

## Why GAO Did This Study

Military families with special medical and educational needs face unique challenges because of their frequent moves. To help assist these families, DOD provides services plans, which document the support a family member requires. The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 included a provision for GAO to review the Services' EFMPs, including DOD's oversight of these programs.

This report examines the extent to which (1) each Service provides family support and (2) the Services monitor and DOD evaluates assignment coordination and family support.

GAO analyzed DOD and Service-specific EFMP guidance and documents; analyzed fiscal year 2016 EFMP data (the most recent available); visited seven military installations, selected for their large numbers of military-connected students; and interviewed officials responsible for implementing each Service's EFMP, as well as officials in OSN that administer DOD's EFM policy.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO makes a total of three recommendations to DOD. DOD should assess and report to Congress on the extent to which each Service provides sufficient family support personnel and services plans, develop common performance metrics for assignment coordination and family support, and evaluate the results of the Services' monitoring activities. DOD agreed with these recommendations and plans to develop performance metrics for assignment coordination and develop plans to evaluate the Services' monitoring activities.

View [GAO-18-348](#). For more information, contact Jacqueline M. Nowicki at (617) 788-0580 or [nowickij@gao.gov](mailto:nowickij@gao.gov).

# MILITARY PERSONNEL

## DOD Should Improve Its Oversight of the Exceptional Family Member Program

### What GAO Found

The support provided to families with special needs through the Department of Defense's (DOD) Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) varies widely for each branch of Military Service. Federal law requires DOD's Office of Special Needs (OSN) to develop a uniform policy that includes requirements for (1) developing and updating a services plan for each family with special needs and (2) resources, such as staffing, to ensure an appropriate number of family support providers. OSN has developed such a policy, but DOD relies on each Service to determine its compliance with the policy. However, Army and Navy officials said they have not received feedback from OSN about the extent to which their Service-specific guidance complies. Federal internal control standards call for developing clear policies to achieve agency goals. In addition, DOD's most recent annual reports to Congress do not indicate the extent to which each Service provides services plans or allocates sufficient resources for family support providers. According to GAO's analysis, the Military Services have developed relatively few services plans, and there is wide variation in the number of family support providers employed, which raises questions about potential gaps in services for families with special needs (see table).

**Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) Personnel and Services Plans at Continental United States Installations, Fiscal Year 2016**

Military Service	Total number of installations	Total number of exceptional family members	Total number of family support providers and related personnel	Total number of services plans (SP) created <sup>a</sup>
Air Force	58	34,885	58	160
Army	39	43,109	92	5,004
Marine Corps	13	9,150	88	552
Navy	50	17,533 <sup>b</sup>	74	31 <sup>c</sup>

Source: GAO analysis of the Military Services' fiscal year 2016 EFMP data. | GAO-18-348

<sup>a</sup>Can include more than one enrolled family member.

<sup>b</sup>As of November 2016.

<sup>c</sup>Additional SPs may have been modified in fiscal year 2016, but could not be reported by the Navy.

Each Service uses various mechanisms to monitor how servicemembers are assigned to installations (assignment coordination) and obtain family support, but DOD has not established common performance measures to assess these activities. DOD has taken steps to better support families with special needs, according to the DOD officials GAO interviewed. For example, DOD established a working group to identify gaps in services. However, OSN officials said that DOD lacks common performance measures for assignment coordination and family support because the Services have not reached consensus on what those measures should be. In addition, OSN does not have a process to systematically evaluate the results of the Services' monitoring activities. Federal internal control standards call for assessing performance over time and evaluating the results of monitoring activities. Without establishing common performance measures and assessing monitoring activities, DOD will be unable to fully determine the effect of its efforts to better support families with special needs and the adequacy of the Services' EFMPs as required by federal law.