

## **BRAC update: School choice for off-post families: Public or private?**

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With more than 32,000 students and 60-plus schools, the Muscogee County School District is the educational heavyweight in the area.

But with the current expansion at Fort Benning bringing an estimated 9,800 children to the area - more than 6,800 of those school age -- the local private schools believe they can land a share of the influx.

“I had one family that came up to our booth and said, ‘Oh, there you are. We’ve been on the Internet and found your school online and wanted to meet you and hoped that you would be here today,’” said Mary Snyder, enrollment director at Brookstone, a college preparatory school on Bradley Park Drive in Columbus.

Snyder was speaking as more than 1,000 soldiers and civilians crowded inside a social club recently at Fort Knox, Ky., in search of information about housing, schools and quality of life in the new community they are being transferred to in the coming months.

At about 800 students, from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, Brookstone is one of the largest private schools in the area. Others with big enrollments include Glenwood School north of Phenix City at more than 500 students, and the Catholic-based pairing of St. Anne School and Pacelli High School with more than 500 pupils. Calvary Christian School off Old Moon Road in Columbus has roughly 550 students pre-k through high school.

“There’s going to be a certain percentage of the population that’s coming to Columbus that’s going to be interested in private Christian education,” said Lee Ann Tipton, director of finance at Calvary Christian School.

One possible obstacle to enrolling a child in any of the private schools would be the tuition that must be paid. For example, tuition at Brookstone ranges from \$10,000 to \$14,000 per year depending upon the grade.

Snyder estimates Brookstone now has 20 to 25 military-related students, a small percentage that seemingly would make the educational institution a better fit for the more affluent -- commissioned officers, higher-ranking enlisted personnel and upper-level civilian staffers working at Fort Benning.

“But we have a wonderful financial aid program as well,” she said. “If anybody is interested in Brookstone, we try to do what we can to see that they can attend.”

In all, Fort Benning is expected to add about 28,000 new residents by the time the Base Realignment and Closure process is completed in September. That breaks down to about 4,700

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soldiers, nearly 1,900 government civilians and 4,800 contractors, with nearly 6,900 spouses and the 9,800 children.

The 2005 BRAC congressional mandate calls for the relocation of the U.S. Army Armor School to Fort Benning, which has long been home to the U.S. Army Infantry School. The combined training hub has been dubbed the Maneuver Center of Excellence.