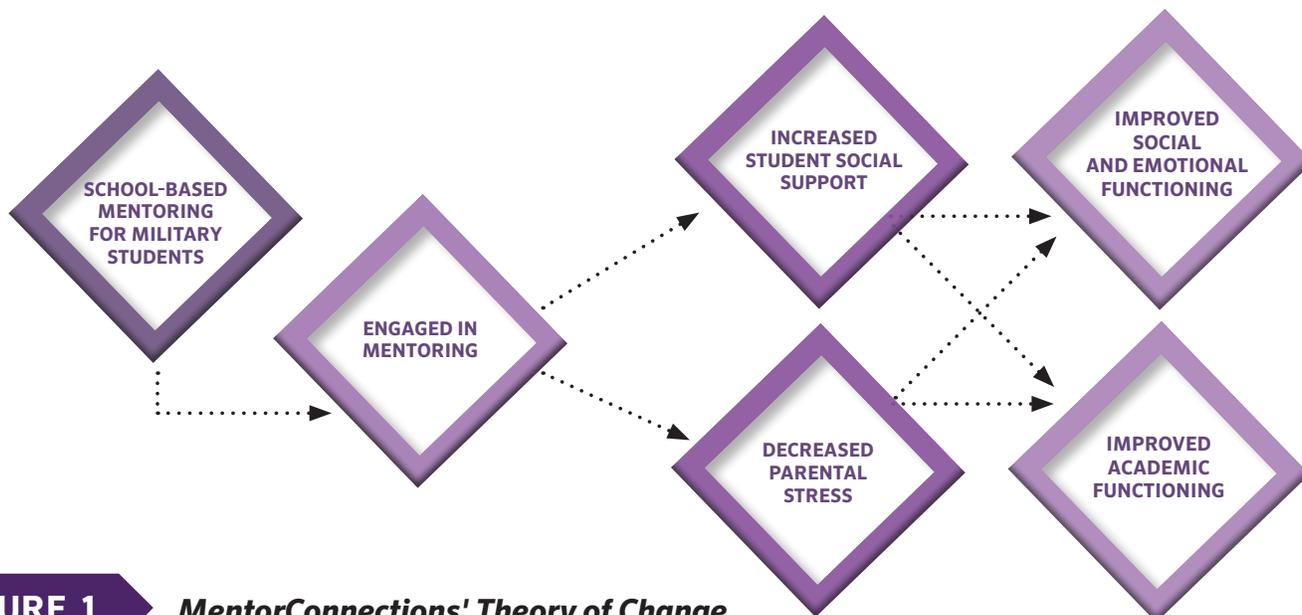
Military-connected youth are those with a parent in the active-duty military, National Guard, or Reserve. Their parent(s) may be serving in any branch of military service—Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard. When a parent is in the military, the entire family serves. Military families make significant sacrifices, including, among others, uprooting and moving every couple of years, enduring lengthy and often repeated absences of the service member parent, and living with the threat of losing that parent, especially during times of war. These special circumstances of military life warrant the supportive response of the communities within which military families reside.

The U.S. Department of Defense has been urging schools, communities, and local service agencies to become better prepared and more capable of serving military families. School-based mentoring is one way to meet the needs of military students and families. This approach to mentoring offers military-connected youth the support of an additional adult at school who is safe and fun.

### Overview of *MentorConnections*

*MentorConnections* (MC) is a strategy by which schools can support military-connected students in the elementary school grades. We use the term military-connected students to mean students who are dependents of active-duty members of the United States military (i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, activated National Guard, or Reserve). We recognize that many other families have connections to the U.S. military and have served our country through a role in the armed forces; however, for the purpose of the MSM project, we narrowed our focus to this particular definition of military-connected.

In the MC program, support for military-connected students comes in the form of SBM. The conceptual model underlying *MentorConnections* is shown in Figure 1.



**FIGURE 1**

***MentorConnections' Theory of Change***

The model posits that MC students who are actively engaged in the mentoring program will experience increased social support and their parents will experience decreased stress. These benefits are expected, in turn, to lead to enhanced academic and socioemotional functioning for military-connected students. Our initial pilot test (N = 48) revealed that MC led to greater social support for students and reduced stress at home for parents; results involving more distal outcomes were mixed (see Appendix A).

The MC program is based on the following assumptions:

- a. Military-connected families experience stress and hardship that can have adverse effects on the academic and socioemotional functioning of elementary-school-age children in these families.
- b. Military-connected families are resilient, and military parents are appropriately cautious and selective about accepting support for their families and children. Note that for convenience, we use the term parents in this manual to refer to any military-connected parent, guardian, or identified caregiver.
- c. As a form of school support, school-based mentoring via the MC program has the advantage of being time-limited and relatively benign, offering an appropriately measured response to the needs of these students with little risk of harm.
- d. Effective delivery of the MC program requires a) a strategy for identifying and engaging military families; and b) an approach to SBM that is based on the Elements of Effective Practice (Garringer, Kupersmidt, Rhodes, Stelter, & Tai, 2015) and tailored to fit the needs of military-connected students and families.

Implementing MC at the level of the school district is greatly facilitated when a district-level MC Coordinator is supported by a Home-School-Community (HSC) Support Team at each school (see Section 3) and by a local mentoring agency (LMA) willing and able to incorporate MC into their SBM programming.

## **Organization and Purpose of the Service Delivery Manual**

This manual is a detailed guide to implementing *MentorConnections*. As noted, MC is both a model of school-based mentoring (see earlier figure) as well as a model through which schools or school districts can effectively deliver that service to military-connected students.

Note that our initial implementation of the MC program included two features that were helpful but likely not essential in all circumstances. First, MC was established and implemented across multiple schools through the work of an itinerant, district-level MC Coordinator. We suspect the MC model is also feasible when implemented in a single school by a site-specific MC Coordinator. Second, the initial trial of the MC program was done in partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Washington (BBBS-SWWA), an LMA that was responsible for screening, training, and matching mentors. Many schools in this country independently operate their own mentoring programs,

suggesting that the MC program is a workable option for schools that do not have an available mentoring agency partner, prefer to work separately from an LMA, or plan to implement MC in a single school and do not see the need for LMA support. More important than these particular features are these essential features: a) a strategy for identifying and engaging military families; and b) an approach to SBM that is based on the Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring and tailored to fit the needs of military-connected students and their families. We believe that schools, school districts, mentoring agencies, and partnerships that involve schools and LMAs would all be successful in implementing MC if these basic conditions were met. Note, however, that for the purpose of this manual, we describe our initial implementation, which was at the district level and involved a partnership between the school district and an LMA.

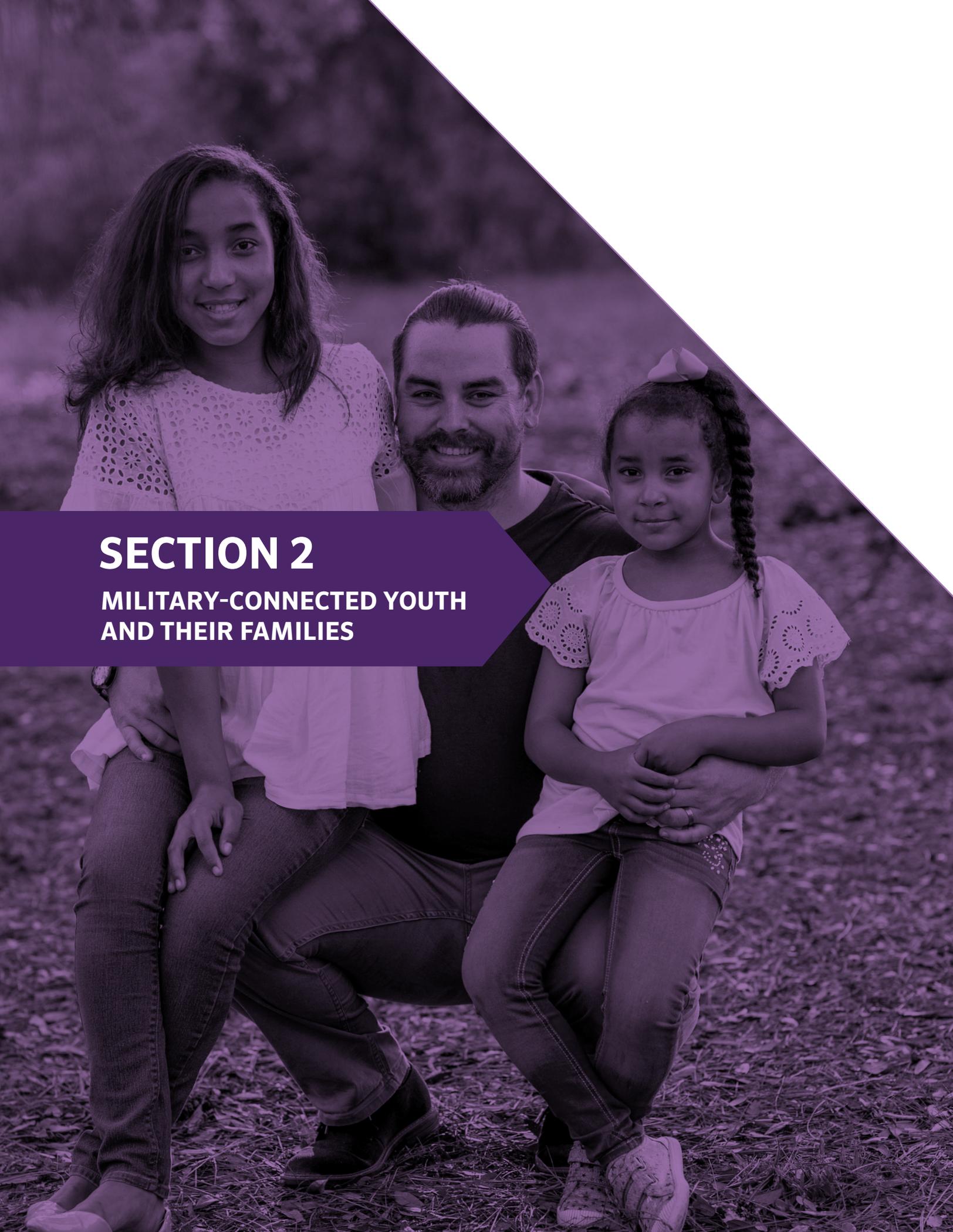
This manual has two parts. The first details the *MentorConnections* Service Delivery Framework, which is a strategy whereby school districts can offer a significant but measured response to the needs of military-connected students enrolled in the elementary school grades in collaboration with schools. The second describes the *MentorConnections* Program and offers recommended program practices and procedures when using school-based mentoring to address the particular needs of military-connected youth and their families. We note that the practices and procedures outlined in this manual are not intended to replace those used by existing mentoring programs; rather, the goal is to augment that which is currently being used. More importantly, this manual, albeit fairly detailed in its description of the MC program, does not cover all aspects considered essential to effective youth mentoring. For readers interested in learning more about the basics of implementing a youth mentoring program, we suggest the following resource: <http://www.mentoring.org/program-resources/elements-of-effective-practice-for-mentoring/>.

## **Purpose of the *MentorConnections* Service Delivery Section**

The Service Delivery Model for *MentorConnections* is not resource heavy but does rely on the dedicated efforts of at least one district-level employee, the MC Coordinator. The MC Coordinator works in partnership with an LMA and with Home-School-Community (HSC) Support Teams at each participating elementary school. HSC Support Teams are composed of a school counselor, a military parent, and a community representative. In the Service Delivery section of the manual, the various moving parts that make up the MC Service Delivery Model are described. Included are sections for school districts, for local mentoring agencies, for MC Coordinators, and for HSC Support Teams. Each has an important role, and success of the MC program will require mutual trust, shared responsibility, and a consistent focus on the needs of military-connected students and their families.

## **Purpose of the *MentorConnections* Program Section**

The *MentorConnections* program augments established practices for more general mentoring programs by modifying and in some cases adding to these practices in an effort to be more responsive to the needs of military-connected students and their families and to the school setting in which mentoring is delivered. As noted earlier, this manual cannot stand on its own but assumes the program is linked to an established mentoring program or agency or has the infrastructure, policies, and procedures needed to meet best practices in youth mentoring. For additional resources, we refer readers to <http://educationnorthwest.org/resources/youth-mentoring-program-planning-and-design-resources>.



## **SECTION 2**

**MILITARY-CONNECTED YOUTH  
AND THEIR FAMILIES**

# SECTION 2

## MILITARY-CONNECTED YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES



In 2011, President Barack Obama called for greater support for our country's military families (Obama, 2011). He noted that nearly two million children in the United States have a parent in the military, and the majority of these children are educated in our public schools. Almost half of service members today have children, and those who do, have an average of two children. More than half live in civilian communities rather than on a military installation.

Military families often must endure one or both parents being gone for lengthy periods. Repeated and lengthy combat deployments by U.S. military personnel reached an all-time high in the previous decade (Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2013; Strengthening Our Military Families, 2011). Since 9/11, 2.77 million service members have served on 5.4 million deployments, and our nation is still at war (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2018/03/20/2-77-million-service-members-have-served-on-5-4-million-deployments-since-911-infographic/#75a084cf50db>). During that same time, over two million children in this country have experienced the deployment of a military parent (AASA Fact Sheet, retrieved 8/27/2012). Even when our country is not at war, repeated absences for parents for duty assignments are still the norm, and some of these might include dangerous conditions.

Although military families are characterized by their resilience (Park, 2011), deployment-related stress (DRS) can take a significant toll. With lengthy deployments and limited time between deployments (Richardson et al., 2011), the non-deployed parent and other family members must learn to manage households for long periods of time on their own. For children, deployments mean prolonged separation from one or both parents, disruption in daily routines, and concern about the safety of the deployed parent. They can also mean greater family responsibilities, especially in single-parent or dual-career families (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001). The effects of repeated combat deployment and DRS can be felt long after service

members return home (Institute of Medicine, 2013). Indeed, deployment and returning to life as a noncombatant is often a trigger for very high levels of DRS for military personnel and their families (Adler, Bliese, McGurk, Hoge, & Castro, 2011; Sayers, 2011; De Pedro et al., 2011). These transitions bring with them shifts and changes in family structure and roles that can result in elevated levels of stress.

Military families are also highly mobile, with most moving every two to three years as a routine part of their service, with about a third of all military children moving every year. It is estimated that military students experience six to nine moves during their K-12 years, a mobility rate three times that of nonmilitary children (De Pedro et al., 2011; Kitmitto et al., 2011). One study found that 40% of military families with children 5 to 12 years of age had moved at least three times in five years (Flake et al., 2009).

