

# Coping with Military Life

*How to make transitions easier for children*

by Tech. Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.  
photo by Master Sgt. Scott Wagers

Like a lot of Air Force parents, Maj. Gregg Bottemiller is in a quandary. His daughter is a high school sophomore, and they plan to move this summer. His main concern: "How do you guarantee your children's successful transition from high school to college when you're always moving?"

What are the social, emotional and educational needs of mobile military children, and what resources are out there for them? Do military parents have to pay out-of-state tuition? How do you find out about graduation laws and scholarships available in the state you're moving to?

Major Bottemiller, chief of the public affairs department at the Defense Information School at Fort Meade, Md., found many of his answers on the new Department of Defense "Military Child in Transition and Deployment" Web site at [www.militarystudent.org](http://www.militarystudent.org).

"We designed the Web site with mobile kids in mind," said Dr. Jean Silvernail, the creator and developer of the site who works for the Education Opportunities Directorate in the Pentagon.

Created in 2000, the directorate serves about a million military "brats" in public schools in the United States. Officials realized they should target the needs of the mobile students whose

parents serve in the armed forces. As a DOD Education Activity principal in the early 1990s, Dr. Silvernail recognized the lack of available information. Little did she know that more than a decade later she'd be in a position to help fill that void.

During the time it took to create the Web site, it exploded into different areas. "When the war in Afghanistan started, we realized we needed to address not only mobile children, but mobile parents," Dr. Silvernail said. "When a parent deploys, some kids take up the responsibility left behind. Then when the parent returns, they lose a role that they were really getting good at."

After two intensive years, the site was born. It offers advice and resource assistance for school transition issues, military deployments and much more.

The three most popular links on the site are "Kids (6 to 12)," "Teens" and "Parents." It's designed to reach active duty, Reserve and Guard around the world, including parents, teens and children. Next year, an online educators course targeting public school teachers will be created.

"Educators spend a lot of time with military children, so we want them to understand our children's issues and their special needs," Dr. Silvernail said. "We're targeting public school teachers who may have just one or two military students in their classes. We've discovered that once educators understand issues, they are very amenable to make a difference."

After an information overload from countless pre-college briefings and stops at the education office and family support center, Major Bottemiller said he likes the new Web site. "It's a good place to start, and believe me, you're going to need a good starting point. After a little digging, you're going to find what you're looking for on the new site." ❖

## Militarystudent.org highlights

The three most popular links on the Department of Defense "Military Child in Transition and Deployment" Web site include "Kids (6 to 12)," "Teens" and "Parents." These categories contain subject links that either stop Web surfers in their tracks or show them links to further their knowledge.

**Kids (6 to 12)** — "Goodbye" seems to be the hardest word. When parents deploy, children have to find ways to cope. The site advises children to create a small keepsake to send with their mom or dad, like a self-drawn picture, a small story or a box filled with special items. Knowing parents have something special from their children makes parents feel close even when separated from their children by hundreds of thousands of miles.

Also useful are the kids' moving guide and the chat room.

**Teens** — Teens who like to drive — and which teen doesn't — will be interested in checking out "Teen Driving Laws." Moving to a different state may affect a teen's driving status. A state-by-state chart lays out the driving requirements for the United States.

