



NORTH CAROLINA MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMISSION

Minutes of the Quality of Life (QOL) Committee Meeting, 4th Quarter, October 20, 2020
Microsoft Teams/Conference Call #: 984-204-1487 Conference ID: 109 292 954#

MEMBERS PRESENT

Kirk Warner, Chairman
Edward Reeder
Gerald "Rudy" Rudisill
Patricia Harris

NCMAC MEMBERS ABSENT:

Julie Daniels
Bill Hatcher

OTHER NCMAC MEMBERS:

Rep George Cleveland

ADDITIONAL ATTENDEES

Alice Dean, NCNG, Children and Youth Programs
Mark Patton, Cumberland County Schools
Kevin Bruch, DoD State Liaison Office
Howard Lattimore, Fort Bragg Schools
Valerie Nasser, Craven County Schools
Jamie Livengood, Wayne County Schools
Julie Fulton, MCI-East School Liaison
Rollie Sampson, Moore County Schools
Brittany Norman, Onslow County Schools
Donna Grady, Camp Lejeune
Leafe Palmer, MCAS Cherry Point School Liaison
Bryan Ayers, Camp Lejeune/NCCC
Siobhan Norris, UNC Systems
Ron Massey, City of Jacksonville
Doug Taggart, DPI
Shadia Young, Fort Bragg ACS
Iris Pierce, Fort Bragg School Support Svcs
Kelly Jackson, DMVA

OPENING REMARKS: CHAIRMAN KIRK WARNER

Chairman Kirk Warner called the meeting to order at 10:04 and welcomed everyone to the Quality of Life meeting. He conducted a roll call of the attendees. He asked if there were any new attendees to this meeting. He said that he would be glad when they could meet in person again. Chairman Warner said that he had been reminded that we have a legal obligation to disclose any conflict of interests that may or may not arise or potentially arise with your regular job or any of your business of the Quality of Life committee. If you have a potential conflict, he asks that you disclose that potential conflict, so we are aware of potential conflict. Does anyone have such a conflict? We had not been doing that before but have been asked to do it going forward. So, does anyone have any potential conflict of interest with the business on the agenda and if not, please be cognizant of any potential conflicts that arise from the discussion topics and govern yourself accordingly.

CONSENT AGENDA

Chairman Warner said that the committee had a quorum and would approve the 3rd Quarter draft Quality of Life minutes from July 16, 2020. Kelly Jackson said that she needed to make one correction to the draft minutes on page 3, the third paragraph. Change Kevin Bruch to Mark Patton. Chairman Warner asked if anyone had an issues with making the one change to the draft minutes. No concerns

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from the voting members. Kirk Warner made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Edward Reeder and passed by a unanimous vote.

LEGISLATIVE COMMENTS: REPRESENTATIVE CLEVELAND

Chairman Warner asked Representative Cleveland to give them an update from the Legislative Committee. He said that they were in election mode. There were several items that had gone through the Legislative Committee but did not make it through the legislature last year. He fully intends to bring them up again and get them through the legislature next year. He does not know of anything that they have to be concerned about legislatively. Chairman Warner asked if there was a timeframe that they needed to be mindful of to get anything new in? He said that fortunately, with Rep Cleveland on the committee, we come up with an idea and he fits it in. Rep Cleveland said that they were going into the long session next year, so there would be several months to work on things. He intends to introduce his legislation in February, but if something else comes up we will have until May to get it into the hopper. Chairman Warner thanked Rep Cleveland for his support and participation.

