

# Lucio Bill Supports Military Children

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**Austin, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio** (D-Brownsville), authored legislation which authorizes special designations for school that support military connected students and families.

## **Texas Legislature passes bill into law to support military children\***

Military-connected students in Texas could soon receive more specialized help in school with passage of a bill in support of designated Purple Star Campuses.

Students enrolled in a school district who are dependents of active duty military, veterans or members of the armed forces killed during their service fall under this definition of “military-connected students,” according to the recently approved bill. State Sen. Eddie Lucio, D-Brownsville, authored Senate Bill 1557 which will take effect Sept. 1.

“We have the schools that will not only welcome them with open arms but provide the support structure to help the students succeed,” Lucio said.

According to the bill analysis, military-connected children often go through difficulties with parents on deployment or constantly on the move. A school that applies and qualifies will be designated as “Purple Star Campuses,” according to the bill. These schools will have a liaison who will support and represent these children and their families. Among the requirements for designation as a Purple Star Campus are having accessible information, maintaining a “transition program,” raising awareness for staff and initiatives such as partnerships with local military.

Mario Ybarra Jr., son of a U.S. Marine who was killed in action during the Vietnam War, advocated for passage of the bill. Pfc. Mario Ybarra Elementary School, in the Weslaco school district and is named in honor of his late father. The elementary school was named with Purple Heart School distinction in March, recognizing the campus’s dedication to helping veterans and their families. Ybarra has been pushing to take the measure a step further and sent a letter to Lucio in August 2018, advocating for the need for legislation.

According to the letter Ybarra sent to the state senator, other states have made measures toward the “Purple Star” program without going through the legislative route. However, legislation would give the program “sustainability” and “credibility,” which is a major reason Ybarra made the push toward the bill.

Ybarra has hosted events and awareness campaigns for veterans and their families. He said legislation would give “accountability” in supporting and checking up on students with these ties to the military.

Losing his father caused emotional pain for his family, he said. This caused mental health issues during his childhood, and struggled to find support.

Not every military child will experience this type of stress or have mental health issues, as this demographic tends to be “resilient.” Even though not every military child will have symptoms of depression and anxiety, the law will offer a support system that will enable them an option to seek help if they need it, he said.

Ybarra said the Valley does have a “fair share” of veterans and military families.

Texas has the second largest population of military-connected students and there are about 2 million children of members of the Armed Forces, according to the TEA website.

Ybarra did not have these services during his time as a child of a fallen serviceman. The law and “Purple Star Campuses” could help teachers see the “red flags” and to lend an ear to the needs of military children.

“My biggest hope is that school professionals, leaders, teachers they all have a much better understanding of the type of lifestyle that military-connected children endure and offer support to them, and not only be empathetic but be proactive,” Ybarra said.

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