Despite the stress these families endure as a routine part of their service, most families do quite well. Military students are often described as resilient, and many appear to adapt and even grow in the face of family relocation, but others are negatively impacted (Card et al., 2011). Meta-analytic findings suggest elementary-school-aged students are more negatively affected by the perturbations associated with military family life than their adolescent counterparts (Card et al., 2011). This point is especially critical when examining the potentially damaging impact of student mobility. Developmental processes and structures that are affected by shifts in family residence operate very differently for children versus older adolescents (Anderson, Leventhal, Newman, & Dupéré, 2014). Because active-duty military service members are less likely to have children old enough to attend high school, districts concerned about this highly mobile student population are wise to put their focus on students at the elementary and middle school levels.

There are times, however, when the strain of parent deployment (combat-related or otherwise) or frequent moves can overwhelm family members and create a period in which military-connected students feel increased stress and isolation. Our supposition is that—as is true for youth more generally—these youth can benefit from the additional support of a positive and caring adult. In fact, supportive relationships with a caring adult have been shown to make an important difference in the lives of vulnerable youth (Werner & Smith, 1982), and we suspect military-connected youth are no exception.

## **Military Culture**

In many ways, mentoring a military-connected student is the same as mentoring any other child. Most of these relationships will not be hugely affected by the families' connection to the military. Still, military culture is an important part of the child's life. Thus, it is important for programs to train and sensitize mentors to how children's experiences may be shaped by military culture so that mentors can be better attuned to military culture and appropriately responsive in their role as mentors.

The metaphor of an iceberg—with 90% hidden below the waterline—has been used to describe various cultures and is an apt description of military culture (i.e., 90% of the culture is not readily apparent to outsiders). Elements of military culture that are “above the waterline” are those that are readily apparent to those who are not part of the culture. These include obvious signs, such

as uniforms, ranks, and ceremonies. Although these are often the things most people think of when considering the military, they make up only a small portion of the culture as a whole. Most of military culture consists of elements with which civilians are not familiar. Elements “at the waterline” and “below the waterline” of military culture will often have a unique meaning for each individual and family. These include, for example, military service creeds that are specific to each branch of the military, as well as broader concepts and military values such as discipline, teamwork, and self-sacrifice. These values play an important role in defining what it means to serve and to be connected to the military. While civilians may understand them in theory, only those connected to the military can truly appreciate their personal significance. This distinction is important to remember when introducing civilians to military-connected students and families as part of a mentoring program.

On a practical level, familiarity with the elements “above the waterline” is just as important as familiarity with those aspects “below the waterline” in facilitating a mentoring relationship. Knowledge of these more apparent elements will help mentors demonstrate respect for military families and their culture. For example, it is important to be familiar with how to address a service member. Each branch of the military has a different term associated with it. For Army and Army National Guard, the term is *soldier*; for Air Force and Air National Guard, *airman*; for Navy, *sailor*; for Marine Corps, *marine*; and for Coast Guard, *coast guardsman*. It is important that you use the appropriate names when addressing a service member, and it is especially important to use the correct term—do not call them by another service member’s title. Mentor training should address these “waterline” aspects of military culture while at the same time making it clear to mentors that they are not expected to become experts in military culture. Rather, it is important that they are sensitive and open to learning more about military culture and military family life. This will help foster a relationship that feels supportive.

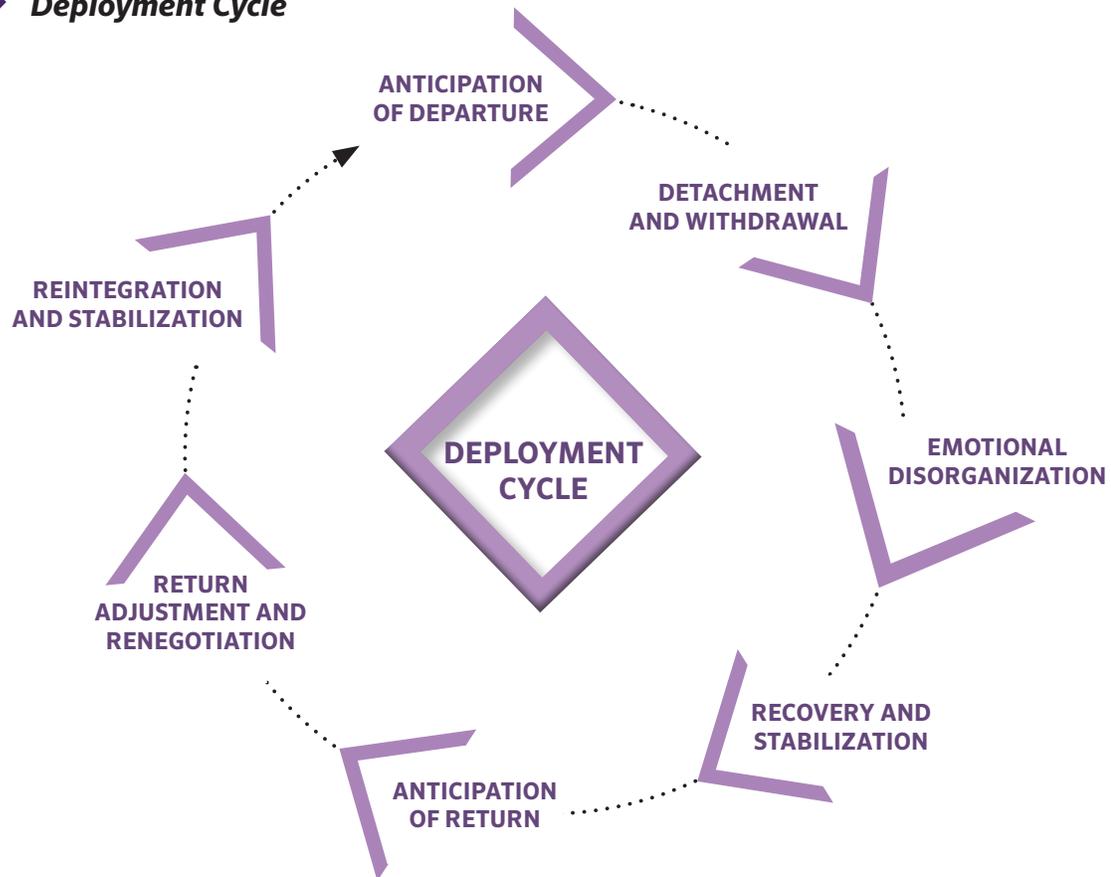
## Combat-Related Deployment Cycle

Another significant aspect of military life is the cycle of deployment that service members and their families may experience (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). As noted previously, many have endured repeated and lengthy deployments in recent years. Deployments not only affect families during the time that the service member is away, but also take families through a series of stages including preparation, deployment, return, and reintegration, with the full cycle much lengthier than the time of the deployment itself. Each of these phases can bring distinct stressors and emotional responses (see Figure 2).

The Deployment Cycle has been described as typically having seven distinct stages:

- **Stage One: *Anticipation of Departure***
- **Stage Two: *Detachment & Withdrawal***
- **Stage Three: *Emotional Disorganization***
- **Stage Four: *Recovery & Stabilization***
- **Stage Five: *Anticipation of Return***
- **Stage Six: *Return Adjustment & Renegotiation***
- **Stage Seven: *Reintegration & Stabilization***

FIGURE 2

**Deployment Cycle****Stage One: Anticipation of Departure**

This stage begins as soon as the family member receives orders. Stress in the home increases as the family immediately begins to anticipate and prepare for the family member's departure. In addition to preparing to say goodbye and adjust to life without the service member for an extended period of time, families also must manage their feelings associated with the potentially dangerous circumstances that the service member may face. This is a daunting task for any family, especially for families with children. As a mentor, it is important to be aware that parents will choose to manage what and how much to tell their children about the service member's deployment, with some parents electing to actively shield their children from knowledge of any danger by not sharing details about the service member's activities during the deployment.

**Stage Two: Detachment & Withdrawal**

In the last weeks before service members leave, they must focus on preparing for their mission, and may distance themselves from their family. Communication in the family may be difficult, which will produce even more stress in the home, in addition to the anticipation of loss.

**Stage Three: Emotional Disorganization**

Once the service member deploys, the family at home must adjust to life without the service member. This may be overwhelming at first, as routines change and responsibilities are added. Children may have an emotional response during this time, which could include being more

irritable than usual, having difficulty concentrating (especially at school), and wishing that things would “go back to normal.” This is a time of adjustment and change for the whole family, and each family will respond differently to the changes.

#### **Stage Four: Recovery & Stabilization**

This usually occurs between weeks three and five after deployment, as the family starts to settle into a routine of life without the service member.

#### **Stage Five: Anticipation of Return**

Typically, about six weeks before the service member returns, the family prepares for homecoming. They may be happy and excited and experience a boost of energy. There may also be a desire to try and make everything “perfect” for the return of the service member.

#### **Stage Six: Return Adjustment & Renegotiation**

About six weeks after the service member returns, the initial joy, excitement, and relief at the service member’s return may diminish as the family adjusts to the changes that occurred during the time of separation. A deployment can be for several months, which is a long time, especially for a child. During this time, everyone will have changed, and family routines that were upended when the service member departed are again disrupted by the return. The family has to readjust to being together again.

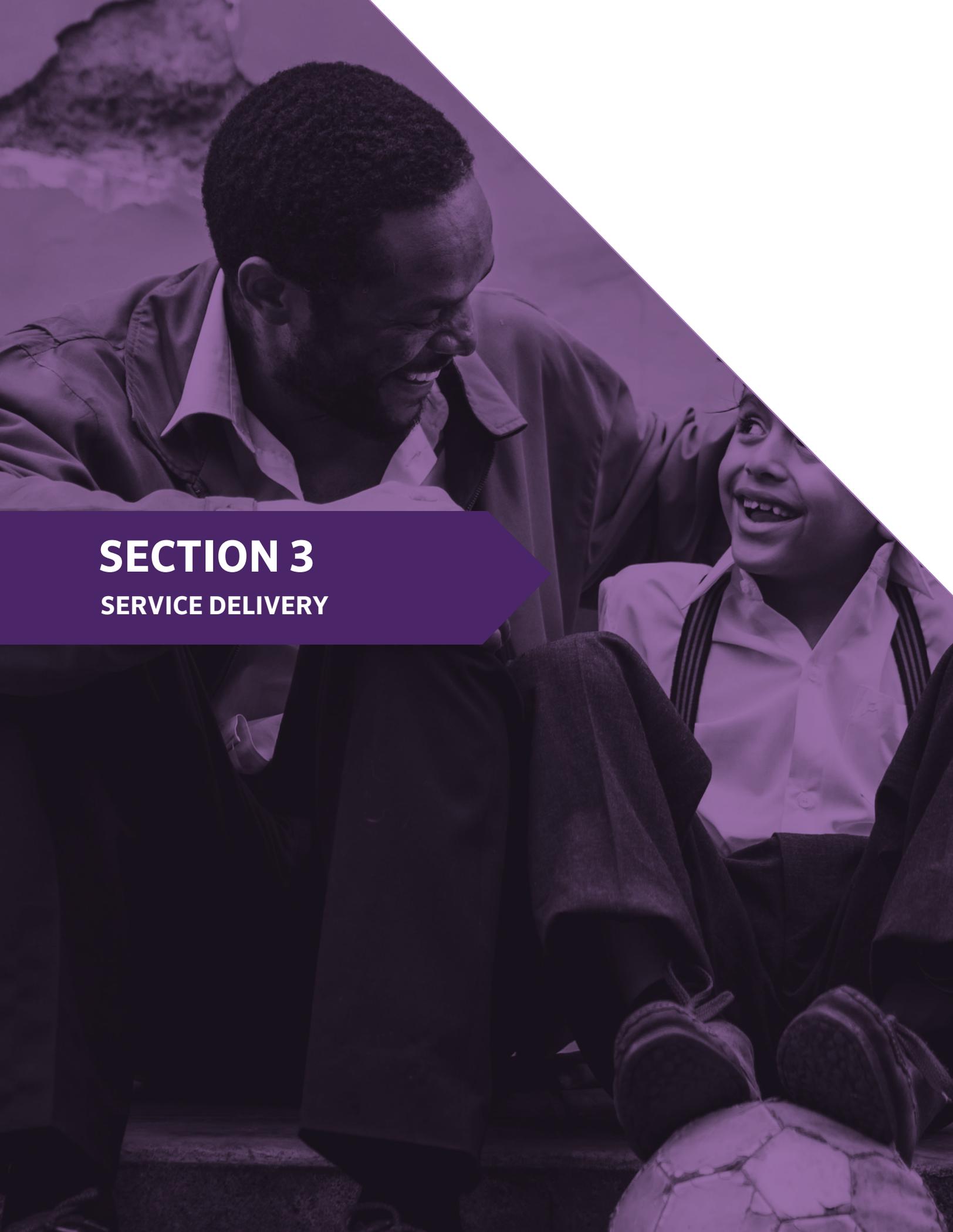
#### **Stage Seven: Reintegration & Stabilization**

By about six months after the service member returns, the family has typically settled into a new routine and established a “new normal” for expectations and responsibilities. There are still adjustments, but things are settling down.

Overall, this cycle is one of frequent change and adjustment. It can be an especially dramatic process of readjustment for an elementary-aged mentee.

## **Conclusion**

Most military families are strong and resilient, and many have developed their own strategies for how to address the challenges of military life. Although it is important to be aware of the distinct aspects of military life, it is also important to keep in mind that military parents want their children to learn and grow and play and, most importantly, simply to be kids. Being a mentor of a military child means that you are familiar with the unique challenges of military families but focus on making sure the child has fun and feels safe.



## **SECTION 3**

### **SERVICE DELIVERY**

# SECTION 3

## SERVICE DELIVERY



The MSM project involved a collaborative team of partners—schools, youth mentoring agencies, military families, and the broader community. That collaboration was critical to the development and initial launch of the *MentorConnections* (MC) program. A multisystemic approach to mentoring military youth is helpful because schools and mentoring agencies tend to operate within distinct service delivery silos. More importantly, for military youth, parents are only peripherally involved or connected to mentoring programs run by schools or mentoring agencies. Thus, a broad-based coalition—one that includes schools and LMAs working collaboratively to engage military parents and community volunteers—is better equipped to reach and support military students (Astor et al., 2013; Basualdo-Delmonico & Herrera, 2014; Esqueda et al., 2012).

