



A BLUEPRINT FOR

MILITARY EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

And Education Freedom for Those Who Defend Freedom

Launching the Semiquincentennial Education Initiative for Military Families

Military families have no choice about where they serve. They should always have a choice about where their children learn.

September 2026

Executive Summary

As we honor our nation's 250th anniversary, Americans are reflecting on the ideals that have sustained our Republic for two and a half centuries: liberty, self-government, opportunity, responsibility, and freedom. No group has done more to defend those ideals than the men and women of the United States Armed Forces and the families who serve alongside them.

Part and parcel of those ideals is education, the key to understanding and proliferating a free society. Great education is a goal for all Americans. But those who sacrifice the most to protect and preserve American ideals often have the least opportunity to pursue that for their own families. Education is not merely a family concern. Education is a readiness issue.

Military families rarely choose where they are stationed, when they move, how long they remain, or whether a deployment will separate a parent from a child for months at a time. For military children, each permanent change of station can mean a disrupted education, a new set of academic expectations, lost services, and another search for a school capable of meeting a child's needs.

The FY2027 defense debate has provided an opportunity to begin addressing that problem. The Trump Administration's FY2027 Department of War budget request included approximately \$870 million for a new Department of War Education Activity (DoWEA) school-choice initiative, built around tuition assistance of up to \$15,500 per student and projected to serve approximately 11,000 military dependents. This would allow the Department to understand the connection between educational stability and access to quality K–12 options with reduced relocation stress and stronger military readiness.

As such, it's an appropriate vehicle to address this critical issue.

Congress was asked to authorize this pilot, through an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The proposal was introduced in the House, by Representatives Addison McDowell of North Carolina and Claudia Tenney of New York. The Rules Committee made it in order, and it reached the floor as Part A Amendment No. 26, offered by Representative McDowell.³

The amendment would have authorized the Secretary of War to establish a pilot program for full-time active-duty families residing in the United States. Eligible educational costs could include private or faith-based elementary and secondary schooling, public charter school expenses, homeschool instructional materials and training aids, and other approved education costs. The pilot was designed to test demand, feasibility, scalability, and effects on readiness, with authority running through the 2030-2031 school year.

On July 21st, it failed by just two votes, 214–216.

A combination of substantial congressional support and critical need should motivate the nation's leaders to try again, not only to enact the pilot through the continuing FY2027 NDAA process or future legislation, but to launch an unprecedented and well-deserved education initiative for military families that addresses the needs of students, spouses, educators, and the nation itself.

This paper proposes the **Semiquincentennial Education Initiative for Military Families**, built around five reinforcing proposals:

- **Military Family Education Accounts** that allow funding and approved supports to follow military children wherever duty takes their families.
- **Military Education Innovation Zones** that bring high-quality public, charter, private, classical, faith-based, microschool, specialized, and other innovative providers to military communities.
- **A Military Spouse Educator Corps** that creates portable careers and taps an extraordinary but underused education workforce.
- **A Classical & Civic Curriculum Initiative** that gives military families access to rigorous instruction in American history, civics, literature, constitutional principles, and the foundations of a free society.
- **AI-Enabled Learning Networks** that provide educational continuity, personalization, secure records, and stronger support across repeated moves.

Together, these policies would make educational freedom and continuity part of America's commitment to military readiness rather than another burden military families must navigate alone.

"If we trust military families to defend our nation, we should trust them to choose the education that is best for their children."

Education Freedom for Those Who Defend Freedom

Military families surrender control over where they live, where they move, when they move, and how long they remain in one place. They accept deployments, transfers, separations, and disruption as part of their commitment to the nation.

Countless military families deployed for nearly a year can attest to the difficulties and struggles that such conditions create for the family at home. It is part of the commitment made when answering the nation's call.

Every military family understands that some sacrifices come with the uniform: missing birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, first steps, graduations, and family milestones. **But accepting a military assignment should not require sacrificing a child's educational future.**

Yet too often that is exactly what happens. A family may have access to excellent charter, private, classical, faith-based, hybrid, or specialized options in one assignment and almost none in the next. A parent may finally find a setting in which a child is thriving, only to lose it when new orders arrive. A child with dyslexia, autism, a speech disability, or another documented need may arrive in a new state and discover that services painstakingly assembled over years must be explained, defended, delayed, or reconstructed.

