

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-400T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Military families with special needs face unique challenges because of their frequent moves. To assist these families, each Military Service implements its own program, known as EFMP. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2017 included a provision for GAO to review the Military Services' EFMPs, including DOD's role in providing guidance for these programs.

This statement focuses on the extent to which (1) each Military Service provides family support in the continental United States and (2) the Military Services monitor and DOD evaluates assignment coordination and family support. This statement is based on a May 2018 GAO report and updates its three recommendations as of January 2020. For the report, GAO analyzed EFMP guidance and documents; reviewed federal laws; analyzed fiscal year 2016 EFMP data; visited military installations, selected for their large numbers of military-connected students; and interviewed officials responsible for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the EFMPs.

What GAO Recommends

In the May 2018 report, GAO made three recommendations to DOD. DOD concurred, but has made limited progress toward addressing them.

View [GAO-20-400T](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (617) 788-0580 or nowickij@gao.gov.

February 5, 2020

MILITARY PERSONNEL

DOD Has Made Limited Progress toward Improving Oversight of the Exceptional Family Member Program

What GAO Found

In May 2018, GAO found that variation in support provided to military family members with special medical and educational needs through the Department of Defense's (DOD) Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) could lead to potential gaps in assistance. GAO recommended that DOD assess the extent to which each Military Service is developing services plans for each family with special needs and is providing sufficient resources to staff an appropriate number of family support providers, as required. DOD concurred.

- Services plans are important because they describe the necessary services and support for a family with special needs enrolled in the EFMP as well as during the relocation process, such as when a servicemember is assigned to a new location. In April 2019, DOD reported that the Military Services had adopted a standardized form to use when developing services plans; however, DOD has not yet assessed the extent to which each Military Service is developing these plans. In January 2020, a senior DOD official said that the Department began collecting data related to services plans in the last quarter of 2019.
- In April 2019 (the most recent update), DOD officials said they were planning to pilot a staffing tool to help the Military Services determine the number of family support providers needed at each installation. However, the pilot is expected to last 2 years before it can be implemented across the Military Services.

GAO also found that DOD lacked common performance measures for the EFMP and was unable to compare the program's performance across the Military Services. GAO recommended that DOD develop common performance metrics for the program. DOD concurred, and in April 2019 said that it was still in the process of developing performance metrics for assignment coordination and family support. In January 2020, DOD noted that it had not yet developed guidance regarding use of forms that would help improve its ability to collect common performance measures across the Military Services.

Further, GAO found that DOD does not have a process to systemically evaluate the results of each Military Service's monitoring activities. GAO also reported that DOD did not systematically review the results of monitoring activities because it relies on each Military Service to self-monitor. DOD officials said efforts to standardize certification of EFMPs have been unsuccessful because the Military Services cannot agree on a set of standards that can be used across installations. GAO recommended that DOD implement a systematic process for evaluating the results of the Military Services' monitoring activities. DOD concurred with the recommendation, but has not yet fully implemented it.