A multiorganizational approach to military-student mentoring can also have its challenges. MC program partners must take seriously their responsibility to the children and families they serve while also adhering to their respective policies and procedures. For LMAs, two of the most valued resources are its volunteers and its “brand” (or reputation) in the community. The satisfaction of volunteers with their mentoring experience and the agency’s reputation with families and in the community must be protected, and unnecessary risks must be avoided. Therefore, well-run mentoring organizations adhere closely to established standards that promote program benefits and reduce program risks. Thus, it is no small thing for a school district to approach a mentoring agency with a request to be involved in practice elements typically implemented by agency staff (e.g., recruiting families or volunteers). MC programs are greatly advantaged when there is a clear articulation of responsibilities, when the lines of communication are open, and when there is a spirit of commitment to working together to support military youth.

This section of the manual describes the service delivery responsibilities for each of MC’s partners: MC Coordinators, Local Mentoring Agencies, and Home-School-Community (HSC) Support Teams.

## **The School District**

Delivering the MC program at the district level requires an earnest commitment to serving military students. That commitment is reflected most importantly in providing the funding needed to hire an MC Coordinator (see Appendix B).

### ***Hiring an MC Coordinator***

Hiring an MC Coordinator is an essential step in implementing the MC program. When MC is implemented at the district level, this person will be the district's largest and most visible investment in using school-based mentoring to support military-connected students. When MC is implemented at the individual school level, a similar message of commitment and investment can be made when school staff (e.g., teacher, school counselor) are selected and supported as MC Coordinators. Regardless, the position of MC Coordinator is critical for the successful implementation of the program.

### ***Funding the MC Coordinator Position***

For most school districts, resource allocation is a key issue and a vital starting point when hiring an MC Coordinator. Key questions include:

- Are there funds available to hire a district-level staff person to coordinate a school-based mentoring program in multiple schools, or is the MC program operating in a single school or two, thereby obviating the need for a district-wide coordinator?
- What level of FTE is needed to run the program with fidelity?
- Are the funds recurring and, if not, what is the plan for sustaining MC in subsequent years?

Ideally, every district would have the resources to hire the personnel necessary to meet the needs of all its military-connected students. A more realistic scenario is that school districts will make decisions that are a good fit for their limited resources. The following parameters can help inform such decisions:

- Number of military-connected students in the district;
- Proximity to a military installation that provides family-and youth-focused services; and
- Presence of a local high-quality youth-mentoring program.

### ***Level of Effort for the MC Coordinator Position***

In the initial development and launch of MC, the Coordinator position was half-time. In 2015, North Thurston Public Schools had 13 elementary schools that ranged widely in the number of military-connected students served (roughly 10%-60%) and in the kinds of programs currently

offered specifically for military-connected students. Based on several factors, some of which pertained to the grant-funded MSM research project, the decision was made to launch the MC program in four schools. As such, a half-time position was a good fit.

The scope of work should guide decisions about the MC Coordinator's level of effort. In the initial launch of the program, the MC Coordinator worked closely with an LMA that took the lead on many of its typical roles in school-based mentoring (i.e., screening and training volunteer mentors, creating mentor-mentee matches, monitoring and supporting matches, and managing match closures). The MC Coordinator also worked closely with the HSC Support Team at each participating elementary school. HSC Support Teams play a crucial role in helping promote the MC program to military families and in recruiting potential volunteer mentors for the program. As the primary link between the school district and the LMA, the MC Coordinator was responsible for coordinating efforts to identify and recruit military-connected students and potential mentors into the program. In short, the MC Coordinator is not working alone, but the position requires considerable skill and effort to ensure a strong working alliance among all stakeholders. Thus, allowing adequate time for these tasks is crucial.

### ***Qualifications for the MC Coordinator Position***

Ideally, the person hired to be an MC Coordinator should have experience building and maintaining partnerships within and outside the school district and also have enough familiarity with military culture to have credibility with military families. The MC Coordinator must have experience working within schools and with school staff, including site-based administrators. Good examples include individuals who have worked in Student Support Services or with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) teams within the district. MC Coordinators must know the demands and constraints faced by elementary schools, as well as how to work efficiently within the culture of the school district. It can help if the MC Coordinator has a history of working productively with current school administrators, support staff, and teachers. In the initial launch, the MC Coordinator was a former district employee with considerable experience and an excellent reputation. As an example of the value of her experience, she suggested waiting three to four weeks into the new school year before approaching schools with any MC-related requests. Though seemingly small, these kinds of decisions convey a message of respect to school staff and a willingness to plan carefully so that goodwill is maintained throughout the year. It is not vital, but experience with youth mentoring programs can also be very helpful for the MC Coordinator.

### ***Description of the MC Coordinator Position***

In the initial launch of the MC program, the Coordinator was responsible for implementing the program at four different elementary schools in the district. This position involved meeting with all four schools' administrators and school counselors to outline the goals, structure, and timeline of the MC program. The Coordinator also worked collaboratively with the LMA selected for this project (BBBS of Southwest Washington). Note that because this LMA was selected by the research team prior to the start of the project, an MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the school district and the LMA was not used in the initial launch of MC. However, it would be essential for districts and/or LMAs seeking to collaborate on future MC programs to

have an explicitly articulated agreement of roles and responsibilities (see below, Clarifying and Establishing Partner Roles and Responsibilities).

The MC Coordinator also met at least once/month with members of the HSC Support Team (most often the school counselor) and also with mentoring agency staff. These meetings were designed to promote communication among partnering organizations, support student and volunteer recruitment, and ensure consistent program implementation. When first building and launching an MC program, the Coordinator will likely spend considerable time (e.g., 10 hours per week) overseeing implementation of the program at each school. However, once an MSM program is up and running and matches are meeting regularly, LMA staff should assume a greater role in match support, one that is in line with a more typical SBM program. The MC Coordinator will continue to check in with school staff and meet monthly with each school's HSC Support Team (e.g., 10–15 hours per month). As the school year comes to a close, the MC Coordinator will assist with the match closure process, so the number of hours may increase during the last month of school to 7–10 hours per week. Of course, there will always be unforeseen issues and events to handle, and the MC Coordinator is the person responsible for managing and communicating about those situations.

### ***Clarifying and Establishing Partner Roles and Responsibilities***

Another critical role for school districts seeking to launch the MC program is obtaining all necessary MOUs. A co-signed MOU does not guarantee an effective MC partnership, but a well-crafted statement of understanding among all parties is a valuable guide, regardless of the strength or longevity of prior working relationships. Specifying and agreeing at the outset to program roles and responsibilities greatly lowers the risk of confusion and discord and increases the odds for initial and long-term success. Examples of the level of detail to include in an MOU are the number of matches expected, responsibilities surrounding student and mentor recruitment, which staff (e.g., MC Coordinator vs. MLA staff) will cover match support and match closure, and who will purchase supplies for match visits (see Table 1).

MC was developed with the notion that efforts to support military students via SBM would be more effective if the program were embedded in and championed by the school or school district. As such, the expectation is that MOUs would be written by school staff or administrators; however, we can also imagine this effort being driven by a local mentoring agency. Either way, an MOU is an essential piece of the working alliance. Once written, it is typically school administrators and directors of mentoring agencies who sign the MOUs. It is also helpful for the MC Coordinator and each school principal to review and sign the MOU. In this way, key district employees responsible for implementing the MC program know their commitments and responsibilities as well as those of the LMA.

When drafting an MOU, it is helpful to be as clear and specific as possible. For example, “Recruit youth” could be explicated to note exactly how many youth will be recruited; the grade/age range and any other characteristic of military students to be recruited; and the timeline for recruitment. Thus, the task could be specified as “Recruit 25 eligible second through fifth

graders for the program by October 31.” Specificity in partners’ tasks helps to ensure successful collaboration and effective program implementation. Recommended elements to include in an MC-specific MOU are listed in the table below.

**TABLE 1** *Sample MOU between School District and Local Mentoring Agency*

School District	Local Mentoring Agency
Fund, hire, and supervise MC Coordinator	Identify lead staff responsible for MC-specific tasks
Provide school staff member for HSC Support Team	Identify schedule for communicating with participating schools
Engage a school point of contact/liaison	Identify lead MC staff and case managers
Share school calendar listing delayed starts and closures	Train agency staff on school protocols, schedule, etc.
Identify and screen youth (e.g., academic needs, behavioral issues, Tier 2 status)	Participate in HSC Support Team meetings (note frequency)
Contact parents for permission to refer	Recruit volunteer mentors who are willing to be involved in a school-based mentoring program once a week for at least a full academic school year (note number of volunteers and projected start dates for mentors)
Youth recruitment (note number of youth, grade, timing, etc.)	Process parental permission and intake forms
Screen youth (see Section 4 of this manual)	Screen mentors (see Section 4 of this manual)
Refer potential mentor volunteers to LMA	Train mentors on mentoring children from military families
Provide group space for one-on-one mentoring activities and HSC Support Team meetings	Purchase match activity supplies (funding commitment and process for storing supplies)
Provide secure storage for supplies	Create data-sharing agreement with school district
Register mentors in district volunteer screening	Match youth and mentors (note number of matches by date)
Create data-sharing agreement	Communicate with families (note frequency)
Confer with LMA on matching	Send staff to monitor each match activity
Identify and share information about student absences	Monitor matches (note frequency)
Track volunteer attendance (note whether through paper logs or computerized logs)	Provide match support (note definition and frequency)
Provide student data for evaluation activities	Facilitate match closures
Facilitate program communication with families (note frequency, content, timing, etc.)	Evaluate youth outcomes (note specifics on what will be included in this evaluation)
Participate in LMA’s monthly program review meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in monthly program review meetings</li> <li>• Prepare and share results of evaluation</li> <li>• Participate in HSC Support Team meetings (note frequency of meetings)</li> </ul>

A well-crafted MC MOU should also include details on these three elements: communicating, preparing, and scheduling.

### ***Communicating***

Productive partnerships always include the scheduling of regular communication including meetings to discuss challenges and opportunities, consider issues related to sustainability, review program goals, and troubleshoot any issues that might arise. Be careful about assuming that the LMA shares the same norms around communication as the district/school. Schools should share with the LMA the protocol for contacting various school staff (e.g., teachers, counselors, administrators), for calling students' parents/guardians, for information sharing about student absences or family moves, and for how to stay updated on potential room changes in the school building. Particular attention should be paid to decisions about who contacts primary parents/guardians (and when).

Regular in-person meetings, although time intensive, are essential to building the school-LMA partnership, especially in the first year. For the first four months after the program's launch, holding 30-minute meetings every other week can help avoid misunderstandings and provide an opportunity to pinpoint potential snags and areas in need of increased attention. After four months, a monthly in-person schedule should suffice. An agenda and meeting notes will also provide a basis for reviews and reminders and serve as a great record for revising the program. These partner meetings also provide set times to explore program enhancements and resolve partner challenges.

### ***Preparing***

It is helpful for school staff to be familiar with military family life and culture, but that is likely to vary both across schools and within schools. Some schools offer professional development in this area, but for those that do not, the online training developed for the MC program is one option (see <https://msmentor.hosted.uark.edu/Military-training-7.28/>). Once aware of military family life and culture, teachers and other school staff will be better able to identify and engage military-connected youth and also support volunteers who serve as mentors and LMA staff who are onsite and supporting the MC program.

### ***Scheduling***

Respecting schools' academic calendar is essential to a successful LMA-school partnership. For the LMA, this could mean beginning program operations up to four weeks after the first day of school, pausing programming during district testing, notifying mentors of school holidays and closures, and ending program activities a few weeks before the last day of school. This is familiar territory for mentoring programs that work with schools, but it is worth noting that concerted efforts to fit the program into the school calendar helps build trust and goodwill. For example, because many SBM matches close at the end of the school year, a fall start gives youth as much time for mentoring as is possible during a given school year. One way to start soon after the school year begins is to take time in April or May to a) identify and screen potential students; b) secure parent permission; and c) recruit, screen, and train mentors.

## **The MC Coordinator**

As noted earlier, when the MC program is implemented at the district level, hiring the MC Coordinator is the district's largest and most visible investment in using school-based mentoring to support military-connected students. The MC Coordinator is critical for the successful implementation of the program. In this section, we outline features of this position that were particularly important in the initial launch of MC at the district level.

### ***Managing Relationships Between and Within Systems***

We described earlier the ideal and preferred qualifications for the MC Coordinator (e.g., experience working within a school district's culture, some familiarity with military family life). Perhaps even more valuable than these critical experiences is an appreciation of how systems work and a capacity to build and maintain relationships between and within systems. As noted earlier, the MC Coordinator is working administratively with LMA staff, with principals and school liaisons at each school, and with each school's HSC Support Team. In addition, the MC Coordinator is frequently interacting with and supporting military students' teachers, military students' parents, and military students' mentors. MC programs are at an advantage when the MC Coordinator can "read" systems and manage interpersonal relationships within and between those systems.

### ***School District***

The first relationship MC Coordinators must attend to is with the school district. It is important to pursue the MC program in ways that align with the district's overall educational mission. It can be helpful to keep district administrators apprised of MC program progress and events. Useful are easy-to-read data reports, some of which can be shared via district websites or newsletters. In the initial launch of MC, a local television station aired a short piece on the program, which was of course welcomed by the school district.

### ***School Principal***

MC Coordinators must also work to build effective alliances with school principals. These site-based administrators are often quite busy and meeting many demands, so the effective MC Coordinator anticipates potential program challenges and offers principals workable solutions to key issues such as finding space and time for MC matches, limiting time demands on school staff, and ensuring that military parents feel heard and respected.

### ***School Liaison***

Another important school-based relationship is with the MC program school liaison, who is also a member of the HSC Support Team (see below). The school liaison is often the school counselor, but it need not be. It could be a military-linked paraprofessional, a PBIS specialist, or some other school staff committed to supporting military students. Ideally, the school liaison is invested in being a champion within the school for the MC program. School counselors appreciate when programs can be effective while minimizing the costs in time and effort to school staff and students.

In the initial launch of MC, the designated school liaison was either the school counselor or a paraeducator dedicated to military-connected students. Liaisons identified potential students for the MC program, helped identify military parents for the HSC Support Team, and notified the MC Coordinator of any student issues that arose (e.g., absences). Even if not serving as liaisons, school counselors can provide important information about potential students for MC and can help recruit volunteer mentors.

