

## Reading with the Troops

---

*Machen Elementary School  
Hampton, Virginia*

Uniformed men and women from Langley Air Force Base gave reading a prestigious air during Machen Elementary School's Reading with the Troops event.

School administrators developed the idea to help bolster reading skills and excitement at Machen. As they are located so close to Langley Air Force Base, the Action Team for Partnership (ATP) figured military volunteers might be the perfect resource to add an official cachet to their reading curriculum.

The school's Parent Involvement Facilitator set to work right away to recruit Air Force personnel. She created a flier and a sign-up sheet and distributed it to a contact at the base. Squadron leaders eventually got word of the volunteer movement and recruited more troops. Eventually an entire log filled with volunteer's contact information.

A few days before Reading with the Troops, teachers from grades K-5 chose the books that they wanted Air Force troops to read to their students. Some books were non-fiction and taught the students curriculum-rated topics such as insects, physical matter, and math. Other books were grade-appropriate fictional stories.

On a morning in March, 25 Air Force Base volunteers of all ranks and positions arrived at the school ready to read. A small group of parent helpers assisted the troops by signing them into the school and briefing them on what their duties entailed. Either before or after reading books aloud to the children, troops spoke about their respective jobs on the base.

In 25 classrooms across the school, hundreds of elementary schoolers sat at rapt attention while troops read them stories. After the readings, students peppered the volunteers with dozens of questions about the books and their jobs. For a large number of students, many of whom had family members serving in the military, these readers represented role

models to whom they could relate. For others, the military personnel represented a career path that the students may wish to explore in the future. Once troops finished answering questions, they retired to the Parent Resource Center for refreshments and snacks. There, school officials presented them each with lunch, a Mustang pin, and student-written thank you cards for donating their time.

The event was so popular with Machen students that for months after the event took place, students still asked when the readers would return. The event cost \$150 to conduct. The school used Title I funding to cover the minimal expenses. Teachers plan to make Reading with the Troops a regular event at Machen. They are considering expanding the program to include more than just the reading curriculum.

*Tamera Clarke  
Parent Involvement Facilitator  
(757) 766-5260  
tcrosby@sbo.hampton.k12.va.us*