INTRODUCTION OF NICK SOJKA

Chairman Kirk Warner welcomed Nick Sojka to the meeting and asked him to introduce himself to the committee. Nick Sojka said that he appreciated the invitation and opportunity to be part of this committee. He is the General Counsel and Board Attorney for Cumberland County Schools. He has been representing school systems in Southeastern NC as an attorney for close to 30 years. He has had experience working with Hoke County for a number of years which is a very military connected county. He has some familiarity with the Compact and the unique issues that military families have. The Governor appointed him as the Commissioner for the NC Council earlier this year. Thanks to Donnie Loftus and Doug Taggart he is getting up to speed relatively quickly. He participated in the National meeting of the Compact at the first of October. One of the major issues at that meeting was to possible inclusion of our National Guard and Reserve families under the Compact. That is an issue that is going to continue to be studied at the National level. If they are included under the Compact, that will have a major impact on a state like NC, where we have great participation by our citizens in all of the branches of service, from the Guard and Reserve. On the State level, this is a very quick update, we did have a State commission meeting in September that was virtual. One of the issues that we successfully addressed was the question about military families who have their orders to relocate to NC but have not physically relocated here, and we clarified for all of our school systems who participated in the virtual meeting, that it is absolutely permitted for the children of those families to begin school, not only to advance enrollment in our NC schools systems but actually participating virtually in their classes. So, when the parents physically relocate to NC, the children will hopefully be up to speed and able to transition into their receiving school systems. We had a legal opinion, from the Council of the State Board of Education that supported us on that. He knows in Cumberland County they have formally adopted that position through their administration. He appreciates the opportunity to share with this group and what this committee does for the military families. Chairman Warner asked if there was any discussion on any other aspects needed for out of state folks that have not been able to transfer. What was the angle if any, for extracurriculars aside from academics? Could they take a full load of classes? Nick Sojka said that was a good question. Working from memory, he does not recall specifically addressing the co- curricular or extracurricular angle. He would be happy to take that item up and

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consider it during the next meeting at the State level. He can be contacted through the Cumberland County website. If any of you have any questions about co- curricular or extracurricular, please reach out to him and he will try to help with that.

Kevin Bruch said that for virtual schools this is one of their ten key issues and from what Nick Sojka said it meets their requirements for that virtual school. If it would be possible to get a copy of the legal ruling or something that they could post on their website as a PDF, to give NC credit for meeting that requirement for virtual schools. That is the big thing with the virtual schools is to allow them to start school ahead of time, even virtually along with the advance enrollment. Doug Taggart said that he wanted to clarify one thing. He said that he had the opinion from Chole Gossage, and he would send it to Kevin Bruch. It does leave it up to the local school system to decide how they are going to do that. He wants that information to be clear. The larger school systems seem to be doing the remote enrollment for the school systems around the installations.

K-12 AND DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (DPI) UPDATES/ISSUES:

Chairman Warner said that one of the K-12 updates/issues is the delayed Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders. He asked if anyone had an updated on this topic? Mark Patton said that he has been working with families that got delayed and getting them outside counseling. They have seen a spike in family violence which was also discussed at one of the quarterly meetings. He has had some referrals for that in Cumberland County. Also, some individual children counseling. The counseling is not because of the delay in orders but has added to the frustration of other things. We are just trying to connect them to the right resources. Chairman Warner asked if there was anything done with regards to the increase in violence? Was there a game plan on how to address this if anything and who is addressing this? He sees many disciplines working on this matter. Mark Patton said that the Community Blueprint Veterans Engagement Board has done a family violence presentation with their network of non-profit that work with military and veteran families in July. This was a virtual event and attended by about 75 people.

Chairman Warner asked the Military Liaison Counselors (MLO) what issues have they seen and how have they been addressed? What do we need to be concerned about? How are we keeping up with these issues? Rollie Sampson said that they are seeing an uptick in behavioral health issues. They do a suicide intervention program. Part of that is a student screening. She has noticed that 2/3 of the students that needed to be screened were military connected students, but they are not 2/3 of the student population. They are seeing an increase of level of anxiety, stress, and depression in that population compared to their peers. She has noticed that within those groups, those students that PCS are really struggling to make personal connections on campus. We do not have afterschool programs; we do not get to do the new student orientations which include tours and meeting new students. Even in the classrooms the students are moving from class to class. At lunch time, they are not choosing who they want to sit with. So, all of the things that we have to do to keep them safe and healthy is taking a deterrent on their mental health. Especially the students that have joined after the start of the school year. We have to be proactive in how we support these students. The teachers are also stressed so everyone has a layer of stress to deal with. She thinks that the families that have PCS'd this year have felt the stress more than other families. Chairman Warner asked if there was a way to get folks together physically, has that been an option? Rollie Sampson said that when you talk about in

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person classes, and you are on Plan B, then you have 50% of your student population. We cannot mix kids in what you call Pods. She cannot mix her Monday and Tuesday kids with her Thursday and Friday kids. That is a challenge right there. Then depending on the school, her 6th graders cannot interact with the 7th and 8th graders. It limits the opportunities for the Military Family Life Counseling (MFLC) that do small group and one-on-one. It limits how many students that they can work with and access. Some schools are trying to build in some of the extracurricular into the day, so at least virtually we can find other ways for them to meet other students. This is still not the same as old school hanging out due to social distancing.