### ***School Staff***

It is hard to overstate the importance of MC Coordinators managing well their relationships with school staff. These relationships will greatly influence how the MC program is perceived and supported by the school. There are a number of issues that are critical to working in synchrony with schools and school staff. These include treating all school staff respectfully, using the school space assigned for mentoring, adhering to the daily class schedule and yearly calendar, and ensuring that all mentors follow school policies. Front office staff can set the tone for the entire school with a warm, in-person welcome that helps mentors feel appreciated as a valued contributor to the school and to the program. In the initial launch of the MC program, all mentors checked in using the district's computerized system for tracking volunteers' attendance. The system allowed the MC Coordinator to track mentor attendance during and at the end of the school year and to detect any patterns of subpar attendance. For schools that do not have sophisticated volunteer sign-in systems, front office staff are usually responsible for ensuring that volunteers log in.

Teacher support for the MC program is also an important contributor to its success. Teachers are responsible for a student's well-being at school; they determine whether mentors have smooth access to students and to information about how students are doing or whether they want to see their mentor. Therefore, it is important that teachers' time is respected and that all scheduling and communications involving teachers are respectful and not disruptive.

### ***LMAs***

When MC is implemented at the district level, a critical relationship to manage is with the partnering LMA. As noted earlier, it is no small thing for a school district to approach a mentoring agency with a request to be involved in practice elements typically implemented by agency staff (e.g., recruiting families or volunteers). The MC Coordinator must be sensitive to the LMA's policies and guidelines and find ways to communicate often and openly, with a spirit of working together to support military youth. Of course, a well-crafted and fully detailed MOU between the district and the LMA is an invaluable part of that productive alliance. Still, the interpersonal nature of this working alliance is not to be underestimated. At the end of the day, it is the quality of these relationships that often determines how much gets done and how well it is done. MC Coordinators should take time and move slowly to build a trusting relationship with LMA staff. Most LMAs are nonprofit entities that experience a fair degree of turnover in addition to high staff workload. As such, feeling understood and supported by the MC Coordinator is an important piece of that trust.

### ***Choosing the LMA Partner***

Choosing the LMA partner and clarifying respective roles are crucial steps toward successful service delivery. Not every community in this country has its own mentoring program but a great many do. It has been estimated that nearly 4,500 youth mentoring programs are operating in the U.S. ([www.mentoring.org](http://www.mentoring.org)). Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) alone operates in nearly 400 communities. Many Communities in Schools (CIS) programs also offer formal mentoring, and CIS is in 2,300 schools in 25 states and the District of Columbia.

Ideally, school districts will partner with one or more high-quality local mentoring agencies in the delivery of school-based mentoring. However, determining what constitutes “high quality” can be challenging. The LMA’s history of service in schools and the consistency of its service with partner schools are perhaps the most important selection criteria. Schools should ask about the number of mentoring matches supported from year to year and the extent to which those matches end prematurely (i.e., before the volunteer’s commitment period ends), as well as the agency’s rate of retaining mentors. Nationally, about one in three matches in formal programs ends before the initial agreement date. A stronger program will have fewer early match closures. Other helpful information is the duration of these LMA-school partnerships as well as schools’ and volunteers’ satisfaction with the program.

Additional resources for evaluating a quality mentoring agency can be accessed via MENTOR (The National Mentoring Partnership) and its network of state MENTOR Affiliates. MENTOR Affiliates offer a system by which youth mentoring programs can voluntarily enroll in a quality evaluation and continuous improvement program (<http://www.mentoring.org/our-work/national-quality-mentoring-system/>). This work is founded on a set of research-informed best practices outlined in MENTOR’s Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring and is based on a body of research suggesting that youth in programs implementing research-informed practices experience stronger mentoring relationships and make greater gains through program participation than their peers in other programs. Schools can search by zip code for mentoring programs in their area via the Mentoring Connector, which notes quality designations for each program: <http://www.mentoring.org/program-resources/mentoring-connector/>.

### ***Identifying and Engaging Military-Connected Students and Parents***

One of the more challenging aspects of implementing the MC program is identifying and engaging military-connected students and parents. With the recent passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), schools are now required to use a military student identifier (MSI) in their district information-gathering system. However, if parents choose not to disclose this information, schools might struggle to know which students are military-connected. It can be helpful for the MC Coordinator to contact local organizations whose mission includes supporting both military personnel and their families, as these organizations can help identify military families in the district. For example, BBBS of San Diego County has partnered with military housing corporations (e.g., Lincoln Military Housing) that have housing communities near schools as a way to provide outreach through newsletters, websites, and other media.

Some school districts have very high concentrations of military-connected students because their schools are located on or near a military installation. For these districts, the challenge is less about identifying military-connected students than about supporting all who are in need. Results from a survey of school districts conducted by our research team revealed a tendency for these districts to have multiple programs available to all military-connected students. Because SBM programs are limited in how many students can be matched due to various constraints (e.g., number of volunteer mentors recruited, school space), MC programs in schools with high numbers of military-connected students will need to determine how many students can be supported among those who are a good fit for the program.

There are also districts that enroll relatively few military-connected students but are nonetheless committed to serving this population. In these cases, hiring an MC Coordinator, even if only half-time, will be more difficult to justify. Schools committed to offering school-based mentoring to military-connected students should consider allocating time to school counselors who can oversee the tasks of identifying and referring military-connected students and their parents to an LMA. In such cases, it would be helpful to school counselors to be familiar with sections of this manual that are pertinent to the MC Coordinator and involve a) identifying and engaging military-connected students and their parents; and b) making referrals to an LMA.

### **The Local Mentoring Agency (LMA)**

MC offered at the district level is a collaborative effort that requires a working partnership between the school district where students are enrolled and a local mentoring agency. Implementing MC offers LMAs an opportunity to serve a special population of students who experience unique challenges due to their parents' service in the U.S. armed forces. A successfully run MC program can also help LMAs with fundraising, as supporting military families is often an appealing focus for funders and donors.

## **LESSONS IN ACTION**

### **The Importance of Positive Relationships**

Each elementary school functions differently. But, regardless of the school context, successful implementation requires a positive relationship with each school's principal, counselor, teachers, and front office staff. Finding an in-school champion for MC can make a big difference, and the chances of finding one are increased when efforts are made to foster these relationships. This holds for school district staff as well. Access to student data, to school space, and to support for recruiting students and contacting families rest on positive relationships, thoughtfulness, and mutual respect.

### ***The LMA's MC Lead***

It can be helpful if the LMA assigns a single staff person to be the MC Lead. Although not essential, it is helpful if this person has some military-related experiences or connections (e.g., growing up in a military family, having a spouse or siblings in the military). The agency's MC Lead also builds relationships with key partners, grows a community network of support, oversees and supports case managers working on the program, and supervises the tracking of agency data related to the MC program. The MC Lead also meets regularly with the HSC team. The MC Lead along with the agency director provides the public face for recruitment, fundraising for MC and even attending school board meetings to represent mentoring and MC. Launching the MC program will require even more time and effort from the MC Lead, which is important to keep in mind when staffing for the program.

Concentrating MC match management (i.e., match support and monitoring) in one LMA staff person reduces the learning curve and increases the fidelity of implementation, especially when MC involves slight shifts from an agency's standard practices. For example, the MC match closure practices include a five-step year-end closure process that may be different from other LMA closure processes. It would be more efficient for staff to implement those five steps across all MC matches rather than have different match managers working with each match.

### ***Military Culture Training***

Program staff working with military-connected youth also need to understand the strengths, needs, and challenges of military-connected youth and their families. The MC military culture training developed through our pilot project provides a basic orientation option (<https://msmentor.hosted.uark.edu/Military-training-7.28/>). If staff do not have military experience, it might be helpful to find someone in the community to help educate both LMA and school district staff. Involving staff members who understand military culture and are able to speak to families using military terminology can play an important role in engaging military families, supporting matches made with military-connected youth, and engaging partners within the military installation. Staff should also familiarize themselves with community and installation resources available to military families to make appropriate referrals as needed.

### ***Onsite Staffing***

The approach to SBM used in the initial launch of MC required that staff be present each week for MC match meetings. That staff person, in addition to managing the logistics of the weekly visits (e.g., student or mentor absences), also helped set the emotional and social tone of the visits, which can promote the development of closer mentoring relationships. This onsite role means that agency staff need to set aside time for traveling to and from the school, as well as welcoming match participants, introducing activities (see Section 4 for a description of the facilitated mentoring activities), ensuring that all students are present, and monitoring and supporting the matches. This crucial role could be fully implemented by the MC Lead or shared with the MC Coordinator. Either way, the details should be outlined prior to launching the program. Table 2 shows a sampling of weekly tasks and time required for MC meetings at four different schools.

**TABLE 2** *Weekly Onsite Agency Staff Time*

Tasks Required for Each MC Meeting	Estimated # of Minutes (Hours)
Travel time round-trip, 20 miles	45
Set up mentoring space (arrange desks, prepare materials)	15
Facilitate mentoring (welcome students and mentors, introduce activities, locate missing student(s), monitor and support matches, fill in for absent mentors)	90
Clean up and re-set space	15
<b>Total time per school/week</b>	<b>165 (2.75)</b>
<b>Total time across 4 schools/week</b>	<b>660 (11)</b>

***LMA Program Implementation***

Valuable benefits can accrue from partnerships like those in the MC program; however, successful on-the-ground collaboration calls for clarity of roles. Typically, LMA staff are responsible for processing (intake, screening, training) volunteer mentors, for processing (intake, screening) students into the LMA system, for forming new matches, and for match monitoring. But these procedures could shift depending on school policies (e.g., district requirements for volunteer screening) or program differences within the LMA. A detailed overview of identifying and screening both mentors and mentees can be found in Section 4. Table 3 presents the estimated time needed for tasks within each of these areas. The estimates in this table were provided by the BBBS mentoring agency that participated in our pilot MC study.

***Match Monitoring***

Match monitoring simply means supervising the matches to ensure that the match is progressing positively. The Elements of Effective Practices for Mentoring presents research-based benchmarks for the Standard of Monitoring and Support. The monitoring benchmarks for agency implementation call for staff to:

- Contact both mentor and youth twice per month during the first month of match meetings;
- Contact each mentor and student on a monthly basis after the first month of match meetings;
- During each contact, ask about match activities, quality of the relationship, and observed benefits for the student;
- Document the frequency of match meetings, the length of in-person contacts, and a description of the pair’s activities;
- Assess the quality of MC matches to determine if they should be closed or provided additional support;
- Check in with the school in the morning of scheduled meetings to ensure that all MC students are present and notify the mentors if any are absent.

**TABLE 3** *Estimated Level of Staff Effort to Form a Match in Year 1*

Task	Estimated Number of Minutes
<b>Processing New Mentor</b>	
Hold initial inquiry conversation and schedule the interview	115-130
Put file together	5-5
Conduct interview in person with orientation	75-90
Send follow-up email for what's missing in application	3-5
Write assessment and update MIS	30-60
Complete 3 reference checks	14-45
Conduct background checks	3-5
Input data on mentors who are ready to be matched	3-5
Conduct pre-match training *	100-120
Engage participants in military culture training	15-20
<b>Subtotal Minutes</b>	<b>295-385</b>
<b>Processing New Mentee</b>	
Hold initial inquiry conversation and schedule the interview	15-30
Conduct interview in person with orientation (includes average drive time)	75-90
Write assessment and update database	30-60
Complete database entry and create ready-to-be-matched file	3-5
<b>Subtotal Minutes</b>	<b>126-186</b>
<b>Matching</b>	
Read volunteer and youth assessments to ensure good fit	5-10
Send match information to volunteer	15-30
Send match proposal to parent/child and school	15-30
Finalize date/time for introducing volunteer to youth	3-5
Conduct match introduction in person (includes average drive time)	60-90
<b>Subtotal Minutes</b>	<b>100-165</b>
<b>TOTAL Processing Minutes Without Recruitment</b>	<b>521-736</b>
<b>TOTAL Processing Hours Without Recruitment</b>	<b>8.7-12.3</b>

\* This total assumes each mentor requires 2 hours for the 2-hour training. However, this number will decrease per mentor when you train multiple mentors at the same time.

Having agency staff onsite during match activities allows for a more effective way to monitor matches. Because match participants are observed every week, it can be tempting to do rather brief check-ins during match meetings (e.g., “How are things going?”). This strategy is inadequate, however, for learning about the strength of the relationship and the individual experiences of students and mentors (Garringer et al., 2015). To receive an open, honest assessment of how things are going, match check-ins should be done individually with youth and mentors in a space where privacy can be assured.

## **Home-School-Community (HSC) Support Teams**

The African proverb “It takes a village” proposes that it takes an entire community working together for children to experience and grow in a safe environment. The village looks out for and supports all children but is not responsible for raising each child. Similarly, HSC Support Teams take proactive steps to engage people from different sectors of the community to look out for and support military-connected students. The HSC concept stems from research on the benefits for schools and students when there are bridges that link the strengths of the home, school, and community (Epstein et al., 2009). HSC Support Teams represent the following key stakeholders: a) military families; b) the school; and c) the local community. Without support from and collaboration among these stakeholders, in collaboration and guidance from the MC Coordinator and the LMA, schools would likely find it difficult to identify, engage, and support military students using SBM (Astor et al., 2013; Esqueda et al., 2012).

### ***HSC Support Team Membership***

Each HSC Support Team consists of the following volunteer members: a military parent or guardian, a school liaison, and a community representative. These teams are formed and supported by the MC Coordinator and assisted by LMA staff. The MC Coordinator and school liaison start the process of identifying other potential HSC Support Team members, perhaps by reaching out to military support personnel currently involved in parent-school associations.

HSC Support Team members’ roles in the school and community can vary widely, but each HSC member should be committed to supporting military-connected students and believe in the value of youth mentoring. Additional personal characteristics for selection include:

- Respectful of school culture and procedures;
- Interested in helping military families;
- Interested in building new relationships; and
- Ready to reach out to the larger community network on behalf of MC.

The military parent member will hopefully bring a) knowledge about military supports in the local community, b) a willingness to engage with military volunteer groups, and c) ideally, educational and work experience that can be used to support the MC program. The school liaison member is often the school counselor but could also be a dean of students, a PBIS coordinator, a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) coordinator, an assistant principal, or some other school staff person ready to be a champion of military student mentoring. The

community representative member might be a member of a local civic or service organization (e.g., Lions Club), owner of a local business, corporate employee, homemaker, retiree, member of a faith community, or local government official.

### ***Tasks of the HSC***

HSC Support Team members are volunteers with limited time and resources, but a commitment to supporting military-connected students. Individual school autonomy within the HSC role is needed because schools and school populations can vary greatly in the factors that can affect the mission of HSC Support Teams. With autonomy comes the flexibility to support the mentoring of military-connected students in innovative ways. That said, the MC Coordinator assists each HSC to follow structured guidelines needed to maintain mission focus, to ensure fidelity of program delivery across the district, to maximize available resources, and to reduce foreseeable risks.

