

7/24/2026

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my pleasure to offer my strongest support for **Project Gratitude**, an extraordinary initiative that recognizes and honors one of our nation's most overlooked populations, our military-connected children.

Throughout my career as a health educator, I have seen firsthand that a child's mental, social and emotional wellbeing is fundamental to their health and safety. Sadly, suicide remains a leading cause of death for children and teens. Studies show that military-connected children have increased rates of suicide attempts and are at higher risk of engaging in risky behavior due to environmental conditions outside of their control, including repeated relocations, parental deployments, prolonged separations, and general uncertainty. While these young people demonstrate remarkable resilience, they frequently carry these burdens quietly and without public recognition or support outside of the military. **Project Gratitude** serves as protective factors by helping military children to feel valued and appreciated by the people whose acceptance they often crave the most- their peers.

Project Gratitude addresses the needs of military-connected children in a uniquely thoughtful way. Civilian students learn about the sacrifices made by military families and then write messages of encouragement to military-connected children. This is particularly poignant to me, as I have answered thousands of letters and emails from students over the course of my professional career working with school districts all over the country including many military schools both in the United States and abroad. While most of these letters were written under the pretense of asking a question or getting advice, the truth is, there is very little I can tell these students that they cannot look up using ChatGPT. Yet, even as AI has become more accurate and accessible, the letters and emails keep coming, especially from children experiencing periods of anxiety and uncertainty. They want human-connection, and **Project Gratitude** provides it.

Civilian students greatly benefit from **Project Gratitude** as well. The educational component gives students the opportunity to practice sympathy, gratitude, self-reflection, perspective-taking, and civic responsibility, thereby aligning with all the CASEL competencies (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making). This is significant, as many SEL programs in the classroom teach these concepts, but not stretch the students to transfer their learning in a meaningful way.

I commend **Project Gratitude** for creating an innovative program that simultaneously supports the emotional well-being of military-connected children while helping civilian students develop empathy, gratitude, and an appreciation for the sacrifices made in service to our country. Its mission fills an important gap that has too often gone unrecognized.

I enthusiastically endorse Project Gratitude and encourage schools, educators, community organizations, businesses, veterans' organizations, healthcare providers, and philanthropic partners to support this remarkable initiative. By investing in programs that recognize military-connected children while teaching empathy to the next generation, we strengthen not only individual children, but our communities and our nation.

Healthy Regards

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