

BRIEF

Maximizing
Access &
Success
for Special
Populations

Supporting Military-Connected Learners in Career Technical Education

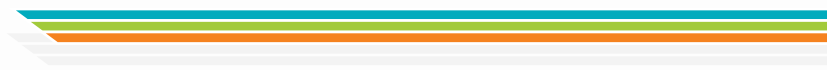
Career Technical Education (CTE) policies and programs have increasingly focused on supporting the needs of historically marginalized learners and closing access and performance gaps among learner groups. Perkins V, the latest iteration of federal CTE legislation known as the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, is part of this trend. The law defines nine learner groups as special populations and includes a number of provisions that address expanding access to and supporting success within CTE programs for special populations. This brief will describe strategies for supporting one of these special populations: military-connected learners.

SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V

LEARNER GROUPS DEFINED AS SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN PERKINS V:

- Out-of-workforce individuals
- English learners
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Individuals with disabilities
- Single parents, including single pregnant women
- Youth who are in/have aged out of the foster care system
- Individuals preparing for careers that are non-traditional for their gender
- Youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families, ex. low-income youth and adults

CTE educators are developing strategies to support learner groups who, while not special populations under the law, may need additional supports, including migrant and undocumented, LGBTQ+, justice-involved and Tribal learners.



DEFINING MILITARY-CONNECTED LEARNERS

Perkins V defines military-connected learners as youth with a parent/guardian who is a member of the armed forces (referring to the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force or Coast Guard) and is on active duty.¹ Active duty does not include full-time National Guard duty.²

Military-connected learners can face unique challenges, including separation from a parent or caregiver due to deployment, high mobility rates that create academic and social challenges, and difficulties accessing or maintaining special needs services owing to different policies and procedures across school districts, among other challenges.³

STRATEGIES FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED LEARNERS

Youth with a parent/guardian who is an active duty servicemember were first defined as a special population in Perkins V, so states and local CTE leaders are in the early phases of implementing strategies to support this learner group. Potential state (🏛️) and local (📍) approaches include:

Supporting learners through challenges related to school transitions 📍

School administrators and other support staff can proactively review policies and procedures for learners enrolling mid-year to ensure a smooth transition. Local leaders can work to intentionally evaluate learner transcripts and prior course completion to ensure that military-connected learners are not disadvantaged in accumulating credit or meeting specific graduation requirements due to mobility.

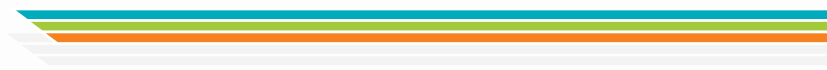
Cross-agency coordination and partnerships 🏛️ 📍

State and local leaders can facilitate networks among local districts with a high enrollment of military-connected learners to foster support groups among school leaders, engage in joint projects, or help inform learners about available resources. Coordinating with education and family support services provided by relevant military branches in local areas can maximize learner resources and assistance.

¹General Military Law, 10 U.S. Code § 101(a)(4).

²General Military Law, 10 U.S. Code § 101(d)(1).

³Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support, Illinois State University, College of Education. (2020). Supporting military-connected students. https://icsps.illinoisstate.edu/images/pdfs/CTE/Special_Populations_Resources/Super_Strategies/Military_Connected_Students_2nd_Proof.pdf



Policies and procedures 📍

Local CTE leaders can support military-connected learners, especially those enrolling mid-year, by providing a mid-year welcome packet with information for learners to engage with school activities and familiarize themselves with important dates and policies. Schools can support CTE participation among military-connected learners by allowing them to register for CTE courses or other electives regardless of enrollment date. Including options for preferred forms of communication with parents and creating flexibility to meet by video conferencing or phone call can allow families to participate in their learner's education regardless of circumstance.



Standard course sequencing 🏛️

State systems can help military-connected learners transition more seamlessly among institutions and across learner levels by developing standardized course names and sequences, including state-developed programs of study. This standardization can help military-connected learners who have changed districts pick up where they left off without losing credits or momentum.

