

News Release

Transforming Lives

May 3, 2016



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Click above to download soundbites. In order of appearance: Danielle Leach, Military Parent, Shawn, 10, Mentee, Aniya Mitchell, 9, Mentee, Laurie Jones, Seven Oaks Teacher, Tom Pennella, Mentor.

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Federally funded study matches mentors, military children while parents are deployed

North Thurston was the only district in the country picked to participate in landmark research

Military deployment can take a toll on the children left behind. It means prolonged separation from a parent who is overseas. Daily routines are disrupted. Spouses left behind are forced to manage households on their own. According to experts, deployment-related stress can cause children to act out aggressively. Studies also show that this stress not only affects children's social and emotional well-being, but also their academic performance.

One way to improve support systems for military families is school-based mentoring. **North Thurston Public Schools** in Lacey was the **only district in the country** selected to participate in a new Military Student Mentoring (MSM) program. Funded by a \$1.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the multi-year project will allow researchers from the **University of Arkansas** to study the effects mentoring has on elementary school-aged military children while a parent is deployed.

Mentoring Works Washington, a public-private partnership between DSHS, Costco Wholesale and community advocates, is managing the project and recruiting mentors for the program.

"Given the significant and stressful impact of a parent's military deployment on his or her children, we believe the presence of a caring and carefully prepared mentor in the lives of those children is crucial," said Simon Amiel, Mentoring Works Washington Executive Director. "A consistent and well-managed mentor-mentee relationship can alleviate the feelings of anxiety, abandonment and helplessness a child experiences as a result of a prolonged separation."

The mentors are interviewed, vetted and trained by **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Washington**, and they visit their mentees at school once a week. Ten mentors are working with the students during the first year of the program. The goal is to expand to as many as 50 pairings during the 2016-17 school year.

DSHS has a history of supporting military families. The agency took part in Operation Military Kids, a statewide program that provided community support for the children of service members.