No civilian family would deliberately design such a system. Yet we ask military families to live within it every day.

For too long, educational opportunity has been treated as a secondary quality-of-life issue in military policy. That is a mistake. Readiness depends on morale, stability, recruitment, retention, and confidence that continued service will not come at an unreasonable cost to a family. A service member deciding whether to reenlist is not thinking only about force structure, procurement, or strategy. That parent is also asking whether a spouse can sustain a career, whether a child is thriving, and whether the next move will again unravel an education.

When children cannot access appropriate schools, retention suffers. When military spouses must repeatedly abandon professional momentum, retention suffers. When families believe continued service will place their children at an educational disadvantage, recruitment suffers. When a parent is separated for months and the family at home must simultaneously battle a school system for basic services, readiness suffers.

The Department of War already treats housing, health care, child care, and spouse employment as readiness concerns. Education belongs in the same category. Stability in learning is not a private luxury. It is part of the nation's obligation to maintain a force whose families can serve without fearing that their children will pay the educational price.

THE CORE PRINCIPLE

Military families deserve more educational freedom than anyone else, not less. They have no choice about where they serve. They should always have a choice about where their children learn.

The following steps can be taken now:

Congress should hold hearings on military education opportunity. The House Education and Workforce Committee, working jointly where appropriate with the House Armed Services Committee, should hear directly from military families and from leaders of public, private, charter, microschool, classical, and other innovative schools already serving military-connected students. Such a hearing should also examine the substance of the McDowell–Tenney pilot proposal, why the House rejected it, and what changes, if any, would broaden support for moving it forward.

The Administration and congressional sponsors should continue pressing for the pilot in the FY2027 NDAA. The McDowell–Tenney amendment was defeated in the House by only two votes, 214–216. The Senate NDAA is still moving through the legislative process, and supporters should work to insert comparable language in the Senate bill or restore it during House-Senate conference negotiations.

The Administration should include the proposal in its FY2028 budget and continue requesting it until Congress acts. Educational opportunity for military families should become a standing Department of War readiness priority rather than a one-year legislative initiative. The Administration should request dedicated funding for Military Family Education Accounts and the related pilot every year until Congress provides the authority and resources necessary to launch it.

Congress should consider the proposal on its own merits if the NDAA process again fails to produce action. The House vote demonstrated both substantial support and the difficulty of attaching this issue to a massive defense bill containing hundreds of unrelated provisions. If lawmakers who opposed the amendment maintain that their objection was to the broader legislative circumstances rather than to educational choice for military families, they should have an opportunity to demonstrate that support through standalone legislation. Military families should not have to wait for another annual defense bill before Congress gives this proposal the focused consideration it deserves. And Congress should have a vote on record for or against military family education options so that voters understand their choices in upcoming elections.

The Semiquincentennial Education Initiative for Military Families

The Department of War Education Activity office (DoWEA) operates 161 schools across 11 countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico, serving more than 65,000 students. Many of those schools and educators are excellent, and the Department is now placing greater emphasis on rigorous curriculum, high expectations, patriotic values, and classical learning.

This paper is not an indictment of those educators or schools.

But even a strong system cannot provide every military family with every educational environment a child may need. Families increasingly seek classical education, faith-based schools, STEM academies, arts programs, career and technical education, microschools, hybrid learning, virtual courses, specialized disability services, intensive tutoring, and other options that no single school system can reasonably provide everywhere.

The goal should not be to persuade every military family to attend a DoWEA school.

The goal should be to ensure that every military family can reach the educational environment that best serves each child.

The challenge is connecting those opportunities to military families wherever duty calls.

The Semiquincentennial Education Initiative should do that through five mutually reinforcing proposals.

Military Family Education Accounts

The cornerstone of a modern military education policy should be a **Military Family Education Account that travels with the child.**

For decades, public education funding has been attached primarily to systems and addresses. For military families, it should be attached to students and remain usable when assignment orders change geography.

