



Military Family Lifestyle Survey

2023 Comprehensive Report

EFMP Families' Access to Health Care and Education Support

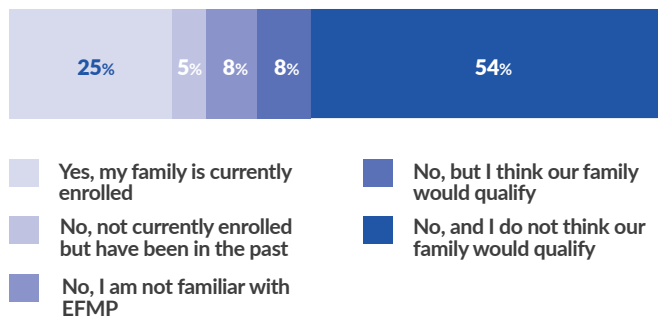
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A slightly greater proportion of active-duty family respondents who relocated since their child(ren)'s education plan was created reported their child received the same services/accommodations as their previous school system within six months if they were enrolled in EFMP.

The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) provides coordinated support to ensure families have adequate medical and educational resources. Historically, each branch implemented EFMP differently, creating mixed experiences for those military families enrolled in the program. Furthermore, despite

Figure 1: Enrollment in the Exceptional Family Member Program

Active-duty family respondents (n=2,561)



Question text: Is your family enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)? An Exceptional Family Member is a dependent who resides with the sponsor and has an identified need which requires special medical or educational services.

enrollment in the program, families continued to report difficulty accessing the specialized care their exceptional family member required — both in health care and in education supports.^{1,2} The FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act directed standardization across branches and program enhancement to ensure families' access to support.³⁻⁷

EFMP Enrollment

One-quarter of active-duty family respondents (25%) report that their family is enrolled in EFMP.^{8,a} Enrollment in EFMP varies slightly by branch (see Table 1), with a slightly higher

proportion of Air Force families participating in the program, and fewer Navy families. Most (71%) respondents enrolled in EFMP are enrolled for their child(ren) (see Table 2), but not all families who have

Table 1: Proportion of Active-Duty Family Respondents Enrolled in EFMP by Service Branch*

Army (n=779)	27%
Air Force (n=642)	32%
Coast Guard (n=116)**	16%
Marine Corps (n=217)	24%
Navy (n=665)	18%

Question text: Is your family enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)?

*Respondents from the Space Force were not included due to low respondent numbers.

**The Coast Guard has a separate but similar program (Special Needs Program), and was included in this analysis.

Table 2: Family Member Enrollment in EFMP

Active-duty family respondents (n=633)

Myself	46%
Child	71%
Spouse	8%
Other dependent	0.6%

Question text: For which member of your family are you enrolled in EFMP? Please select all that apply.

^a The Coast Guard does not have an EFMP, which is a Department of Defense program, but they do have a similar program titled the Special Needs Program, and so were included in this analysis of support for military families with members with special needs.

children with diagnoses eligible for enrollment choose to enroll. Though not all diagnosed conditions^b require enrollment in EFMP, fewer than half (44%) of active-duty family respondents with at least one child with a diagnosed condition reported their oldest child was enrolled in the program.

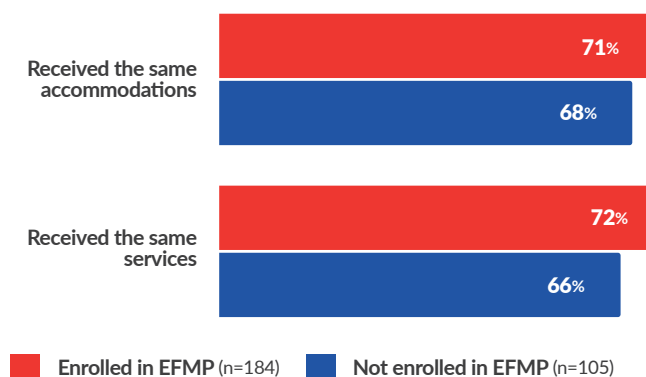
Children's Educational Support

Military families with children who have special education needs experience additional challenges when relocating to a new state or school district.⁹⁻¹¹ One-third (33%) of active-duty family respondents with a child in K-12 education have a child enrolled in special education. Of those with children enrolled in special education, only half (51%) report they are enrolled in EFMP for their oldest child with a special education plan. With relocation being a mainstay of military life, the majority (62%) report that their oldest child with a special education plan has changed school districts since they received that plan. When relocating with an IEP or 504 plan, EFMP's goal is to provide relocation guidance.¹² This support should include navigating formal programs and informal support at the new location, filling knowledge gaps, and determining appropriate community support to meet the family's needs.¹³

The majority (71%) of active-duty respondents report their child with a special education plan received the same services or accommodations for their child(ren) after their most recent relocation. However, EFMP-enrolled families reported slightly higher rates of receiving a similar special education plan and similar accommodations and services after a relocation (71% in comparison to 68% of those not enrolled in EFMP). Receipt of the same services following a relocation followed a similar suit with 72% enrolled in EFMP and 66% of those not enrolled.

Figure 2: Receipt of Special Education Accommodations and Services Following a Relocation by EFMP Enrollment

Active-duty family respondents considering oldest child with a special education plan



Question text: Considering their most recent school change, was your child provided the same accommodations (for example, extended time on tests) that had been provided at the previous school system within six months of enrollment?