Support structures 🏛️ 📍

Regional and local networks can assist military-connected learners with accessing community organizations that provide supports such as mental health services, child care, government benefits offices, housing and transportation. States can support local recipients by reducing or entirely covering out-of-pocket expenses for special populations. This support can be achieved by using funds allocated under Perkins or other federal or state funding streams.

Career exploration and counseling 🏛️📍

State leaders can help local programs forge stronger partnerships among high schools and postsecondary institutions to facilitate career exploration days and establish connections between learners and academic advisers who are well informed about scholarships that are available for military-connected learners. Providing outcome data and information about military careers can help learners explore more career options and make informed decisions.

Welcoming culture 📍

School administrators, psychologists and counselors can engage with military-connected learners by creating affinity spaces for learners to discuss their experiences openly with peers. Encouraging learners to participate in school co-curricular activities or their local community can create a sense of safety and stability. To foster a greater sense of community among schools and families, local leaders can engage in outreach initiatives on military bases and honor military families for their service.

Informed staff training 🏛️📍

State and local leaders can design professional development opportunities for staff to understand the unique needs of military-connected learners, such as trauma-informed care and inclusive classroom practices. School staff members should document military-connected learner behavior or activity level changes to determine any burgeoning patterns.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

The strategies described in the previous section are not mutually exclusive, and not all will be appropriate based on the needs of your military-connected learner population. Before enacting new strategies, assess the current state of military-connected learners in your CTE programs and dig into root causes of barriers and challenges:

- What do military-connected learners tell you about their needs, challenges and successes?
- What does your data show about the CTE participation and concentration of military-connected learners?
- What does your data show about the performance of military-connected learners?
- Which agencies or community organizations could you connect with to support military-connected learners?
- What support services are available for military-connected learners? How are they made aware of these services?
- What relationships do district leaders have with local military installations?
- In what ways can military and area schools work together to create compatible calendars and schedules?
- What systems are in place to allow military-connected learners access to extracurricular activities in the schools, particularly when learners move at times that are not aligned with the normal “try-out” schedule?

For additional resources, visit [Advance CTE's Perkins V Section](#), the [Maximizing Access and Success for Special Populations in Career Technical Education series page](#) in the [Learning that Works Resource Center](#) and [ACTE's Perkins Implementation page](#).

CASE STUDY

North Carolina serves the fourth largest military-connected learner population in the United States and has carried out several initiatives to produce support systems for military families.⁴

First, the state currently provides military liaison counselors to offer district-wide staff training and direct support to learners where military installations are located. To bolster military installation learner support, at least one installation school liaison officer is located on each base as an accessible staff asset. Second, a state partnership with the North Carolina National Guard has helped provide K-12 support through a Family Programs office for military-connected families.

North Carolina has also signed the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which works to resolve education transition barriers such as eligibility, graduation, enrollment and placement challenges for military-connected learners. Finally, postsecondary partnerships with the College Foundation of North Carolina provide information on career options and education benefits for military-connected learners. As a result of the state's cumulative efforts, the Purple Star Award, an initiative to recognize schools that demonstrate military-friendly practices and a commitment to military-connected learners and families, was awarded to more than 340 schools in North Carolina for the 2022-23 academic year.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT MILITARY-CONNECTED LEARNERS

- **Frequently Asked Questions: Suggested Use for Military Student Identifier Code** (Military Child Education Coalition, September 2023)
- **6 Ways Educators Can Support Students of Military Families** (Rutgers University, Graduate School of Education, November 2021)
- **Developing Credit for Prior Learning Policies to Support Postsecondary Attainment for Every Learner** (Advance CTE, April 2019)
- **Education of the Military Child in the 21st Century: Current Dimensions of Educational Experiences for Army Children** (Military Child Education Coalition for the U.S. Army, 2012)
- **4 Resources That Can Help Improve Transitions for Military-Connected Students** (Collaborative for Student Success)
- **College, Career, and Life Readiness for Military and Veteran Children: A Military and Community Leader's Guide** (Military Child Education Coalition)
- **Toolkit to Support Military-Connected Students** (The Pennsylvania State University)
- **Supporting Youth With Parents in Active Armed Forces: Recruitment and Retention Super Strategies** (Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support, Illinois State University, College of Education)

⁴ North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. NC supports military children. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/students-families/student-support/nc-supports-military-children>