Accounts should permit families to assemble an educational pathway from one or more approved providers. Eligible uses should include tuition, tutoring, curriculum, online coursework, career and technical education, dual enrollment, transportation, therapies, special-needs services, assistive technology, and other qualified educational expenses. A child could attend a school full time, combine a microschool with online coursework, purchase intensive literacy intervention, or use a hybrid plan that preserves continuity during a move.

The Administration's FY2027 request provides a practical starting benchmark: tuition assistance of up to \$15,500 per student. Congress should provide the authority necessary to implement and expand such an approach, while the Department should work with states to make existing state and local education funding portable wherever possible rather than forcing federal dollars to substitute indefinitely for funds already intended to educate the child.

This proposal is especially important for students with disabilities.

Federal law and the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children already provide protections intended to preserve services when military students move. Yet families continue to encounter differing procedures, staffing shortages, repeated explanations of existing diagnoses and plans, delays in comparable services, and uncertainty about what will actually happen when a child arrives.

Military Family Education Accounts should therefore carry a **continuity guarantee** with them. A receiving school or participating provider should be prepared on Day One. Existing IEPs, 504 plans, therapies, accommodations, and service histories should be recognized immediately to the fullest extent permitted by law and program design. Reassessment should occur when educationally justified, not simply because a family crossed a state line.

Military spouse and educator Mercedes Grant demonstrates why this matters. After experiencing educational disruption in her own military family, she founded Path of Life Learning, a microschool designed to give highly mobile students personalized instruction, belonging, and continuity. Her experience illustrates both the problem and the opportunity: innovators are already solving problems traditional systems too often regard as unavoidable.

The policy task is to make such solutions portable and accessible rather than exceptional.

Congress should authorize the accounts and establish broad eligible uses. The Department should administer them with simple safeguards, prompt payment, and maximum portability. States should be encouraged to allow their own education funding to follow military children. The test of the program should be whether a military family can move without surrendering the educational plan that works best for its child.

Military Education Innovation Zones

Providing an adequate supply of options that freedom accounts can use should be part of the Department of War's primary education mission. To understand and experience how a plurality of new and revamped schools can improve conditions for students, the Department should designate an initial group of installations and military communities as **Military Education Innovation Zones**, places where high-quality providers are actively recruited and barriers to serving military families are systematically removed.

Rather than attempting to build every educational model inside a federal bureaucracy, the Department should invite successful organizations to join a national mission. Potential partners include high-performing charter operators, classical and faith-based schools, microschool networks, career and technical providers, hybrid and virtual programs, specialized disability-focused providers, tutoring organizations, higher-education institutions, and innovators already demonstrating strong outcomes.

Mercedes Grant and Path of Life Learning are one example. The Yass Prize community and other innovation networks offer many more. The relevant question should not be whether an organization fits neatly into an existing federal category. It should be whether it can provide an excellent educational opportunity that families want.

Innovation Zones should remove practical barriers to expansion. The Department can make appropriate facilities available on or near installations, provide reliable information about family demand, facilitate agreements with installation leadership, coordinate transportation where necessary, and work with states to address open enrollment, credentialing, and funding portability.

Special attention should be paid to gaps that ordinary schools do not fill. Families should not receive nominal “choice” only to discover that no provider nearby can serve a child with dyslexia, autism, speech and language needs, significant physical disabilities, or another specialized requirement. Zones should deliberately recruit and support the demand for those providers driven by students’ needs.

The result should be simple: **a family arriving at or living near a military installation should encounter more educational opportunity, not less.**

The broader benefit would extend beyond military families. Innovation Zones could become a national opportunity to demonstrate educational pluralism, rapid provider expansion, flexible staffing, specialized services, and new approaches to educational continuity.

The Department should begin with three to five installations selected for family demand, provider potential, state-policy conditions, geographic need, and military-readiness considerations. It should recruit providers rather than wait for them to navigate the federal bureaucracy on their own, measure family demand and results, and expand successful models rapidly.

Military Spouse Educator Corps

Underemployment among military spouses is a major concern of Department of War education leadership.

Every year, thousands of military spouses relocate, interrupting careers, surrendering professional opportunities, and navigating licensing requirements that vary dramatically from state to state. Many are educators. Many have advanced degrees. Many have deep experience working with children and families. Yet our current systems often prevent them from contributing their talents where they are needed most.