“[School district] did not accurately transfer the IEP to [incoming state]. They also did not inform me that Speech and Language were 2 SEPARATE therapies here in [incoming state] (in [outgoing state] they were the same) and they left off the Speech portion, which was the portion my child desperately needed.”

Active-Duty Navy Spouse

^b Such as physical conditions, mental health disorders, and neurodevelopmental conditions.

“We moved from a state that treated advanced/gifted services as IEP eligible to a state that did not use IEP[s] for gifted students. While some elements were honored in the gifted plan, others weren’t. The new school district and state just refused to budge, despite the Military Compact.”

Active-Duty Air Force Spouse

Table 3: Resources Used to Advocate For Child When Plan, Accommodations, or Services Were Changed

Active-duty family respondents (n=93)

School Liaison Officer	34%
Military-provided legal assistance for special education	4%
Special education organization assistance, such as Partners in PROMISE, MCEC, or other resources	10%
Privately obtained advocate for special education	18%
Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) Office	27%
Other	46%

Question text: What resources did you use to advocate for your child, if any, when their plan, accommodations, or services were changed? [Select All]

For those who did not receive the same accommodations/services, the most common themes found in responses to the open-ended question “Why were their type of plan, accommodations, or services changed?” were “accommodations/services unavailable at the child’s new school” (14%), “different services available” (14%), and “state education policies are different” (12%). These families utilized a variety of resources to advocate for their child, including School Liaison Officers (34%) and Exceptional Family Member Program

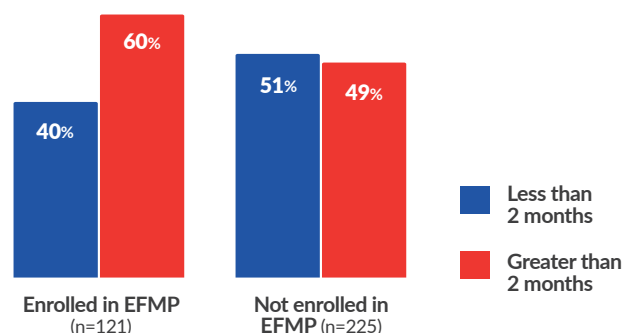
Officers (27%) (see Table 3), although many who selected “other” noted that they did not have resources available or the resources were not helpful, so they advocated for their child on their own, or paid out of pocket for legal assistance.

Health Care Access

Access to health care, particularly mental health care, is a challenge for families regardless of military affiliation (see Health Care Access finding). While enrollment in EFMP should provide families support services, programs, and allowances,¹⁴ the majority of active-duty family respondents whose oldest child receives mental health care and is enrolled in EFMP reported longer wait times for care than their counterparts who are not enrolled in EFMP. This may be because families enrolled in EFMP have more intense needs for niche specialty care than their peers who are not enrolled, or because pediatric mental health care is exceptionally short of providers¹⁵ in comparison to other specialty care. Regardless of EFMP enrollment, however, many respondents are waiting two or more months for care.

Figure 3: Length of Time to Begin Mental Health Treatment After Seeking Care by EFMP Enrollment

Active-duty family respondents considering oldest child receiving mental health care



Question text: Considering your oldest child who you would like to receive mental health care and your most recent search for mental health care for that child, how long have you been on the waitlist?

Concerns Impacting Enrollment

Despite evidence that EFMP enrollment does not limit career options for the service member,¹⁶ many military families still perceive enrollment in EFMP as a potential limitation for future opportunities for the family, including career opportunities for the service member and opportunities for the family to live overseas.¹⁷ Many families chose not to enroll in the program for these reasons,¹⁸ despite the potential for disciplinary action for the service member.¹⁹ Additionally, 4 in 10 (43%) active-duty family respondents currently enrolled in EFMP would disenroll if given the option. Clearly articulating the benefit to families of EFMP enrollment,

exploring families' reasons for wanting to disenroll, and addressing narratives about impacts to the service member's career are opportunities to enhance this program.

Limitations

Coast Guard family respondents were included in this analysis of program support for families with members who have special or exceptional needs. The Coast Guard program — the Special Needs Program — has a similar purpose to the Exceptional Family Member Program for active-duty families in the other branches.

The resources utilized by respondents to advocate for their children included an "Other, please specify" option that allowed respondents to share the resources they used that were not included in the answer options. While many of these responses reflected that respondents advocated on their own or did not use resources, these responses were not re-coded into the other other answer options, and there may have been other resources that were not included in the answer options. Though this survey makes a distinction between those who are enrolled in EFMP and those who are not, it is not possible to determine why a family is enrolled, or why they chose not to enroll despite a qualifying condition. Furthermore, it is not clear why respondents waited for the length of time they reported for specialty care appointments, which could be related to the reasons they are enrolled in EFMP, such as severity of need for specialty care or the specific type of care required.

Recommendations



Department
of Defense

- Establish an advisory board that includes representation from EFMP families.
- Ensure that branches are working collaboratively together to implement the Exceptional Family Member Program 2023 standardization guidelines.^{20,21}



Department
of Education

- Develop a digital IEP that parents and schools have access to for ease of portability.*



Military
Families

- Improve families' awareness of advocacy resources and ability to advocate for their children and other members of their family. For example, the Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP) program²² offers training on a variety of topics for EFMP families along with advocacy training.²³

*More information in Recommendations Chapter of Comprehensive Report

Endnotes

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