No volunteer group can flourish without a clear and feasible purpose; in other words, there need to be clearly stated goals and tasks for the group in order for members to engage and be productive. Each year, the HSC Support Team should strive to set a new set of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely) goals for the year. Examples include the number of mentors recruited, the number of parents attending the year-end celebration, the number of mentors retained, and specific program improvements to be targeted. The HSC calendar of work shifted between the seasons of the school year and the MC program: fall, mentor recruitment; winter, mentor support; spring, match closure. An outline of the seasonal scope of work appears below.

### ***Fall and the Recruitment of Potential Mentors from the Local Community***

HSC mentor recruitment may take a variety of forms, including hosting a “friend raising” party for neighbors and friends at someone’s house and creating a network pyramid of people they know and their time availability, interest in youth, support for the U.S. military, past and current volunteerism, etc. Once that network pyramid is built, the HSC Support Team, in concert with the MC Coordinator and the LMA, can decide which HSC Support Team members contact which potential volunteers. This method for identifying and qualifying potential donors and nonprofit board members is a tried-and-true approach used by many organizations.

### ***Winter and Supporting Mentors and Volunteers***

Match support practices can be enhanced by borrowing the development operations of nonprofit organizations. In that world, stewardship plays a central role. One example of stewardship is recognizing and appreciating the support of key donors and volunteers (see example below). For mentoring organizations, volunteers are a critical resource. One school’s HSC military parent proposed that the HSC Support Team ask MC mentors about their “language of love” to determine how best to say thanks to the mentors for their support and effort. The HSC Support Team can play an active role in providing seasonal notes and gifts and other forms of recognition to the volunteer mentors.

### ***Spring and a Focus on Match Endings***

The HSC Support Team can take an active part in the match closure process (see Section 4). Support can take the form of gathering resources for special activities, preparing end-of-match reflection games, leading match timeline reflections for a group of matches, and planning and managing a year-end celebration for students, mentors, families, school staff, and agency staff.

## **LESSONS IN ACTION**

### **Leveraging Relationships for Program Sustainability**

A full year-end celebration may bring unanticipated outcomes. At one school, a mentor who was not planning on returning for a second year heard from his mentee's parents about how much the student talked about the mentor and how important he was to their child and to them. ***The mentor signed up for another year on the spot.***

### ***HSC Support Team Time Commitment***

Any eagerness about engaging the HSC must be tempered with the knowledge that HSC members are volunteers. That said, meeting regularly and frequently (e.g., every other week or even weekly) at the beginning of the year when forming the HSC Support Team and also during fall recruitment is vitally important to a successful year. In the initial launch of the MC program, we found that meeting only once/month was often insufficient for achieving the necessary HSC tasks. Each HSC Support Team will determine its schedule in consultation with the MC Coordinator, but the MC Coordinator usually shares an agenda with the team prior to their meeting and ensures that key meeting decisions and tasks are recorded and shared later with team members. The final task of the HSC Support Team is to recruit new HSC members and/or secure a commitment to return by current members.

### **Shared MC Responsibilities**

*MentorConnections* is an effort to counter the many challenges of engaging military families in youth mentoring. Spearheaded by the MC Coordinator, the MC program draws from schools, HSC Support Teams, and the LMA to achieve its aims. In youth mentoring, the elements of effective practice typically include mentee and mentor recruitment, match support, family communication and engagement, match closure, and evaluation. In the MC program, the LMA, the school, the MC Coordinator, and the HSC Support Team share responsibility for those tasks. Table 4 lists key MC tasks by partner, with the understanding that the MC Coordinator provides general oversight of all tasks.

**TABLE 4** *MC Tasks by Partner*

Responsibilities	MC Coordinator or School Staff	HSC Support Teams	LMAs
Recruit youth/families	X		
Screen youth	X		
Recruit mentors	X	X	X
Train mentors			X
Match youth and mentors	X		X
Provide physical meeting space	X		
Match activities and supplies	X		X
Monitor matches			X
Support matches		X	X
Mentor stewardship		X	
Communicate with parents/guardians	X		X
Facilitate match closures	X	X	X
Evaluate youth outcomes	X		X

***Recruiting and Engaging Students and Families***

Many school district personnel know about school-based mentoring and the agency(ies) in their community that provide it, but schools typically do not initiate or operate as the key mentoring program sponsor. Rather, teachers or counselors may make referrals to mentoring agencies, or mentoring agencies might approach schools with a request to start school-based mentoring on their campus. The relatively passive role of schools in youth mentoring makes sense given their educational mission. Nevertheless, if schools wish to support military-connected students, a more active posture is needed.

Previous research as well as our own survey data suggest that most mentoring agencies that endeavor to serve military-connected students have struggled to recruit military families into the program (e.g., Basualdo-Delmonico & Herrera, 2014). Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, in its guide for serving military youth (Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 2013), noted that military families tend to be resilient, independent, and more accustomed to serving others than receiving support from others. Military families are also known for taking care of their own, perceiving youth mentoring as a better fit for families struggling under the weight of single parenthood, low income, and children with behavioral difficulties. In our focus groups of military parents, we learned that mentoring programs, if not carefully structured and framed, could be a source of stress for these families.

**Military families seek a sense of normalcy and routine in the midst of moves, deployment, and other sacrifices and challenges they face. For many military parents, the potential benefits of enrolling their child in a mentoring program are often trumped by the costs of deviating from the job of managing their household and the risk that volunteer mentors will do more harm than good. We learned from our focus groups that military parents preferred a school-based mentoring program that was safe and fun and offered a measure of support that does not stigmatize military-connected students.**

***Mentor Recruitment***

Volunteers are the most important ingredient in any mentoring program, as they are the conduit through which the program provides its services. But finding and engaging high-quality volunteers requires significant time and effort. Thus, the responsibility for recruitment is shared across all key partners, and all are encouraged to be as creative as possible in generating ideas for volunteer recruitment. In the MC program, the LMA recruits volunteers using its standard practices such as website advocacy for military-connected students, community presentations, public service announcements, and word of mouth. At the same time, the HSC Support Team uses its network to recruit mentors, inspires community members and friends to volunteer, and distributes MC information and LMA enrollment materials. Ultimately, all volunteer referrals and inquiries are forwarded to LMA staff for the agency’s intake process. Table 5 presents a listing of various strategies for recruiting mentors.

**TABLE 5** ***Mentor Recruitment Strategies***

<b>Local Mentoring Agency</b>	<b>School/HSC</b>
Advertise (website, PSAs, etc.)	Spread program through word of mouth
Present to community groups	Co-present to community groups
Distribute brochures for MC throughout the community	Hold a “friend raising” party
Support and train current MC mentors in recruiting friends and family	Talk to military family organizations
Train mentees to identify potential mentors from their family’s network	Share program description to school parents for them to pass along

***Match Support***

A detailed discussion of match support can be found in Section 4, but it is important to note that match support is a task in which all partners can assist. Volunteer mentors are a critical resource for mentoring programs that requires significant dollars to recruit, screen, train, monitor, and support. LMAs usually offer support and advice; schools can welcome their volunteer mentors; the MC Coordinator provides ideas/materials for match activities; and HSC Support Team members can find ways to recognize mentors. Sustaining the satisfaction and involvement of high-quality mentors is absolutely crucial to the program’s success. Thus, programs should invest in efforts to show appreciation for their volunteers—whether it’s a written communication or an end-of-year event. Mentor recognition was one of the activities in which HSC team members in our MC pilot were most interested.

### ***Family Communication and Engagement***

Focus groups with parents during the MC design phase told us that military parents want to know about their students' mentors and the activities in which their child will participate. The LMA onsite staff can take photos of the mentor and student at their initial match meeting, give copies to the mentor and student, and email or mail a copy to the parents. Although LMAs have tend to have limited communication with parents of youth in SBM programs, military parents were explicit about the importance of receiving information about the program and having contact with program staff. After matches are formed and underway at schools, the LMA can reach out to parents with a brief welcome and introduction, provide contact information parents can use to reach the LMA with any questions or concerns, and emphasize the importance of calling agency staff if their student will be absent from school.

### ***Summer Connections in the MC Program***

Parents in our initial focus groups were open to limited summer contact between mentors and students, but this was complicated by the decision to close all MC matches at the end of the school year, even if a decision is made the following fall to rematch (see Section 4 on Match Closure). Also, the LMA in our project was reluctant to allow these kinds of communications based on concerns about liability and broaching standards of practice. For schools that decide to allow summer connections in anticipation of a fall rematch, there is likely merit in working with LMAs to find safe ways to offer contact during the summer. Examples include notes from mentors sent initially to students' parent or to LMA staff and perhaps also screened as a safeguard.

### ***Match Closure***

Match closure refers to the process of ending a mentoring relationship, whether the ending is planned or unplanned and whether done individually or as a group. The MC Coordinator, LMA staff, school staff, and HSC Support Team all play roles in match closure. The MC Coordinator oversees the scheduling of closure activities planned at each school, but school staff are often the first to learn of unexpected and impending student moves. Ideally, this information is promptly conveyed to the MC Coordinator and school liaison on the HSC Support Team. HSC Support Teams at each school plan and schedule closure activities specific to their school and provide supplies and materials as needed. HSC Support Teams are also in a position to work with school staff and the LMA to recognize MC mentors for their voluntary service. Most LMAs will have standard procedures for match closures (even if not used for all matches). These include monitoring matches for potential endings, orienting mentors, mentees, and families to the notion of closure at the beginning of the match, providing helpful closure "scripts" (e.g., 3-2-1 reflections) to mentors, providing onsite support for planned match endings, and finally, conducting exit interviews and completing ending paperwork.

## ***Evaluation***

Ideally, efforts to implement the MC program also include efforts to evaluate the quality and consistency of the mentoring, important youth outcomes, and overall satisfaction with the MC program among key stakeholders. Ideally, assessment of match quality occurs both during and at the end of the match and includes the perspective of both mentees and mentors. Commonly assessed youth outcomes in SBM programs include school attendance, school performance, and disciplinary referrals. Most LMAs have standard procedures for evaluating match quality and youth outcomes. For MC, school districts can support the MC program by assisting in efforts to compile data on student attendance, school behavior, and academic performance.





## **SECTION 4**

**SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING FOR  
MILITARY-CONNECTED YOUTH**

# SECTION 4

## SCHOOL-BASED MENTORING FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED YOUTH

In this section, we describe in greater detail the MC school-based mentoring program for military-connected elementary students. Our aim is to offer guidance on how a) MC Coordinators, b) HSC Support Team members, c) LMA staff, and d) MC volunteer mentors can customize and implement the MC program in their schools and community.

### **Family Recruitment**

Serving military-connected youth through SBM requires first identifying the youth and then engaging them in the program. Both steps can be challenging. Unlike many mentoring programs that have long lists of youth waiting to be served, programs serving military-connected youth need to be more proactive in recruiting participants. Program staff will need to invest more time and effort in this process, especially when attempting an initial launch of MC in a school or school district. Once a strong, positive reputation is established in the eyes of the local military community, engaging eligible families will likely be much easier.

The federal education law ESSA requires states to identify and track the academic progress of military-connected students. With the federally-required military student identifier, school personnel and MC staff can more easily identify students who might benefit from MC. It is important to note, however, that schools can still lack identifying information about military students if parents do not complete the necessary paperwork during registration. Because this is a fairly new requirement, schools are still seeking the optimal way to systematically gather this information. Thus, there will still be a need for outreach and coordination with school personnel, including teachers, principals, and counselors, to identify all military-connected students. Also, military families come and go throughout the school year, so the program's approach to identifying and enrolling students should be similarly flexible. For more detailed information on approaches to identifying military-connected youth, please see the Service Delivery section of this manual.

The process of determining which students might benefit from, and qualify for, MC is best accomplished soon after the school year is underway. School staff have many responsibilities and duties at the start of the new school year; thus, it is better to approach staff about a month or so into the school year. This timing gives teachers, counselors, and administrators more time to get to know their students and make more informed referrals. Ideally, the MC program would begin four to six weeks after the start of a new school year.

### ***Student Screening***

The conceptual model underlying MC is that extra support provided via SBM is a good fit for military students who typically function adequately but whose families are currently experiencing added stress due to military-related challenges. To ensure that potential program participants fit this description, we found it helpful to use the following screening process.

To refer a student to the program, staff complete a brief referral form in which they rate referred students on three dimensions: **a) how easily the students build relationships with others (e.g., peers, teachers, coaches); b) the extent to which the students could benefit from extra support and fun at school; and c) the extent to which the family could benefit from the students receiving extra support at school from an adult mentor.** The school counselor or administrator also might be able to add pertinent information about a family's unique military-related circumstances that could help in the selection process.

Information from the referral form and insights from the school counselor can help identify students most likely to benefit from MC. Implicit in the three dimensions note above is an effort to eschew students who struggle to form relationships with others, who are doing extremely well or are having lots of problems academically and behaviorally, or students whose parents prefer not to be involved or see little need for a mentor. Schools might find that a brief behavioral screening measure can be used to help implement the MC screening criteria.

Military-connected families and students who experience frequent moves, parent deployment (combat-related or otherwise), or parent absence due to frequent or extended training assignments show tremendous resilience. There will be some families, however, that experience a period of emotional strain from these challenges. Students in these situations might display outwardly defiant or inappropriate behavior, but more common, it seems, is emotional distress that is mainly internal in nature. This is important given that most teachers are accustomed to making referrals for students whose academic or behavioral difficulties are easily observed.

Another way to understand the kind of student who would best fit MC is to consider referrals within a PBIS framework. Many schools are currently using PBIS as the social/emotional component of their Response to Intervention efforts (see [www2.ed.gov/programs](http://www2.ed.gov/programs)), designed to meet the needs of all students in their development of social skills. The PBIS framework has three tiers. Tier I services cover the universal social skill supports available to all students in a school. Tier II interventions are for students who need additional support and include programs such as Check and Connect (see <http://checkandconnect.umn.edu/>), mentoring, and small group support. Tier III interventions are for students needing more intensive one-on-one support, including services from other professionals (e.g., mental health counselors). Previous research on military-connected students and on SBM programs suggest MC falls squarely within Tier II services.