This is both an educational problem and an economic one. Military spouse unemployment and underemployment have long been identified as barriers to retention and family stability. Solving this challenge should be a top readiness priority. Military spouses are one of the nation’s greatest untapped sources of educational talent and leadership.

Many have led organizations, built businesses, provided therapies, tutored students, or acquired significant expertise through the adaptability of military life demands. Some have taught.

To address the employment issue and the dearth of educators these recommendations will need to meet demand. A **Military Spouse Educator Corps** should be created with portable pathways for spouses to serve as teachers, learning coaches, tutors, subject-matter experts, academic mentors, career advisers, microschool leaders, virtual instructors, special education teachers, therapists, transition navigators, and case-management supports.

These roles should not be confined to a traditional full-time staffing model. Full-time, part-time, hybrid, remote, and project-based work can allow spouses to remain professionally active even when military life changes location.

Credential portability is critical. The Department should work with states to accelerate recognition of valid licenses and demonstrated experience and to create reasonable provisional pathways where necessary. A spouse who moves every two or three years should not have to begin their professional career again every two or three years.

The Corps can also strengthen the continuity guarantee for highly mobile children. Military spouses with education and special-needs expertise are natural candidates to serve as transition navigators, helping families transfer records, understand available options, identify providers, and resolve problems before they turn into months of lost services.

The Department should establish the Corps as a portable national talent network rather than another fixed federal employment program. States should recognize credentials rapidly; participating schools and providers should have access to the talent pool; and spouses should be able to carry their professional standing and work history from installation to installation.

Classical & Civic Curriculum Initiative

America's 250th year is an appropriate moment to renew civic knowledge, constitutional literacy, and understanding of the ideas and sacrifices that sustain a free society.

Military families know better than most that freedom is not self-executing. The Constitution does not defend itself. Every generation must understand the institutions, history, responsibilities, and moral commitments that make self-government possible.

The Department has already signaled a greater emphasis within DoWEA on rigorous curriculum, patriotic values, classical learning, high expectations, and academic excellence. That direction should be developed while preserving the larger principle on which this blueprint rests: families should have choices among a number of strong educational environments rather than one model imposed upon every child.

Military students need meaningful access to rigorous study of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, American history, Western civilization, great literature, economics, civic responsibility, and the moral foundations of freedom. Leading classical and civic education organizations already possess curricula, teacher development programs, and school models that can be deployed quickly.

The Department does not need to create all of this itself. Proven networks already exist. The Chesterton Schools Network, for example, has demonstrated how a rigorous classical and Catholic model can be replicated across communities through strong curriculum, school leadership, teacher formation, and a clear philosophy of education. Organizations like Chesterton can help open schools in military communities, train and support educators, provide curriculum, and help identify and develop local leaders. They should be viewed as a prototype for the kind of partnership the Department can cultivate, and the Department should actively recruit other proven classical, civic, faith-based, and content-rich providers capable of doing the same.

DoWEA schools should be able to draw upon excellent curriculum and professional development. Innovation Zones should recruit providers with demonstrated expertise. Military Family Education Accounts should enable families to choose these options when they fit their children.

The principle is straightforward:

The families who defend the Constitution should not have to fight to ensure their children understand it.

The Department should identify and make available high-quality classical and civic curricula, invite proven providers into military communities, strengthen teacher development, and make such options available through choice rather than compulsion. America's 250th anniversary should be the catalyst for a lasting commitment to civic knowledge, not a one-year commemorative exercise.

AI-Enabled Learning Networks

Military education also presents an extraordinary opportunity to solve one of the persistent consequences of mobility: schools too often treat an arriving child as if their education is starting all over again.

They should not.

The American military has historically pioneered technologies that later transformed civilian life. The Department can do the same with the responsible use of artificial intelligence and interoperable education technology.

For a child moving every two or three years, a persistent learning record and individualized educational pathway are not merely convenient, but wholly essential. Systems like that can preserve months or years of progress.

An **AI-Enabled Military Learning Network** could support personalized tutoring, adaptive instruction, accelerated coursework, language learning, career planning, family engagement, educator productivity, and continuity across assignments. A student who has mastered material should not repeat it simply because a new district uses a different sequence. A student struggling in literacy or mathematics should not lose the intervention that was working because the family moved.

