

Comal Independent School District

NEWS RELEASE

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Comal ISD awarded \$608,000 Department of Defense grant

Comal ISD was recently awarded a \$608,000 federal grant from the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) Educational Partnership for the Promoting Student Achievement at Schools Impacted by Military Force Structure Changes grant program.

“We are so excited and honored to be selected for this grant,” said Comal ISD’s executive director of special programs, Deb Mahone. “We applied for this grant to enable us to acquire additional resources and develop innovative programs to assist our high mobility students, such as those in military families, to be successful in Comal ISD.”

The grant will target Bill Brown Elementary and Smithson Valley High, which each have a student population of more than 15 percent that is military-connected. The grant will fund initiatives for under-served students and students of mobility who are at risk of academic failure.

“This is the first year DoDEA has been able to execute our grant program, and it’s very gratifying to be able to offer assistance to the schools that are educating our military’s children,” said Dr. Shirley Miles, Director of DoDEA. “We are looking forward to seeing how the districts implement the programs they’ve developed. We know that all children in the grant recipient districts will benefit from these awards.”

The grant will focus on enhancing student learning opportunities, student achievement, and educator professional development at military-connected schools with projected military student growth between 2007 and 2009 due to force structure changes. According to the DoDEA, this data is based on a report to Congress on Assistance to Local Educational Agencies for Defense Dependents Education published in March

2008. School districts serving 22 military installations identified through that report were invited to submit a grant proposal.

Mahone said it's important for school districts to have enhanced curriculum for military students and that this grant will help better educate military students at BBES and SVHS.

"Military students are often highly mobile and have diverse educational experiences from many different locations in this country and around the world," said Mahone. "It is important to recognize the strengths these experiences bring as well as identify the gaps that may exist due to inconsistencies across educational programs. These additional funds enable us to better assess and address the unique needs of our military children at these two schools."

Programs will be implemented at both campuses to help better serve the military students as well as additional resources and staff development to help the teachers better serve all students with unique needs.

"At Bill Brown, we are focusing on staff development that provides skills to staff to help new students fit in. Additional instructional materials as well as staff development will also be provided with the goal of integrating reading throughout the curriculum to strengthen all academic areas," Mahone said.

At SVHS, Mahone said an additional reading intervention teacher will be hired to assist struggling students who are new to the system as well as those who need additional assistance to meet standards for high school graduation.

"We have also directed some of the funds to the education 20/20 system, which is very helpful in credit recovery and also in providing needed credits for students who have moved in from another area with different standards who may be missing credits toward Texas standards," said Mahone. "We are also providing staff development to improve teacher skills in these areas at SVHS."

DoDEA's aim with this grant is to enhance the education of military students but funds may be used to raise student achievement for all students. Mahone said the theory behind this is very similar to how schools are looked at that are schoolwide Title 1 schools.

"We know from research that improving the entire school foundation or program will benefit all students at the campus including those with unique needs," she said. "Strong teacher teams and instructional programs can more quickly respond to individual student needs and can use diversity to benefit all students. So, we look at programs that

will improve the campus as a whole as well as programs that will target the unique needs of military students and highly mobile students.”

Mahone said she is thankful for the opportunity to enhance educational programs and support for the students at Bill Brown and Smithson Valley.

“In addition to enabling us to provide quality learning opportunities for students, this grant will assist in preparing teachers as they meet the challenge of educating 21st century learners in an increasingly mobile society,” said Mahone.

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