A final issue to consider in the screening process is whether a referred student has siblings or stepsiblings attending the same school who are a good fit for MC. This information can be obtained by reviewing the roster of students compiled from the military student identifier. Having siblings participate together in the MC program can often benefit the entire family. That said, it is important to note that siblings can sometimes have very different mentoring experiences; thus, it's important for parents to decide if it is best for their family to have multiple children participate or continue to participate for another year (see the section below on match closure).

## LESSONS IN ACTION

### Families Can Benefit from Matching Siblings

Mentoring can benefit the entire family. One mentee went home and announced, “My mentor’s back!” Her younger sister, who attended the same school, heard this and asked about getting her own mentor. Her parent reached out to *MentorConnections* staff and shared how excited her other daughter was about possibly being part of the program. The second child was successfully matched, and these siblings were able to share in the experience of having this support at school.

#### *Reaching Families*

Once school staff have identified military-connected students who could benefit from having a mentor, it is time to connect with the parent/guardian to obtain permission as well as other information. A review of school enrollment information can help determine who is listed as the parent, if multiple families are involved, or if the student is living with a relative (grandparent, etc.) or blended family. It is also helpful to understand who the active-duty adult is in the family or whether both parents are active duty.

Depending on the number of students referred, there might be need for an introductory email or letter sent home with each student. In the original MC program, we used a quick phone call to let parents know that information was coming home about a school-based mentoring program. It is helpful to include the parent permission form with the letter or email, with a request for it to be returned to school. Given that military parents are often busy and focused on managing their family in the face of many challenges, it can be helpful to follow up with additional phone calls from the MC Coordinator or even the school counselor. **It is important that all phone calls and emails are made from school district phone numbers or district email addresses to assure parents that the MC program is school-sponsored.**

All family- or parent-related MC documents, especially enrollment and background forms, should be gender neutral and reflect the fact that family units can be very diverse. For example, it is wise to ask about “parents” or “caregivers” living in the home rather than about “mothers” or “fathers.” It is also important to ask caregivers to share any additional information about their student or family that is important for program staff to know. For example, information about pending deployments or moves can be helpful when matching students and mentors. Information about students’ interests and activities can also be helpful.

#### *Engaging Military-Connected Parents*

Engaging military families will likely be more successful if MC Coordinators are able to build a personal connection with students’ parents and other caregivers. Due to frequent moves, many military parents are less able to rely on long-standing social networks to get word-of-mouth

endorsements about school programs. Absent such input, military parents will want information from a trusted source, such as teachers or school counselors. An MC Coordinator who is not a well-known part of the school environment will have to make an extra effort to reassure parents of the benefits of this program. Military parents might also find it helpful to know they can meet the MC mentor or at least learn more information about the adult volunteer and his/her background.

Some parents do not see mentoring as a good fit for their children's needs (Basualdo-Delmonico & Herrera, 2014), and this can be especially true for military parents (Spencer et al., 2018). Formal mentoring programs are often viewed as serving only youth who are troubled and having significant social and emotional problems. It is critical to frame MC simply: extra support and fun at school for students whose families are facing military-related stressors.

It is also important to carefully frame the role of the mentor (Basualdo-Delmonico & Herrera, 2014). Mentoring programs have historically served youth from single-parent homes, and mentoring was often cast as a way to help youth who lacked a positive adult role model. This "deficit" model is less commonly used by mentoring programs, but its legacy is still evident. More importantly, it is an issue particularly relevant to military families: Deployed parents are not looking for a replacement adult, and seldom are military students lacking positive adult role models. Instead, MC mentors offer extra support at school that is both fun and safe.

Newly enrolling families often review district and school web pages for information and links related to school involvement, for ways to volunteer, and for news about parent-teacher associations. Recently arriving military parents will search for resources that acknowledge the unique needs of parents and students with a military connection. Ideally, information about the MC program (overall description, FAQ, contacts) should be easily accessed via district or school web pages dedicated to military families. Even if these postings do not prompt military parents to seek out mentoring, they might be more open to their student participating in MC if they can learn about the program through a helpful and trusted web link.

When MC staff call military parents, it is helpful identify themselves and their official position within the school district. It is helpful to begin by assuring parents that their student is fine and that the call is not tied to any urgencies or concerns (e.g., sick, in trouble, in danger). We found it helpful to frame the call as a way to let parents know about an opportunity that could be appealing to their child. If no one answers, leave a message with a call-back number, and let parents they can expect and email with information about the MC program. Often parents will have reviewed that information before calling back.

When emailing information to parents about the MC program, it is important to use a district email address and to identify early the purpose of the email. Because many families have more than one student in the district, always identify which one is the focus of the email. Attach all MC-related materials to the email, and let parents know when they can expect a phone call.

It is important that parents who are contacted about the MC program have a copy of the parent permission form. In many elementary schools, parents are accustomed to receiving and returning these forms via email or in students' weekly folder.

If there is no response from a military parent even after repeated attempts, it might be helpful to get guidance from school staff about next steps. Staff might know other ways to make contact, and this extra step is often worth the effort given that parents hardest to reach are often those whose children can benefit the most from the support of an MC mentor.

One potential barrier to participation is the concern felt by some military families that by participating in a program serving military students, their children will be tagged as military. Military families, although proud of their service and their capacity to cope with the challenges of military life, often see schools as a place where their children can just be children (and not children of military).

## **Mentor Recruitment**

Mentoring as a way to support military children and their families is appealing to many individuals in our country, but actually volunteering to be a mentor is another matter. It can be challenging to recruit adults who are willing to meet regularly with youth and fulfill all program requirements. It can be especially challenging to recruit mentors when military mentoring programs are just getting off the ground. Such was the case with the MC program. Once mentoring programs for military youth are well established, as is the case with the BBBS program at Camp Pendleton in San Diego, the process of recruiting volunteers reportedly becomes much easier.

Over the course of launching and implementing the MC program, we learned a number of lessons about effective volunteer recruitment. For example, schools often have a core group of volunteers who work in various capacities with the school. Many are retired and enjoy the routine of volunteering each week to help young people. The school's volunteer coordinator or the school counselor are often directly connected to this network of helpful adults.

## **LESSONS IN ACTION**

### **Using Existing Relationships to Recruit Mentors**

A counselor at one school invited a few of the weekly volunteers to a lunchtime meeting to learn more about MentorConnections. Each volunteer signed in with their email address and phone number and were given a mentor enrollment form to complete, if they were interested. Some completed the form at the end of the meeting, and a couple took the form with them. Follow-up phone calls were made to those who took a form home to see if they were interested. This recruitment strategy led to five new mentors, all of whom were excited to be part of a new program and glad they could see each other weekly.

## ***Friend Raising***

Friend raising is another effective strategy for recruiting mentors. A friend-raising event is a gathering in which current mentors invite a friend to learn more about the program. Usually it involves sharing dessert, coffee, or a light snack in someone's home. All who attend sign in with their email address and phone number, and a follow-up call is made to gauge their interest in mentoring a youth. Inviting current or former mentors, mentees, and parents to share their story at these events can be especially helpful, allowing volunteers to make a personal connection to the MC program.

Groups such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) can also help with mentor recruitment. These groups often recruit parents and community members to help with school events. PTAs and PTOs also tend to manage a database of potential volunteers. These groups are often open to collaboration; consider requesting their help in recruiting members via phone calls, monthly meetings, or special events.

Common to all recruitment strategies and a key lesson from our project is the importance of issuing a personal invitation to adults who can mentor a military student. This very direct way of asking for help, in our experience, greatly increased the odds of volunteering compared to a more passive approach such as posting fliers or making broad appeals via newsletters.

## ***Who Is the Ideal Mentor?***

The ideal mentor does not exist—for two reasons. First, there are many different kinds of adults who can be a supportive presence in children's lives, and this is certainly true for youth mentors. Effective mentors can vary in age, in their cultural and educational backgrounds, and in their likes and interests. Second, children come with very differing sets of strengths, needs, interests, and ways of interacting. A volunteer can be a great fit for one child but struggle to connect with another child (and vice versa).

It is worth noting, however, that there are times when mentors and mentoring can be harmful to youth. The most obvious example, of course, are those adults who volunteer as a way to exploit or abuse children (see Screening below). Less obvious is the harm that can come when mentors are inconsistent or when they stop mentoring prematurely (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012). An even more nuanced issue to watch for is mentors' capacity to provide a "good-enough" relationship, one that combines consistency with a minimum level of negativity or conflict. Mentors don't have to have a wonderfully warm and engaging style, but they do need to be able to provide a relationship that is not marked by criticism and conflict. ***If volunteers lack the ability to be committed and caring mentors, regardless of their background or motivation to help military-connected youth, they should not be matched!*** That's especially true for mentors participating in the MC program. Military parents don't want mentors to be counselors or therapists or positive role models; instead, they want mentors to be a **consistent, safe, and fun** source of support at school.

MC mentors can be either civilians or those with a military background or a military connection. Either can be a good fit for MC, and more important than a military connection is an interest in serving military families and a willingness to learn about the strengths, needs, and interests of military students and families. Also important is the stability of volunteers' lives. MC and LMA staff should try to anticipate circumstances that could interfere with mentors being a consistent presence, unable to fulfill their commitment as mentors. Relevant here is information about possible plans to relocate, to change jobs, to go back to school, or to change their family circumstances (e.g., marriage, divorce, having a child), all of which are standard foci of LMAs' process of screening mentors.

### ***Military-Connected Mentors***

Several mentors who participated in the MC program were retired military or currently enlisted. For some parents, matching children with a military-involved mentor went a long way to building trust in the program. One MC mentor was a retired colonel, and his mentee told him: "My mom says I can trust you because you're a retired colonel." Involving military volunteers can also introduce its own set of challenges. For example, another one of our mentors was active-duty military, and twice during the school year, she had to be away for a month of training. This made it very difficult for her to develop a relationship with her mentee, which became a stumbling block for the match. When interviewing active-duty military personnel as potential mentors, be sure to ask about their nine-month schedule and how it might affect their ability to commit to the program. Those MC mentors who were active-duty military but were not away during the school year greatly benefited, it seemed, from their military background; it gave them a strong understanding of what their mentees were going through when family members deployed or when families had to move. Not all active-duty military know their future training and deployment schedule for an entire academic year, but it can help to anticipate potential absences and other challenges in advance.

### ***Civilian Mentors***

Civilian community members, even those not familiar with the military, can make excellent mentors. Community volunteers frequently commented to us that they wanted to give back to those who serve our country and to their families. They saw mentoring a military-connected child as an excellent way to do that. But community volunteers will need training in what it means to be in a military family. Early in our project, we conducted focus groups with military parents and used that information, as well as other resources, to develop an online training for military mentors (see below). Our mentors reported that they appreciated the training and that they referred to the lessons of the training throughout their match. A key part of the training is information about the unique aspects of military culture, including any military jargon that mentees might use. Learning to understand and respect that culture seemed to help mentors understand mentees' stories and concerns.

## Screening Volunteers

In addition to background and reference checks essential to any youth mentoring program, there are additional factors to be considered when screening volunteers to mentor military-connected youth. As noted previously, mentoring should not be harmful, which can happen when mentors are inconsistent and fail to follow through with their commitment. ***Given how often military-connected youth experience change and school transitions, it's important to screen out volunteers who might struggle to visit consistently or who might end the relationship prematurely.*** Potential mentors should also be open to learning about military culture and be sensitive to the concerns of military-connected youth. Therefore, it is important to attend to volunteers' general attitudes and beliefs about the U.S. military. For example, mentors who have strong negative biases about the military or its impact on child well-being could struggle to offer support that is not harmful or nonjudgmental.

## Volunteer Training

Mentoring military-connected youth is similar to mentoring any young person, but there are some important things to keep in mind. The most important point is that mentoring for military students should be an experience that is safe, supportive, and fun.

In the MSM project, we developed a training designed specifically for mentors working with military-connected youth (see <https://msmentor.hosted.uark.edu/Military-training-7.28/>). This training was intended as a supplement to the core training provided to volunteers by our partner local mentoring agency. In other words, this focused training is not meant to be used as a general preparation of volunteers to mentor youth and should not be used as a replacement for what mentoring agencies typically use. As noted earlier, this supplemental training was derived from a series of focus groups conducted with military parents whose children were enrolled in the school district where the project was located. A key aim of the training is to sensitize mentors to the fact that military family life has distinct features, and military culture is associated with a proud tradition and strongly held values and beliefs. Volunteers are not expected to become experts in military culture, but it is very helpful for mentors to have some familiarity with those values and beliefs and to be comfortable with the terminology used by military students and parents.

Key aspects of the MSM military mentor training include:

- Information about important features of military families, such as their resilience, the value placed on “taking care of their own,” and their high mobility rates.
- Introduction to the transitions that typify military family life (i.e., frequent relocations and the multiple phases of the deployment cycle).
- Fostering awareness of likely differences in how non-deployed co-parents manage information (the “narrative”) about a deployed partner.
  - Parents of younger children, in particular, might say very little about the circumstances of the deployment or describe the absence as a “work trip.” Mentors should follow children’s lead and not introduce any new information or make assumptions about what children know or are experiencing with regard to a parent’s deployment.

- It's important to remind mentors about this caveat a couple of weeks after the start of the match.
- Clear guidance regarding the mentor's role in the child's life, which is to be a safe, fun, and supportive adult.

## **Preparing Parents, Students, and Teachers**

### ***Preparing and Engaging Parents/Guardians***

In most school-based mentoring programs, there is very little contact between mentoring program staff and mentees' parents. Based on information gathered from military parents in our focus groups, it makes sense to provide parents of military-connected youth opportunities for parental engagement. Many of these highly mobile families do not have deep roots in the school or community, so opportunities for engagement can promote greater trust on the part of military parents, which can be critical for program success.

Beyond fostering trust and goodwill, involving parents in the MC program can be helpful in learning more about the circumstances affecting military students and their families. Especially helpful are early conversations about current or anticipated transitions that could inform the timing of the matching or match closure processes. The kinds of information that could be relevant include:

- Military duty status of the service member, including current and upcoming deployments;
- Relocation history and perceived impact on the family and the child;
- Preferences for type of mentors (e.g., military background);
- Preferences for being involved in MC, if any (e.g., meeting the mentor); and
- Preferences about sharing the family's military status with mentors.

Once a match has been made, parents should be notified and offered the opportunity to meet their child's mentor, either individually or through a program-sponsored group event. These events do not need to be elaborate, but they can be useful ways to engage families, connect parents and mentors, and provide a fun and exciting activity for youth. Even a photo of the match (emailed or sent home with the student) can help parents feel more connected to the program. For example, we held an MC ice cream social midway through the school year. Mentors, mentees, and mentees' families came to the school one evening to visit and make ice cream sundaes together. This event also featured a simple "photo booth" where families could take pictures of the mentor and mentee. (More details about and photos from this ice cream social are provided in the section on Closure Activities.)

