

Understanding military kids

AACPS STUDENT COUNCIL BUILDS SUPPORT FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED STUDENTS

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As commander of Headquarters Command Battalion, Lt. Col. Thomas D. Chapeau is normally concerned with providing the right mix of resources to support garrison operations for the many tenant organizations that call Fort Meade their home base.

But on Nov. 13, Chapeau was called on to be part of a regional Anne Arundel County Public Schools' effort organized by Anne Arundel County students.

"Patriotic Partners: CRASC Supporting Military Connected Students" is part of a regional student council-led effort to "honor and celebrate military-connected students from across Anne Arundel county high schools and middle schools," according to a statement by the Chesapeake Regional Association of Student Councils.

Along with two school liaison officers — Sarah Bonise, Army school liaison officer at Fort Meade, and Carol Chobany, Navy school liaison officer in Annapolis — Chapeau spoke to the assembled student body to provide some personal insight influenced by more than 19 years of military service.

"The fact that these students have and continue to serve as a military dependent is truly humbling," Chapeau said. "Their resilience is not only supporting their service member, but in having to rebuild and establish new networks of friends, systems and standards as they move from one location to the next every couple years, which can be overwhelming.

“But they do it, time and time again, without complaint.”

Core Understanding

The CRASC Executive Student Council determined it would be useful and informative to have a series of conferences or meetings that focused on how becoming part of the AACPS student body impacts the learning and social lives of military-connected students.

Students were bused to Severna Park High School for a morning of speakers and workshops designed to inform students and teachers on the unique experiences of being a newcomer to the AACPS system as a young member of a military family.

Members of the Executive Student Council designed and executed a day that was broken down into sessions for the keynote guest speakers. They also provided breakout sessions that focused on different aspects of being a military-connected student to help establish a core understanding among the group for future sessions.

The breakout sessions examined military ranks, acronyms common to military-connected families, how military families are moved from assignment to assignment, and discussions designed to create understanding of children living as part of a military family.

According to statistics about military families, 53.3 percent of active-duty members have a spouse and/or children who make up 1.6 million family members.

Statistics also show that 38.3 percent of active-duty service members have children in their families, the majority of whom (about 74 percent) are ages 11 and younger.

Middle and high school students compose 21.5 percent of the school-age members of military families.

Bonise, who works daily with students who attend schools associated with the Fort Meade-cluster of AACPS schools, said she was pleasantly surprised at how earnest and thoughtful the students were in assembling the program.

“I was really impressed because we went to a [CRASC] planning meeting,” Bonise said. “I was really encouraged when the students started outlining the program they had put together, the sequencing of the differing sessions and who would be the principal presenters.”

Ability To Adapt

The session’s other major presenter was Mary Gable, a former principal at Severna Park High School, who shared how happy she was to be returning to the school.

Gable also spoke about her strong connection to MacArthur Middle School, forged in the aftermath of 9/11. Her role as an administrator — getting students, family and staff in and out of what is now a closed installation — began her partnership with military families that continues today.

As assistant state superintendent in the Maryland State Department of Education, Gable is involved in the academic enrichment and educational policies for students. She also serves as Maryland’s commissioner to the Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission.

During his speech, Chapeau spoke of the benefits of being a military child.

“The reward for their sacrifice is that many of these dependents, through their global travels, get unique cultural experiences, learn multiple languages and go places that most Americans only dream of,” he said.

In addition, Chapeau said military kids build resiliency.

“Their resilience plays a huge part in their ability to adapt and tackle the challenges that life throws at them,” he said. “That’s why we celebrate the month of the military child in November.

“It ties in well to Veterans Day as we remember those that have given the ultimate sacrifice as well as those that faithfully served and defended this great nation.”

Chapeau also shared how he became interested in and joined the Army, and spoke of how the Army helped shape him as a leader.

“Life is what we make it,” he said. “For me, motivation, attitude and resilience have been at the core of who I am and continue to be.

“These attributes drive me to be better ... and I think they will help you in your quest to become the next generation of scholars, doctors, social workers and Soldiers.”