Kirk Warner asked if there was any after school programs, and not necessarily school sponsored, but on post or on base to socialize kids at the same age group? Valerie Nasser said that they had opened up the after school programs with social distancing, and if they can do them outside, that is better here in Craven County. She and Leafa Palmer have even done Popsicles in the Park for families to bring their kids out to the parks. They are trying to do outside things for the kids to get together.

Doug Taggart said that he was an Exceptional Child (EC) parent, and his son has autism. He feels that the EC kids are going to be hit harder than the athletic kids. The accommodations that they get for their AP's are very difficult to implement and there is a lot more advocacy required by parents to ensure that the services are being provided to their EC kids. He and his wife have spent a lot more time working with the school staff to make sure that his needs are being met. He thinks the EC kids are at risks for not succeeding as well as they would have in a normal environment. Chairman Warner said that was good insight.

Howard Lattimore said that they are still planting seeds for distance learning. They do have their hot line open and advertise it in various ways. They share this information with the military task force that they have. They talk to a lot of counselors, social workers and MFLC. They are handling that social and emotional piece. Their fall sports will be open but there will not be any spectators for the events. Their counselors are meeting one-on-one virtually with students who are displaying any symptoms. As of yesterday, they will be allowed to have group virtual sessions with students who have similar symptoms.

Iris Pierce said that Hoke County is trying to start a virtual after school program. They do have the hot line on the website for the parents. They also have technological support for those that need the support. She is on the Hoke County High School Sit team. It is the only high school that they have in Hoke County. She is able to be a voice for the military community and have some ideas to provide them. What they are doing now is at each grade level, they have a session for the parents and children to have a virtual zoom assessment. They will be doing this by grade level. They want to find out how the first semester went with the virtual learning. Hopefully, they will get some good data from this and make improvements if needed. She wanted to mention that she did have some families that called her from Fort Bragg schools that felt like their needs were not being met on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) due to the virtual learning. This is not her area, so she sent them Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) to work with them. She has not heard anything back from the families at this time. Also, with Hoke County they are ensuring that every child has a device and they do have hot spots. The thing that she does not like about the hot spots is that the parent has to drive to where the hot spots are, and the children have to do their work from the car or a particular place. She thinks that

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this is an issue for all of the school districts and that is the stress on the parents who cannot work from home and those who can work from home. How do parents get their work done when they are helping the students with homework? This is a difficult time for parents.

Chairman Warner said that he knows that we are in good hands with the folks that are on this call. They are working hard to keep track of what is going on and trying to keep ahead of the game. Also, thinking outside of the box to work on these issues. What he does not know, and we need to put this on the NC Commanders list is how is this affecting servicemember readiness if and when they have to be home helping their children with schoolwork. He would like to get information from the Garrison commanders on this issue at the next NC Commander's Council. He asked Kelly Jackson to work on this this.

Doug Taggart said that maybe we need to think about having a Superintendents brief at the QOL like we did in the past. Maybe we should think about bringing in some of the Student Services Directors from the installation area schools to do a brief on what they are doing. Chairman Warner said that was a good idea. Who do we have to do this? We need to do Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune. We need to see if there are issues that we need to facilitate at the NC Military Affairs Commission. We will need to focus in on what we can do and monitor what is going on. We need to figure out how to tackle these issues. He knows that these issues do not only affect military families but all families. He asked Doug Taggart and Kelly Jackson to work on what we have talked about. This will affect military readiness.

Howard Lattimore asked Doug Taggart to explain his comments about the Superintendents. Doug Taggart said that at one time we had various Superintendents speak at QOL meetings about how they are supporting military students or what they provide their students. He also thought it might be important for the QOL members to hear from the Student Services Directors from the school systems around the installations. Howard Lattimore said that he was part of the Student Services department and that is why he was briefing on what they are doing in Cumberland County.