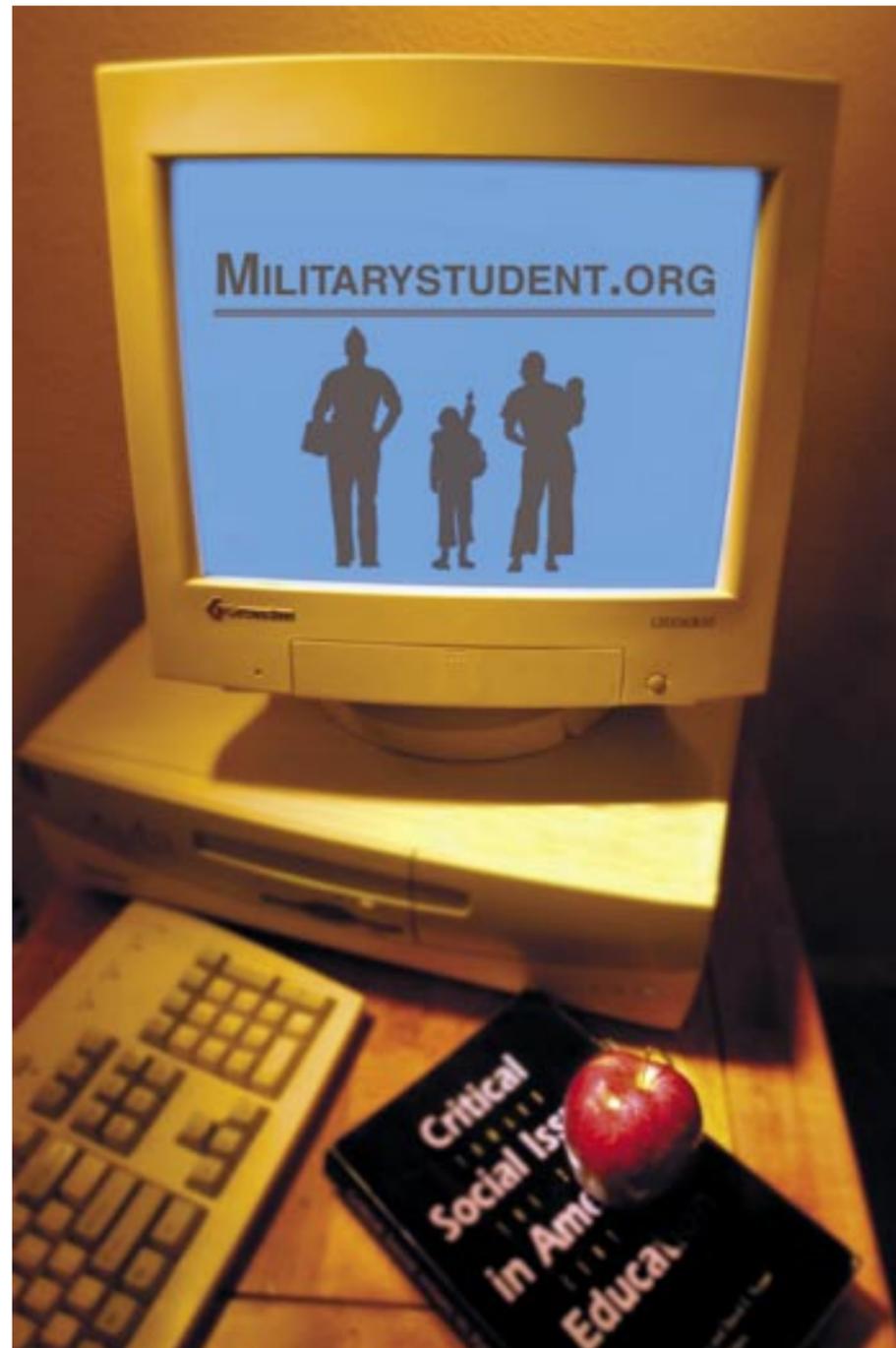
Teens about to graduate from high school will be interested in learning what their gaining school's requirements are for graduation. Moving could affect a student's graduation eligibility. For example, some districts require a state history class before graduation. The best advice is to see a school counselor well before moving to the next state.

College-bound teens will find use for "College Information, Financial Aid and Scholarships." In fact, parents of teens will find these links useful, as well. Teens are just a click away from college information and college funding.

**Parents** — Of interest is the "Matrix of States and their Requirements." It includes kindergarten entrance requirements, graduate requirements, and entrance and exit testing — for example, California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York and Texas have fairly rigorous exams before students can graduate.

In-state tuition also peaks the interest of many parents. Public colleges and universities charge state residents less money than out-of-state residents to attend. But because military parents move frequently, many times they can't establish residency. The in-state tuition link lists each state's policy concerning military members and in-state tuition.

— Tech. Sgt. Orville F. Desjarlais Jr.



### Did you know?

■ Every year, about a third of all military members make a permanent change of station move.

■ Military members move, on average, about every two years.

■ Lower-ranking members move more frequently.

■ Among the services, the Marines have the shortest average time between moves while the Air Force has the longest.