



**Department of Education and Department of Military and Veteran Affairs collect more than 125,000 holiday cards from students for US military service men and women as part of Governor Christie's "Season of Service"**

**For Immediate Release**

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Trenton, NJ "As part of Governor Christie's "Season of Service," the Department of Education and Department of Military and Veteran Affairs announced today that they have collected more than 125,000 holiday cards from across the state for U.S. military service members. Acting Education Commissioner Chris Cerf and Col. Mark Preston from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs collected letters and participated in a "Holiday Greetings to the U.S. Military" school assembly today at Greenwood Elementary School in Hamilton Township.

"These cards and letters are incredibly meaningful to our service members stationed overseas and they provide an opportunity for us to show our appreciation for their service to our country," Acting Commissioner Cerf said. "Just a couple of weeks ago, we asked schools across the state to consider participating in the holiday cards and letters project. The overwhelming response we received from our school children is a heart-warming demonstration of patriotism and volunteerism, showing that New Jerseyans truly care and support our friends and neighbors in the U.S. Military."

"The holiday season is especially difficult for those service members who are unable to spend it with their loved ones," said Brig. Gen. James J. Grant, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. "Although nothing can extinguish the pain of being away from family during this time, our troops will find comfort in the children's holiday cards and know that Americans recognize their selflessness and commitment to our nation's security"

The Season of Service was inspired by 8-year-old Aiden McManus, a New Jersey Hero who has been devoting his time and hard-earned money to feed the homeless and those in need in Burlington County. Nearly 1.5 million New Jerseyans are already positively influencing communities across the state by volunteering their services through local groups, houses of worship and civic organizations.

In addition to the event today, Acting Commissioner Cerf has participated in several public service events in the month of December. On December 15, Acting Commissioner Cerf tutored high school students in Irvington as an example of ways that community members across the state can give back to their public schools. On December 2, Acting Commissioner Cerf participated in a holiday coat drive in Trenton.

In addition to the Mercer County assembly, Holiday Greetings to the U.S. Military events are taking place in six schools around the state with members of the State Board of Education.

**Concurrent Events - Bergen County**

**Municipality, County** - Woodcliff Lake, Bergen County  
**School** - Woodcliff Middle School and Dorchester Elementary School  
**Event** - assembly  
**NJDOE Representative** - NJ State School Board Vice Chair Ilan Plawker

**Concurrent Event - Essex County**

**Municipality, County** - West Orange, Essex County  
**School** - Gregory School  
**Event** - assembly  
**NJDOE Representative** - NJ State Board of Education Member Dorothy Strickland  
**NJDMAVA Representative** - LTC. John Langston

**Concurrent Event - Warren County**

**Municipality, County** - Oxford Township, Warren County  
**School** - Oxford Central School  
**Event** - assembly  
**NJDOE Representative** - NJ State Board of Education Member Jack Fornaro

**Associated Event - Hunterdon County**

**Date and Time** - Monday, Dec. 19, 2011, 2:30 to 3 p.m.

**Municipality, County** - Annandale, Hunterdon County

**School** - North Hunterdon Regional High School

**Address** - 1445 State Route 31, Annandale, NJ 08801

**Event** - Military personnel will attend Interact Club meeting, members consist of over 400 students

**Associated Event - Union County**

**Date and Time** - Monday, Dec. 19, 2011, 10 a.m.

**Municipality, County** - Kenilworth, Union County

**School** - Warren G. Harding Elementary School

**Address** - 426 BOULEVARD, KENILWORTH, NJ 07033-1529

**Event** - assembly

**NJDOE Representative** - NJ State School Board Member Jack Fornaro



From left to right, Sgt. 1st Class John Trainor, Spc. Mary-Colleen Sobon, both with the 117th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, Col. Mark A. Preston, New Jersey National Guard Joint Force Headquarters, Lt. Col. Paul Rumberger, commander 117th CSSB and Command Sgt. Maj. Hermenegildo Devarie, command sergeant major 117th CSSB.



NJ DOE Acting Commissioner Chris Cerf and Col. Mark A. Preston, New Jersey National Guard are presented with nine bags of holiday cards for our U.S. Armed Forces at the Greenwood Elementary School in Hamilton Township today. Hamilton Township school officials, Hamilton Mayor John Bencivengo and members of the New Jersey National Guard took part in the Holiday Greetings for the U.S. Military school assembly. Statewide, school children sent in more than 125,000 cards and letters as part of Governor Christie's "Season of Service."



Greenwood Elementary Students sing God Bless America at a special Holiday Greetings To the U.S. Military Assembly in Hamilton Township.





Woodcliff Lake Superintendent Lauren Barbelet, Middle School Principal Jack Leonard, NJ State School Board Vice Chair Ilan Plawker, Lt.Col. Mark PETERSKI and Woodcliff Middle School Students at the Holiday Greetings for U.S. Military Assembly in Bergen County



Lt. Col. Mark PETERSKI and Woodcliff Middle School students



Letters written by Woodcliff Middle School



A 6th grader from Woodcliff Lake Middle School reads her letter to soldiers while Lt. Col. Mark Piterski and servicemen look on.





A Woodcliff Middle School 6th grade student reads her letter to soldiers while Principal Jack Leonard and State School Board Vice Chair Ilan Plawker look on.



Gregory School Principal Michele Thompson with students reading letters to the U.S.Military.



Gregory School student reads his letter to the U.S. Military, assisted by Principal Michele Thompson



Students in West Orange take part in a Holiday Greetings to the Troops assembly.