The same network should provide the practical infrastructure for students with disabilities and other specialized needs. A secure, parent-controlled transition record could contain current goals, IEPs or 504 plans, recent evaluations, accommodations, service histories, assistive technologies, instructional data, and provider information. With parental permission, a receiving school could begin planning before the child arrives rather than weeks afterward.

Each pilot community should also have human transition support. Technology can transfer information, but families facing complicated educational needs still require people who understand the system and can intervene quickly.

Privacy must be foundational. The network should be parent-controlled, cybersecure, interoperable, and transparent about how data and algorithms are used. AI should never replace great teachers, human judgment, or parental authority.

The network's purpose is simple: **a military child should never have to start over because duty required another move.**

The Department should build the continuity network initially around participating Innovation Zones and families, establish strict parent-control and cybersecurity requirements, integrate rather than duplicate existing education records, and measure whether it reduces delays, repeated assessments, lost instructional time, and family burden. Successful tools should then travel with the child across the military education ecosystem.

A Defining Opportunity in America's 250th Year

As America honors 250 years of freedom, we will rightly celebrate those who have defended it. But gratitude alone is not enough.

Military families do not need another proclamation, but what every American parent wants: the ability to choose the education that allows a child to flourish, the assurance that essential services will not vanish at a state line, and the confidence that continued military service will not require accepting educational instability as an unavoidable cost.

The Administration's FY2027 budget request demonstrated that educational choice can be translated into a concrete federal commitment at a meaningful scale. The experience of military families shows why the opportunity should be broader than a single voucher or pilot.

The next steps are now clear.

Congress should continue pursuing authorization and funding. The Administration should make military education freedom a continuing budget and readiness priority. The Department of War should bring proven providers to military communities, open pathways for military-spouse educators, expand rigorous civic and classical learning, and use technology to preserve educational continuity wherever families are sent.

None of this requires reinventing American education.

The educators exist. The schools exist. The specialized providers exist. The technology exists. The demand certainly exists.

What remains is leadership.

"Military families have no choice about where they serve. They should always have a choice about where their children learn."

Education freedom for those who defend freedom is not simply a call to action. It recognizes the obligation the nation has to match its gratitude with action. Military families have earned nothing less.

Sources and Legislative Notes

1. U.S. Department of War, "FY 2027 Mandatory Funding Overview," pp. 20-21. The document requests \$870 million for DoWEA school choice vouchers, establishes a \$15,500 tuition-assistance benchmark, and projects approximately 11,000 participating dependents. https://comptroller.war.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2027/DoW_FY2027_Mandatory_Funding_Overview.pdf
2. Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, Roll Call 269, July 21, 2026. Part A Amendment No. 26 failed 214-216. The party breakdown was 213 Republican ayes and three Republican noes; zero Democratic ayes and 213 Democratic noes; and one independent aye. The Republican no votes were Brian Fitzpatrick, Andrew Garbarino, and Darin LaHood. <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2026269>
3. House Committee on Rules, H.R. 8800 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2027, Rules Committee Amendment No. 905, Version 2, submitted by Representatives Addison McDowell and Claudia Tenney and made in order; floor text printed as Part A Amendment No. 26. <https://rules.house.gov/bill/119/hr-8800>
4. Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives, Roll Call 278, July 22, 2026. H.R. 8800, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2027, passed the House 216-212. <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2026278>

5. U.S. Department of War, official leadership biography and release regarding the Department of War Education Activity. DoWEA operates 161 schools in 11 countries, seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico, serving more than 65,000 students. <https://www.war.gov/About/Biographies/Biography/Article/4456214/paul-craft/>
6. Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission, Compact model language and guidance. Receiving public schools initially provide comparable services based on a current IEP and reasonable accommodations under Section 504 and the ADA; subsequent evaluations remain permissible. <https://mic3.net/assets/compact-model-language.pdf>
7. Center for Education Reform, "Supporting Military Families with Students with Disabilities," memorandum prepared for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2026; and CER profile of Path of Life Learning, a 2025 Yass Prize finalist.