
Defense Report

AUSA



Education for the Children of Military Families – The Responsibilities Should Be Clear

The children of military families living on government-owned bases find themselves caught in the middle of an annual game of power politics between efforts on the part of several successive administrations to cut financial aid to impacted school districts and the desire of Congress to continue at least part of the support.

For 1982 the Reagan Administration had proposed to eliminate educational aid to school districts in which less than 20 percent of the students resided on military bases. This would have had the effect of cutting off impact aid for most of the schools surrounding military bases. One group in Congress, fighting back at the President for cutting other social programs, would have cut out all impact aid. Another group would have continued impact aid regardless of the size of the military presence. Military families living in base quarters had several anxious months in which to wonder whether their children could expect a free public education next year or whether the involved school districts would be forced to charge tuition because of the loss of impact aid. This anxiety seems to have been relieved by the final budget resolution which would provide adequate federal support.

There are at least three inescapable truths here. First, all children of this nation have a right to public education. Second, the communities adjacent to military bases have the right to expect financial assistance in providing public education for the children of families living in tax-exempt government housing. Military families living within civilian communities, after all, pay taxes for public services, either directly through home ownership or indirectly through rent payments. Finally, each time impact aid is imperiled and the threat of tuition payments faces military families there is understandable damage to morale. In most instances, the tuition planned by the various school districts has been far in excess of the military families' ability to pay.

If we are to retain the fully-trained career service members we need so badly we must eliminate these recurring uncertainties. Once and for all, there should be public recognition that the children of military families living on government bases will be supported by the federal government they serve.