

Interstate Compact Eases School Transitions

An interstate compact is spurring sweeping improvements to the school transition process for military parents and their children, while also making inroads into addressing parents' education-related concerns, a Defense Department official said.

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children affects everything from school enrollment and eligibility to course placement and graduation, explained Ed Kringer, director of state liaison and educational opportunity for the Pentagon's office of military community and family policy. Since its inception in 2006, 39 states have adopted the compact, ensuring inclusion of nearly 90 percent of military children and teens.

The Defense Department developed the compact in coordination with the Council of State Governments' National Center for Interstate Compacts in an attempt to counter many of the common education challenges military families face, he said.

"All parents want good education for their children; they want them to have a chance to succeed," Kringer said. "In many cases, many [military] parents have felt there are roadblocks -- unintentional roadblocks -- but roadblocks put in the way of their children."

A delay in records transfer has been an ongoing concern, he noted, with some schools taking weeks, or months, to ship records to another state. This delay can result in a delay in course or program placement. Through the compact, however, schools are required to ship records within 10 days.

The compact also looks out for students in honors programs, Kringer said. In the past, school officials have barred students from enrolling in honors programs until their qualifications could be verified. Meanwhile, they've lost a semester or more of participation in that program.

"If you're transferring schools every couple of years and every couple of years you're losing that advanced training, that can have a serious impact," he said.

The compact works to avoid these education gaps by requiring the gaining school to presume students are qualified for an honors program if they were in a similar program in another school and there's space in the gaining program, Kringer explained. The students still can be tested, but meanwhile, they're not losing valuable learning time.

Kringer also noted the compact's impact on extracurricular activities. Students who move during the school year often miss activity deadlines and end up having to sit out a year of an activity, such as band or a sport, until auditions or tryouts are held again. The compact requires schools to waive the deadlines or, if those dates are steadfast, to find an alternate way for the student to apply, such as taped auditions.

The value of extracurricular activities can't be underestimated, Kringer noted. "It helps them fit in, join in," he said.

For high school seniors, the compact works to ensure frequent moves don't affect their graduation plans. The compact requires the gaining school to look closely at courses and exams so students aren't denied a graduation due to minor differences in standards between states. If standards can't be waived, then school officials should see if students qualify for a diploma from their former school.

Kringer acknowledged some schools have concerns about having to save slots or bump someone else out in favor of military students. But that's not the case, he said. "We're just ensuring kids have a chance to participate, to compete."

The compact includes many other provisions, Kringer said. He encouraged parents and school officials to educate themselves about the compact, particularly as the new school year starts.

Kringer said DOD officials will continue to work with the interstate commission, the compact's governing body, to bring the remaining 11 states on board.

– Elaine Sanchez
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Retroactive Coverage Closing for TRICARE Young Adult

The opportunity to purchase retroactive TRICARE Young Adult (TYA) coverage expires on Sept. 30. Retroactive TYA provides coverage for young adults back to Jan 1, or the day they became eligible if that was after Jan 1.

TYA allows eligible adult children to purchase TRICARE coverage after their eligibility for "regular" TRICARE coverage ends at age 21 (or 23 if enrolled in a full course of study at an approved institution of higher learning).

TYA-eligible beneficiaries may choose to purchase retroactive coverage if they've had significant health care expenses that weren't covered by other insurance. Once enrolled in TYA, beneficiaries may file a claim for reimbursement of costs for covered care. Additionally, young adults in the Continued Health Care Benefit Program (CHCBP) may elect to purchase retroactive TYA coverage and receive a refund for their CHCPB fees.

Those interested in purchasing retroactive TYA coverage must ensure their application form is received by the regional or overseas health care contractor by Sept. 30, 2011. All premiums — both retroactive and the initial three-month payment — must be submitted with the application. The application and payment can be dropped off at a TRICARE Service Center, or mailed or faxed to the regional or overseas health care contractor.

To be reimbursed for covered services, receipts for care must be included when a claim is filed.

TYA launched in May 2011, and has shown a steady increase in enrollment numbers. As of July 31, almost 6,600 young adults have purchased TYA, which currently offers TRICARE Standard coverage for \$186 a month. To qualify for TYA, uniformed services dependents must be under 26, unmarried and not eligible for their own employer-sponsored health care coverage.

A premium-based TRICARE Prime benefit is scheduled to be available later in 2011.

Before choosing to purchase TYA, beneficiaries should carefully consider all of their health care coverage options and balance all the costs. Complete information and application forms are available at

www.tricare.mil/tya.