Shadia Young said that regarding soldier readiness and leadership at Fort Bragg, she is the family advocacy specialist. They do briefings and re-integration and meet the soldiers out where they are at. There is some leadership that is doing great with giving their soldiers the needed time to be at home. There are some that are falling short and their family care plans have been disrupted due to COVID. She thinks that this will impact soldier readiness going forward. Chairman Warner asked if they had developed any type of process or procedures to account for that? He can see the Sergeant Corps helping out in this effort and cross over into different units to help with this effort. Has there been any processes to look into this? Shadia Young said that formally she does not know of any policies. There have been policies from the top regarding how they would handle the family care plan. But she has not seen any formal policies come down. Please keep us updated on any changes.

Chairman Warner asked about the Purple Star program and any updates on that topic? Brittany Norman from Onslow County said that she wanted to give the committee some information on the Purple Star program. As many of this committee know, NC is one of 10 states that have the Purple Star award program. We are very happy about that. Last year NC awarded 132 schools to include a few Charter Schools. We have also been recognized by the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC). They are working to push for more National support to get more States on board for this program. We

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were very excited to see that MCEC gave us a shout out for this. She wants to speak for the team of Military Liaison Officers (MLO) or Military Liaison Counselors (MLC) and let you know how gratifying it is to have an idea that we have been working on for a while and see it come to fruition. Not just for the MLO's and MLC's but for the military families and students across the state of NC. None of this would have been possible without the support of the NC Military Affairs Commission and the Quality of Life committee for supporting this project to be administered by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). We could not have done this without your support. Chairman Warner asked what the deadlines are for this year? Brittany Norman said that they are open now and the deadline is February 1, 2021. Chairman Warner said he liked this program and wanted to get the numbers up higher this next session. He is glad that the Charter schools have been included in this program. We want to continue to march forward with this program and get the information out to all of the counties. Doug Taggart said that he wanted to thank Dr. Mullinex. She has really taken ownership of the Purple Star at DPI as her project. Jamie Livengood said that Dr. Mullinex has also said that she wants to paint the State purple and that is exactly what you are talking about. She is trying to beef up the information out to the more outlying areas that are not near installations. We can all help to paint it purple. She knows that Alice Dean has a lot of contacts and she had folks out West last year that contacted her about the program. She will continue to share that information throughout the State with her National Guard folks. Doug Taggart said that two webinars were conducted last week by Dr. Mullinex on how the Purple Star program will work this next year. Mark Patton said that in his new role for MCEC he will helping push out more to the outlying counties. He will be talking to Dr. Mullinex on how he can share this information.

Valerie Nasser said that the date for the Purple Up Day for the State will be April 16, 2021. This was decided by the Installations from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, Camp Lejeune, Fort Bragg, and Cherry Point are all using this as the Purple Up Day. She also wants to go back to a comments from Howard Lattimore about remote enrollment. She said that we have talked about incoming students being able to register and participate in virtual learning. In Craven County they are allowing this on the outgoing end. So, if a student is leaving the area and want to finish their semester here virtually, they are permitted to do that.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION (DPI) SUPPORT TO MILITARY FAMILIES: DOUG TAGGART

Doug Taggart said that one thing he wanted to mention something that was not mentioned by Nick Sojka but an items that was talked about at the state council meeting. That one item is a cleanup technical corrections bill to clean up issues around definitions. In particular around retired military and that is certainly one of the items we need to see how to move forward on that. That was the only legal one that might be of interest to the Quality of Life Committee. The idea is to do the remote enrollment and remote attendance for retired military for that year after, like is covered by the Compact. That is the primary change that we need to make with the law.

The other items were that Nick Sojka was going to take the lead doing a model for military connected student policy to the School Board Association (SBA). Since we cannot do polices at DPI for various reasons, the SBA seemed to be the best place to go to provide a model. Then the school systems can use the models from the SBA for their own policies.

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The student directory information has been released to the recruiters across the state. This is the third year that DPI releases state level directory information to the recruiters across the state through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the US Army Recruiting Battalion. The Recruiting Battalion gets the privacy data agreements from the individual branch recruiters to ensure that the data is being handled effectively. We have a state level approach to the student directory information. The information was release on October 1 this year. Gerald Rudisill asked if that information was shared with the Guard and Reserve? Doug Taggart said that it was shared with all branches of service. The information is very helpful, and we have gotten the information to them earlier this year. Having the information come from DPI is better than getting it from each school. Then if there are any issues with the information, they come back to DPI for assistance. The student can opt out of this and not have their information shared. Howard Lattimore asked for a copy of the MOA. He has had an issue where the recruiters are asked for information from the schools directly. He would like to have the MOA on file and give it to his human resource office. Doug Taggart said that they can use him as the POC for any recruiter that contacts them. He will also get him a copy of the current MOA.

