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MEDIA RELEASE

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GaDOE Names Mary Lee Clark Elementary School 2023-2024 Military Flagship School Award Winner

The Georgia Department of Education has selected Mary Lee Clark Elementary School as a 2023-2024 winner of the Military Flagship School Award.

The Military Flagship School Award recognizes schools going above and beyond to provide a supportive environment for military students and families. Military Flagship Schools provide specific outreach to military families and recognize and accommodate their unique needs.

All of Georgia's K-12 public schools were invited to apply for the Military Flagship School Award, and applications were evaluated by a panel of judges with experience in the education of military-connected students.

Schools were asked to provide specific examples of their outreach to military families, including:

- Services and programs offered to support the needs of military students and their families
- Training provided to school personnel to help them understand and support the needs of military children
- Opportunities provided by the school to help military parents and their children connect with and feel supported by the surrounding community
- Efforts to help military parents and their children feel engaged and respected within their new school by creating opportunities to get involved

Every selected school has a way to recognize and know if students are from Gold Star Families. They allow excused absences for a student during their parent's overseas deployment departure or arrival day. In addition, they allow enrollment with military orders, shot ID, or shot records for 90 days until the family finds a home or lease, and allow online or phone registration for incoming military members from overseas Department of Defense military bases. Every school recognized has a military buddy system linking incoming military students with other military students during their first weeks of school.

At Mary Lee Clark Elementary School, a full-time Military Family Life Counselor (MFLC) is available to assist with the stressors and concerns that are often unique to military families. A Connections Club is in place to welcome new students, support military families, and make the school a friendlier place – members trained as ambassadors give school tours and distribute welcome kits to students. The MFLC provides weekly Lunch Bunches for the 1st-5th grade military affiliated students. This provides weekly support and helps the students build a network of peer support in coping with the challenges of military life. The MFLC also provides weekly deployment support groups to Pre-K-5th grade students who have a parent on deployment. This provides a safe place to address their emotions and be able to focus on their academics. The School Liaison Officer offers a military family school tour each year, offering services including school communication, transition services, special needs navigation, deployment support, and more. Additionally, the Kings Bay command at the Strategic Weapons Facility Atlantic (SWFLANT) has adopted MLCES as their school for the 2023-24 school year.

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