SPECIAL EDUCATION

DOD Programs and Services for Military-Dependent Students with Disabilities

What GAO Found

A variety of Department of Defense (DOD) programs support military families who have children with disabilities in preK-12 schools. School Liaisons are the primary contacts for military families with preK-12 students who seek support, including special education issues. Four DOD officials told GAO that it is challenging to connect with families who are unaware of School Liaison services. DOD recently implemented an agency-wide communications plan, including the use of social media, to highlight the School Liaison program (see figure). Also, in response to recent congressional direction, all four armed services expanded special education legal support available to families having children with disabilities.

Figure: Image from Military OneSource Event Highlighting the School Liaison Program


DOD financially supports school districts that serve substantial numbers of military-dependent students through two programs:

- **DOD Impact Aid Supplemental Assistance** funds typically supplement school districts’ general funds, according to school district officials. These funds are not required by statute to be used for specific purposes or to be targeted directly at supporting military-dependent students.
- **Children with Severe Disabilities** funds (CWSD) are provided to school districts to reimburse them for costs incurred to provide eligible children with disabilities a free appropriate education. School districts must apply for CWSD, a process some school officials and advocates described as time consuming. Because school district eligibility for CWSD varies by state and a child’s special education services may vary by state, any given child’s expenses may not be eligible for reimbursement in every school district that child attends.