## LESSONS IN ACTION

### The Importance of Family & Mentor Communication

Staff from Big Brothers Big Sisters, the local mentoring agency partner for the launch of MC, took a picture of each new match and sent the photo home with students. In this way, parents could “meet” their child’s mentor. Families also had a chance to meet the mentor during an ice cream social event at school. Families and mentors were invited to make ice cream sundaes, take pictures, and get to know one another. This event was held in the evening and was an easy way for the parents and mentors to connect.

### Mentors and Families at the MC Ice Cream Social



#### *Preparing Mentees*

In addition to training volunteer mentors and preparing parents/guardians, programs should also prepare youth for the mentoring relationship. It can help to give military-connected students simple and clear information about what they can expect from participation in the MC program. This can include the frequency of match visits, the kinds of activities they can expect, the planned length of the match, and how and when the match will end. The goal is to provide youth with predictability and reduce the likelihood of unexpected changes or unpleasant surprises among youth who often experience plenty of both.

Having these preparatory conversations with MC students is a great way to include youths’ voice in the program. It gives them a chance to express their own interests, expectations, and concerns. Even brief conversations can help foster stronger youth-staff relationships and offer opportunities to learn what is foremost on the minds of mentees, what should be conveyed to mentors, and what misunderstandings youth might have about mentoring. That said, it is

also important not to create unrealistic expectations, such as promising a mentor who has very specific characteristics or interests.

### ***Preparing the Teacher***

Classroom teachers play an important role in school-based mentoring: They are often asked to identify students most likely to benefit from mentoring. Teachers want to share in their students' excitement about mentoring and the anticipation of seeing their mentors each week. **For this reason, it is helpful to provide teachers with an overview of the MC program, including the goals of the program and what is involved in a typical match meeting.** Teachers should know if any of their students were referred and matched, the likely start and end dates of the match, and the logistics of each visit (e.g., day, time, location). It is also helpful to give teachers the name and photo of the mentor as well as the name of the person to contact if students in the MC program are expressing concerns about mentors or asking not to attend the match meeting. Providing a photo of the mentor allows teachers to recognize and greet the mentor if they were to meet in the hall or lunchroom.

MC program staff should keep teachers informed about students' involvement in the program and any unexpected events related to the match. For example, it would be important for teachers to know if the student's mentor unexpectedly stopped coming or ended the match early. There are times when teachers function as gatekeepers to the program, controlling when and if students attend match visits. Prior to students' involvement in the MC program, teachers should be advised against withholding mentoring time as a consequence for students' misbehavior or their failure to complete schoolwork. Indeed, it is important for all school staff (i.e., teachers, principal, school counselor) to have a clear understanding that mentoring is a form of social support that is beneficial when provided consistently but potentially harmful when experienced inconsistently. It is also important to respect the fact that community volunteers take time out of their schedules to meet with their mentees regularly. Opportunities for teachers to meet and check in with MC mentors are particularly helpful in promoting a shared investment in using the MC program to help participating students.

## **LESSONS IN ACTION**

### **Clearly Communicating MC Program Expectations**

An unfortunate lesson was the importance of clearly communicating to all school staff about MC program goals and expectations. On one occasion, a teacher stopped by during an MC match visit and told her student he could not participate in mentoring that day because he had misbehaved in class. Other mentors and mentees witnessed this exchange, which was uncomfortable for everyone. The mentor tried to let the teacher know that this was the student's mentoring day. The student was eventually allowed to stay, but not until the MC Coordinator, school counselor, and teacher had conferred. The teacher had not been informed that withholding mentoring should not be used as a discipline tool. The situation was difficult but provided a valuable lesson about taking time before the program starts to communicate program expectations and procedures to all school staff.

## Matching

A number of factors should be considered when matching mentors with military-connected youth, including shared interests, relevant background characteristics, life circumstances, and parent and youth preferences. Research on mentoring has found that matching on the basis of shared interests can help a new relationship get off the ground (Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan, 2000). This is perhaps more important in SBM programs in which matches meet separately and are engaged in activities of their own choosing (but appropriate to the school setting).

In the launch of the MC program, the model was more in line with a typical BBBS SBM program: Mentors and mentees spent most of their time in a shared activity introduced by the MC Coordinator, who also provided any needed materials.

If a military parent is deployed or away on some other temporary duty assignment, it is important to consider the demographic characteristics of the parent who is away. Military students and parents do not need nor want a mentor who can stand in for the parent who is away. In fact, that parent could feel threatened if the MC mentor is someone who has very similar demographic characteristics (e.g., race, gender, age) or military background.

Military parents tend to place a high premium on safety and predictability; therefore, they might want some input in the selection of the mentor, and this should be accommodated when possible. The same is true for mentor-parent contact; some parents might ask for frequent and direct contact with the mentor, although most will likely be comfortable relying on children's reports about the mentoring relationship.

Considering youth's preferences can also be helpful, though it can make matching more difficult. In the MC program, for example, several boys requested "a young guy who can play sports"; however, many of our volunteers were retired women. Meeting that preference could mean that children wait longer to be matched or that a match is never formed. But there might be other ways to accommodate children's preferences. For example, the "right" mentor could be someone who is willing to go outside for recess every day after lunch regardless of the weather. Mentors who choose to spend recess time with mentees are wise to ask if peers are to be part of the interaction.

## Match Activities

Because many children, especially younger, elementary-age students, enjoy relationships that involve doing things together more than talking about things, opportunities to participate in engaging match activities are an important part of the mentoring process. In the launch of the MC program, staff created an "activity cart" that included games, arts and crafts, puzzles, etc., for the matches to choose from at the beginning of each mentoring session. This helped relieve mentors of the burden of coming up with a new activity each week and is likely a useful approach to preventing mentor burnout. Especially early on, as the mentor and mentee get to know each other, being able to enjoy planned fun activities together can help build a strong match. Ideal activities are those that are fun, easy, and still allow for some conversation and getting to know each other. It can also help periodically add new activities and materials, such as seasonal craft ideas or simple building projects. Sometimes program staff will need to demonstrate a new activity to matches.

Mentors can also bring in new activities for their match based on the shared interests of the mentor and student. For example, one MC mentor introduced a project that involved building a marshmallow catapult. This activity was so popular that the next week the mentor provided materials for the other matches to participate in the project. This spurred other mentors to ask if they could also bring in new activities. The answer was clearly yes, but some constraints applied. For example, we thought it wise to avoid activities or materials that were too costly, that could impact children's safety, or that are too distracting to the other matches. Mentors often checked with the MC Coordinator prior to introducing new activities, and some of the mentor-introduced activities were added to the MC activity cart.

In a program specifically for military-connected youth, activities that connect matches to military family life can also be fun and meaningful for both mentors and youth. For example, most military students have lived in different parts of the country. One activity could involve locating on a map all the towns or installations in which they've lived and then discussing each location (e.g., best food, worst weather, something special about the place, best memory there). Onsite program staff have a clear role to play in managing these processes. In the MC program, staff maintained a small whiteboard that announced new and upcoming activities and also listed important events from the school calendar as well as the timeline when matches were winding down.

### ***Ice Cream Social***

The ice cream social became an important part of connecting families and mentors. Each school held an ice cream social in which all of the school's matches participated and families, teachers, and LMA agency were invited.

## MENTOR & MENTEE AT THE MC ICE CREAM SOCIAL



### **Ice Cream**

Toppings, bowls, spoons, and water to drink (keep it simple)

### **Photo Booth**

Families and mentors used their cellphones to take pictures. Each school had a large wooden frame that included the name of their school. Matches held the frame around their heads before taking a photo, so it looked like the photo was framed. There were also funny props to use such as hats, glasses, mustaches, neckties, etc. Some families also stood together in the frame and took photos.

## DECORATING FRAME PHOTOS FROM THE ICE CREAM SOCIAL



### Frames to Decorate

Students and school staff decorated picture frames as a surprise for the mentors. The photo booth pictures were printed and put into the frames, and the mentees gave them to their mentors on the last day of their match meetings.

### Match Support

Match support refers to the overall process of monitoring and supporting ongoing matches. In SBM, this often includes introducing various match activities and providing needed materials, but other forms of match support are also important. These include routine supervision of participating mentors, checking in with youth about their experiences, periodic communication with parents, troubleshooting issues that arise in weekly match meetings, and providing a positive and guided closure process. Given how quickly and significantly circumstances can change for military families, programs should maintain regular contact with mentors, youth, and parents throughout the mentoring relationship. MC program staff should track any changes in family circumstances, provide relevant guidance to mentors, and help prepare youth if there is a need to close a match early.

### *For Matches*

Program staff should regularly monitor the quality of the match (e.g., how mentors are experiencing the program, their comfort with the role of mentor, their commitment to the match) and ensure that the relationship remains safe, supportive, and fun. Matches will vary in the quality and strength of their relationship, and mentors and mentees will have different needs. MC program staff should be prepared to support a diverse mix of matches at any given school. Routinely observing match visits helps ensure the appropriateness of match activities and increases the likelihood that mentees' experiences in MC are fun, safe, and supportive. Staff should note whether interactions are engaging and reciprocal and whether the nonverbal communication suggests satisfaction and enjoyment by both parties. Observing matches also provides good information for follow-up conversations once mentoring is done for the day.

## LESSONS IN ACTION

### The Importance of Ongoing Match Monitoring

Matches can experience many challenges along the way, and routinely observing matches can help mentors through those challenges. While observing match visits, the MC Coordinator noted that one mentor seemed to be struggling to connect with her mentee. The MC Coordinator conferred with the BBBS case manager, who offered to provide a bit of coaching to the mentor. The MC Coordinator also spoke with the student, who asked about bringing a classmate to match meetings. This would enable them to play a game together with the mentor. This plan allowed for more fun in the match while also allowing time for the mentor and mentee to get to know each other. BBBS staff continued to coach the mentor, suggesting activities that might be developmentally appropriate for the mentee. With ongoing support, this match was able to continue to the end of the year.

#### *For Parents/Guardians*

Although many SBM programs do not have regular contact with parents, it can be helpful to provide parents with periodic program updates (e.g., quarterly emails from the local mentoring agency). Parents are interested in the kinds of activities in which their children have been engaging and what they can expect going forward. Regular communication encourages parents to reach out when they have questions or to give feedback about how the program is going. Having a line of communication in place is also helpful when planning for match closure at the end of the school year.

Regular communication with parents can also give MC staff additional insight into how the match is going and provide opportunities to ask about any changes in the family's circumstances (e.g., potential moves, upcoming deployment, return from deployment). Sometimes this kind of information comes from the student, the school counselor, or the classroom teacher, so it can be helpful to make a follow-up call to parents to clarify the anticipated impact on mentoring. There are some situations that require that parents are contacted. An example might be if students share with their mentor information about potentially dangerous or abusive situations at home. In these circumstances, MC staff should work closely with the school counselor to ensure that this information is appropriately and professionally handled.

#### *For Mentors*

It is important to check in periodically with individual mentors, apart from their interactions with the mentee or other matches. Program staff should also monitor match meetings to ensure that mentors are meeting as scheduled, with minimal canceled or rescheduled visits. This can also be done by checking the school volunteer logs to see when mentors are signing in and out. In our launch of the MC program we found it helpful to ensure that mentors were aware of upcoming school events. Mentors were given a school calendar that let them know about key events (e.g., school holidays, parent-teacher conferences, teacher in-service days, dates of standardized testing). We also were able to include MC mentors in school events designed to thank and acknowledge volunteers.

Research has indicated that some mentors drop out because their expectations for the relationship were not met (Spencer, 2007; Spencer et al., 2017). For example, many mentors end the match because they feel unappreciated or believe their mentee isn't benefiting from their efforts. Program staff can help support mentors by reminding them of the importance of being a consistent, safe, and positive source of support for mentees, even when it appears that mentees are not benefiting or not showing appreciation. In some cases, mentors will wonder if their mentee really needs a mentor. It can help to let mentors know that military-connected children need not be distressed or in trouble to benefit from the positive support of a mentor. Sharing positive stories or statements about the mentee (e.g., "Joe really missed you last week!" or "Joe's mom noted how much his behavior has improved at home!") can also go a long way in encouraging mentors and making them feel that their time is well spent.

### ***For Mentees***

Regular check-ins with mentees can help ensure that the match is meeting their needs and interests and is more helpful than harmful. Some children do not show their distress and might even work hard to keep up the appearance that they are doing fine, even if they are not. In fact, military-connected youth whose families embrace the military values of strength, resilience, and independence might, at times, be reluctant to show or voice any distress. Ensuring that the MC program continues to be a safe and positive experience for all participating youth requires consistent, careful observation and the regular use of one-on-one conversations. Updates from the MC Coordinator or LMA staff if a child is absent or there is a change in school schedule are especially helpful for busy volunteers who take time off from work to mentor.

### ***For the Mentoring Space***

Securing a space where matches can meet is critical, but it can also be challenging in space-constrained schools. Each school will determine what space works best for their students and staff. Sometimes the only option is a hallway or the cafeteria. Ideally, the space has desks or tables where matches can meet and play games or work on various projects. Sometimes the school library can be reserved for mentoring visits. Another option is a room dedicated to a particular class (band, orchestra) but that is occupied only at select times during the day (see picture below). It is important that the MC-affiliated staff (e.g., MC Coordinator, LMA staff) receive permission from the building administrator to use the space during the dedicated mentoring time. It can help to post a mentoring schedule on the door to avoid double-bookings and misunderstandings. MC support staff should arrive in time to set up the room for any planned mentoring activities and make sure to clean up the room and return all tables, desks, chairs, etc., to where they were prior to match activities.

## **MENTORING IN ACTION**



### ***For the Match Meeting Time***

Mentoring is typically a one-on-one relationship, but having matches meet at the same time in a shared space can support the goals of the MC program. Joint match meetings convey to military students a strong and collective message of support, safety, and fun. When matches first start, mentors and mentees can be a bit nervous and unsure of what to expect or whether they'll get along. Hearing and seeing how other matches interact helps everyone feel more comfortable and confident. One pair might see another engaging in an activity that looks fun and decide to try it too. If mentors aren't sure about how to do a particular match activity, they can observe what others are doing before giving it a try. It can also be helpful to have current mentors welcome newly arriving mentors by introducing themselves and sharing what they have been doing during their visits.

