

TO: Senate Education Committee

From: Bruce Gjovig, USAF & Space Force Civic Leader
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RE: For SB 2223 Residency Requirements for military installation school board members

SB 2223 amends current law to expand the pool of qualified school board members on a military installation to include not only those airmen, guardians and their spouses who live on the Air Force or Space Force Base, but also those who reside within 20 miles of the military base as well as those who are retired and closely connected to the base.

For example, according to the GFAFB website, there are 1,730 Airmen (plus spouses and children) attached to the base, but only about 500 active duty members who live on base (with spouses and children = 1,900 on base in 2022), with the rest living in surrounding communities, small and large. Thus two-thirds of the airmen live off-base. Their children attend school in Grand Forks or surrounding communities.

Quality of education is important to all of us, especially Airmen and their families. Children with parents in the military move on average six to nine times before graduating from high school. Military-connected students on average academically outperform their civilian peers. Nathan Twining Elementary & Middle School on GFAFB serves about 300 students in the first 8 grades. Though it is on base, the school is part of the Grand Forks School District, meaning the district provides the teachers, curriculum and other resources. The U.S. Department of Defense pays the school district for those services.

The GFAFB School Board has important input into the Grand Forks School Board and helps address the key issues encountered by military families — transferability, transitions, eligibility, enrollment, placement and graduation — and making sure that the school on the base has policies that accommodate airmen who move frequently, and ensuring the school is maintained, both the property and the quality of education. Across the country, military service members are choosing to live apart from their families for years at a time or, alternatively, quit the military altogether to avoid having to enroll their children in underperforming schools surrounding several military bases. Fortunately, North Dakota is not faced with that dilemma.

It is important that the base commanders can recommend the best candidates — on base or off base — for the superintendent to consider to work on the issues that are important and peculiar to children of airmen.