The military student identifier will be due at the end of January 2021.

Doug Taggart said that he had sad news for the committee. Troops to Teachers will not be included in the Department of Defense (DoD) moving forward. This means that they are in a Sunset operation right now and by next May they will be closing down the program. This could change if Congress agrees to fund the program or move it to the Department of Education. This program has been around a long time and helped a lot of veterans become teachers. He does not think it will get saved this time, but you never know. Chairman Warner said that he was sorry to hear this news.

STRATEGIC PLAN: KELLY JACKSON

Kelly Jackson said that the Strategic Plan was done and had gone to the printer. It will be ready to be sent to the Oversight Committee on November 2. We are having 500 copies printed and all of the legislators will get a copy of the plan. This Strategic Plan was developed by a lot of people and is a good document. Thank you to everyone who helped to get this document updated and completed.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Chairman Warner said that a topic from the last meeting Sexual Harassment Sexual Harassment Assault Response Prevention (SHARP). He asked Patricia Harris if there was anything new since our last meeting? Patricia Harris said that she is preparing to do a series of Request for Information (RFI) to be distributed to our military commands and to the family support network in the area of domestic violence sexual assault, substance abuse and beyond. Especially during COVID-19. This is in reference to the Commander's Council discussion where they reported concerns reference substance abuse among the members as well as domestic violence. We are looking forward to preparing those RFI's and get them together. It is not easy to get that information. One thing that we do know is that some of the family support networks have concerns on why some of the domestic violence cases have not been reported. So, where are the people going? There is a lot of community support out there and a big concern for the children that are at home. Chairman Warner asked who would be preparing the RFI's and distributing them? Patricia Harris said that she was working with members of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. They have sent out RFI's before, so they already have a process to do that.

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Bryan Ayers said that he had was no update from Camp Lejeune or the NC Commander's Council. They continue to push through like everyone else. They continue to promote the Purple Star program. He knows that Julie Fulton is helping them out with this program, and she is a Rock Star for the installations. He was intrigued by the prevalence of the mental anxiety and other issues for military dependents. That is a stark contrast with how many of them are reporting in proportion to how many of them make up the actual population of the school.

Chairman Warner asked about topic for the NC Military Affairs Commission meeting. We may want to look at having something on the mental health aspect. If we can get that together between Howard Lattimore and Doug Taggart. We may want to include some information from Camp Lejeune. That could be beneficially for the NC Military Affairs Commission. What is going on with the mental health and how is it affecting readiness. If we could have some type of presentation on that and what the schools are seeing and doing. Are there any other thoughts on this topic? Valerie Nasser said that in NC all teachers and staff receive a two hour mental health training class. We are being trained across the state on how to identify those students, military or not, and it is a valuable program. Chairman Warner said that he would put the Commander's question out there for the Commander's Council on effective readiness and issues that we could possibly address.

Rollie Sampson said that we have Federal Impact Aid going on. This may not be something that they are all tracking but this year the financial impact that this could make on military connected school districts is important. The challenge of doing a survey which is traditionally a paper survey is becoming extremely challenging. She knows that there is legislation trying to be pushed through Congress and that has been going on for months. So far it has not moved anywhere. We could see a significant loss in some of our military connected school districts because we will not be able to get enough surveys back. We will see a funding loss in the next pay out for Impact Aid. We just need to be award of this information. How do we conduct a paper survey when the students are not in school?

Julie Fulton said that when we are doing the RFI's and looking at the children's mental health issues. She and Donna Grady are seeing parent mental health issues connected especially to the virtual learners. Also, if they have a deployed parent, and that parent is home alone and trying to help with the schooling, there is not an easy way to identify who those people are. It is hard to get a scope of what that problem is. She knows that when they have the hurricane and so many housing issues there was a directive that went down DoD. It said that every Commander had to check on every house. So maybe there needs to be something like that and every mid-level Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) checking on families to ensure that everyone is doing ok.

Patricia Harris said that she agreed with what Julie Fulton had to say. She has talked to spouses and they are concerned with arms and weapons in the home.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Chairman Warner asked if there were any public comments from anyone attending the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Warner adjourned the meeting at 11:13 pm.