We found that the hum created by a roomful of MC matches contributed to an overall positive feeling for everyone. However, it is important to attend to group-level dynamics so that one-to-one relationships are not lost in the mix. Thus, it is important to attend to the noise level in the room so that it is not interfering with match conversations. The size of the room and the number of matches will determine how many matches can realistically be in the same room. Gathering matches together at the same time can also provide a buffer for days when mentors have to miss a meeting. If their mentees still want to attend, they can come to the room and either engage with program staff or be included with another match for that day. Weekly mentoring visits—even if the mentor is absent—help create a sense of routine or ritual that is essential to the program's goal of providing consistent support to military students.

### ***For Match Meeting Materials***

#### **Everyday Supplies**

There are several inexpensive and readily accessible items that can help make match meetings fun and keep them running smoothly. These include the following:

- A posted lunch/recess schedule so that MC staff and mentors can know when students are coming and going;
- A message board that can be used to welcome matches, identify new mentors, and let matches know what new supplies are available; and
- A set of activity supplies located on a cart or in a box that can be used by matches during their mentoring meetings.

Because the mentoring space might be used at other times for other purposes, it is important to label all of the supplies as belonging to the MC mentoring program. It is also important to keep supplies well stocked to accommodate multiple projects or activities, or in case students need supplies to complete a project they bring from class. General supplies that are good to have on hand include:

- Writing paper, lined and unlined
- Construction paper
- Glue
- Scissors
- Pens, pencils, and erasers
- Colored pencils
- Markers
- Rulers

## MATCH PLAYING A BOARD GAME



### Specific Games/Activities

It helps to have a variety of games on hand. Consider asking students about their favorite games. Perennial favorites are card games such as UNO or a plain deck of cards. Board games such as Guess Who?, HedBanz, Life, and Jenga are also currently popular. Some mentoring matches enjoy building with Legos, building a model car, or using Play-Doh. Traditional board games such as checkers also offer a great way for matches to talk while enjoying a game together. It is important to rotate in new games or supplies but note there will be some matches that enjoy returning to the same game or activity.

## MATCH ENGAGING IN ARTS & CRAFTS ACTIVITY



### Art Projects

Art projects, particularly seasonal ones, can be a lot of fun for the entire group. For example, one MC match (see below) decided to make a memory book to help the student remember her school, because her family would soon be relocating. The mentor and mentee chose the activity together, and they worked on it each week.

If a match is unsure about what to do, MC staff can offer suggestions; art projects are often a useful activity to have on hand. Sometimes even the strongest matches need something new and fun to do! However, like all activities, art projects should be presented as options; matches should be free to make choices about what they would like to do at each meeting.

## Match Closure

Match closure refers to how youth mentoring relationships are brought to an end (see Table 6). The goal in match closure is a planned, positive experience that acknowledges the time mentors and mentees spent together, the sadness of seeing it come to an end, and a chance to say goodbye (Zilberstein & Spencer, 2017). Positive closure is important for all youth, but it is especially so for military-connected youth who often experience multiple transitions and the starts and stops of multiple relationships. ***In the MC program, it is recommended that every match close at the end of the school year so that all mentees have the experience of positive closure with their mentors.*** If both mentor and mentee plan to return to the school (and to the program) in the fall and parents support it, the pair can be matched again at that time. Even though both mentors and mentees might plan to return the following year, unexpected moves or job/life changes can happen over the summer that prevent the continuation of the match. For that reason, we have all MC matches close at the end of the school year, thereby giving all matches a chance to say goodbye.

Program staff should introduce the concept of closure at the very start of mentoring as a way to emphasize to mentors the importance of a positive closure for military students. In fact, the issue of closure is built into the MC mentor training that was noted earlier (see <https://msmentor.hosted.uark.edu/Military-training-7.28/>). It is also important to begin preparing mentors and mentees for match endings about six weeks in advance. There should be no surprises about matches ending and no avoidance talking about match endings. Note that some military families relocate before the end of the school year, so closure procedures should be planned accordingly. For mentees whose families move suddenly and unexpectedly before the school year ends, staff should strive to implement as many match closure steps as possible.

**TABLE 6** *The Basic Tenets of Positive Match Closure*

Positive Closure	
<b>PLANNED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare participants for closure process and complete all agreements</li> <li>• Facilitated by program staff</li> </ul>
<b>PROCESS-FOCUSED</b>	<p><b>Provides opportunities to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Express feeling about the ending and the relationship</li> <li>• Review highlights, note changes, share memories, and create a tangible reminder of the relationship</li> <li>• Express appreciation of one another</li> <li>• Plan future goals</li> </ul>
<b>GROWTH-PROMOTING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normalizes endings</li> <li>• Positive, celebratory</li> <li>• Tailored to participants' needs, strengths, vulnerabilities – space for expressions of pain, loss, regrets if needed</li> <li>• Provides good model for relationship endings</li> </ul>
<b>CLEAR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closure agreements signed</li> <li>• Future contact clear and agreed to</li> </ul>

In the initial launch of MC, we used a five-step process for closing mentoring matches. This process reflected our recognition that military families are highly mobile, so mentored students have experience with multiple leavings or separations related to their parents’ military transitions. This multiple-step closure process is drawn from findings from a study that explored the impact of closure experiences on mentoring relationships (Keller & Spencer, 2018). Findings revealed limited program facilitation of relationship closures and disturbing levels of youth dissatisfaction in how their mentoring relationships ended. The five steps are listed below and are described in detail later in this section.

1. Acknowledge the ending and create a Closure Map (i.e., a plan for the next four weeks)
2. Special match activity -repeat favorite match activity or the activity that never quite happened
3. Reflection – engage in activities that help youth and mentor look back over their entire match (illustrate the match path, question games, etc.)
4. Tangible transitional object – create or collect an object for each to represent the match
5. Look forward and say goodbye- share food, discuss hopes and near term goals)

**Preparing for Closure**

LMA case managers serve a critical role in preparing for match closure. Staff remind mentors, mentees, teachers, and parents/guardians regularly of the closure date, ensure that any required closure paperwork is completed, determine all participants’ interest in a following match year, and schedule the initial (Step 1) meeting in which they participate.

Below is a proposed match closure timeline. These activities can be written each week on a whiteboard in the mentoring room. The board can also count down how many weeks are left to meet and what the intentional activity is for the next week. Here are a couple of events/activities we used to promote positive MC match closures.

**TABLE 7** *Sample Match Closure Timeline Countdown*

Week	Activity
<b>WEEK 5</b> Closure Map	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan four remaining match meetings</li> <li>• Identify and plan the Special Activity for Week 4 (a pair’s favorite or something talked about but never done)</li> </ul>
<b>WEEK 4</b> Special Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do activity chosen the prior week</li> </ul>
<b>WEEK 3</b> Looking Back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the match activities, personal changes, and challenges faced, e.g., illustrate a match timeline, play a “what can you remember” game</li> <li>• Create a list of what changed</li> <li>• Plan the transitional object to be created Week 2 or collected</li> </ul>
<b>WEEK 2</b> Transitional Object	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create object mentor and mentee and engage in regular activities</li> </ul>
<b>WEEK 1</b> Goodbye/Look Forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete transitional object (e.g., ripcord bracelet)</li> <li>• Identify near-term goals</li> <li>• Clarify post-match communication</li> <li>• Set near-term objectives and talk about how to fill the void of the ended match meetings</li> </ul>

Mentors got very positive feedback from families when they met at the ice cream social. Parents and mentors alike felt it was invaluable to have time to visit and get to know one another. Students were very proud to be able to introduce their mentor to their family. It was important to invite all family members who were able to come; this helped mentors appreciate students' sense of family, the resilience of military parents, and the strong ties to siblings in the family. For example, one mentee who was the oldest of five children was often tasked with caring for her one-year-old sibling, and she managed to demonstrate that quite well at the ice cream social. She was very proud to show her mentor what her family duties were.

Each mentor and mentee can choose the color of their bracelets, and often they choose the same color. The cord used for the bracelets can be found at craft stores or online. MC staff can help matches get started with the knot tying by either demonstrating it for them or showing them a short video (e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqyecPGPgww>). Often students can learn the knot-tying technique pretty quickly, so they often help their mentors. When the bracelets are finished, mentors and mentees can wear them until the end of the school year. The picture below shows the pride expressed by both mentor and mentee as a match completed its bracelets.

## MATCH WITH THEIR RIPCORD BRACELETS



### Ripcord Bracelets

The ritual of making ripcord (aka paracord) bracelets is a way for both mentors and mentees to create and keep something that is symbolic of their match. Some armed forces personnel have made these bracelets as part of their rehabilitation after an injury, and some military students had received a ripcord bracelet in the past from their military parent. So, the ripcord has a special meaning to many military families.

## LESSONS IN ACTION

### The Importance of Match Closure

The Home-School-Community (HSC) Support Team at each school can be very helpful in promoting and planning the closure process. In the launch of MC, one HSC team had this on its agenda at a February meeting, and the community representative, a man who was also an MC mentor at the school, wasn't clear on the need for planned closure activities. The military parent on the HSC explained how frequent moves had affected her family, especially her son. Coincidentally, this mother had just learned prior to the HSC meeting that her family had received orders to relocate. Sharing this news was, of course, very emotional for her. She emphasized the importance for military children of taking the time to say goodbye, noting that it was critical for families with so much mobility. As the community member and military parent both started to cry, he had a new understanding of what closure could and should look like. After that meeting, he shared with other mentors the importance of well-planned closures. At the end of the school year, as he directly experienced the closure process, he commented on the value of each activity. Such is the power and importance of a proper goodbye.

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# APPENDIX A

## INITIAL PILOT TEST OF THE *MENTORCONNECTIONS* PROGRAM

The initial pilot test of the *MentorConnections* program involved four elementary schools in the North Thurston Public School district. This was the first randomized controlled trial to examine the benefits of mentoring as a supportive service for military-connected students.

### Method

Students and parents were recruited into the study in the fall of 2016 and were mentored primarily during the spring 2017 semester. Outcomes were assessed at baseline (prior to random assignment) and again post-intervention (late April/May of 2017). 48 students were randomly assigned to *MentorConnections* ( $n = 27$ ; 13 boys, 14 girls) or a no-mentoring control condition ( $n = 21$ ; 10 boys, 11 girls). Baseline and post-intervention surveys were obtained from 48 students, 45 parents, and 44 teachers. Qualitative interviews for participants in the MC condition were administered to a subset of students, parents, and mentors.

### Proximal Outcomes

Analyses of hypothesized proximal outcomes suggested benefits from *MentorConnections* students' perceptions of social support and parents' ratings of stress in the home.

### Distal Outcomes

Results from analyses of hypothesized distal outcomes were mixed or null, due perhaps to the fact that participating children exhibited limited impairment at baseline.

### Program Satisfaction

Parents, teachers, and mentors who participated in *MentorConnections* were generally satisfied.

### Qualitative Impressions

Students reported enjoying their mentor and the program. Parents greatly appreciated having an additional adult looking after their child at school and found particularly valuable the opportunities to meet and interact with their student's mentor. Mentors reported enjoying the opportunity to support a military-connected student.

### Conclusion

Our study was limited by the size of the sample and by the short duration of the mentoring as well as by numerous significant group differences at baseline. Nevertheless, we found preliminary evidence that *MentorConnections* can be an effective way for schools to support military-connected students and families.

# APPENDIX B

## JOB DESCRIPTION: MC COORDINATOR (FOR MSM RESEARCH PROJECT)

North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS) is seeking an individual to serve as coordinator for a school-based mentoring program to support military-connected students at five to six elementary school campuses.

The *MentorConnections* (MC) Coordinator will collaborate with the administrative team, school principals and counselors, and members of the school PBIS team to implement a new program, the goal of which is to connect military-connected youth with one-to-one mentoring relationships. Achieving this will also involve collaboration with students' parents/caregivers, classroom teacher, support staff, district personnel, LMA staff, and community stakeholders. This contract is a model of coordinated support provided by the MC Coordinator to each school's Home-School-Community (HSC) Support Team, which will comprise the school counselor (or equivalent), a parent of a military-connected student, a military-connected student, and a community representative (e.g., business leader, civic organization liaison). The work includes consulting with school personnel, supporting HSC Support Teams, and coordinating with LMA staff.

The MC Coordinator will be responsible for establishing and supporting HSC Support Teams at each campus and will guide HSC Support Teams in their efforts to facilitate onsite mentoring of military-connected elementary school students who could benefit from added social support. The MC Coordinator will coordinate referrals of military-connected students and potential volunteer mentors from HSC Support Teams to a local, partnering mentoring agency. The MC Coordinator will also assist efforts by the district's research partners to evaluate the feasibility, utility, and efficacy of the MC program. MC program services are dedicated to NTPS military-connected students identified by HSC Support Teams as experiencing disrupted or potentially disrupted academic or social functioning because of family challenges. The primary aim of MC is to provide added social support within the general educational environment that will enable the military-connected students to maintain their educational requirements and/or achieve stability in their social and academic performance.

### Scope of Work:

The position of *MentorConnections* (MC) Coordinator is a half-time position. It requires knowledge of and familiarity with challenges faced by military families. The range of duties to include but not limited to:

- Participate in a two-day training.
- Consult with administrators, teachers, and staff to establish Home-School-Community (HSC) Support Teams at five to six elementary schools that will facilitate onsite mentoring of military-connected students.
- Provide initial training and guidance to newly formed HSC Support Team members.
- Guide, monitor, support HSC Support Teams throughout the school year.

- Oversee and coordinate the collaborative partnership between NTPS and the LMA.
- Coordinate referrals and initial screening of military-connected students from HSC Support Teams to the LMA.
- Coordinate referrals and initial screening of potential volunteer mentors from HSC Support Teams to the LMA.
- Assist LMA staff and HSC Support Teams to match military-connected students with a volunteer school-based mentor.
- Assist LMA staff and HSC Support Teams to monitor and support all MC matches.
- Assist LMA staff and HSC Support Teams to promote parent/caregiver involvement in the MC program.
- Assist LMA staff and HSC Support Teams with efforts to foster community support for the MC program.
- Assist the district's research partners in efforts to evaluate the feasibility, utility, and efficacy of the MC program.

**Qualifications:**

Master's level in education social work/counseling preferred or five years of relevant experience may substitute. Experience working with elementary school students experiencing disrupted or potentially disrupted academic or social functioning because of family challenges. Ideally, knowledge and experience working with military-connected students and/or youth mentoring programs.



The *MentorConnections* Manual, August 2019  
[militarystudentmentoring.uark.edu](http://militarystudentmentoring.uark.edu)