

# Superintendent Helps Kick Off Valentines For Troops Effort

## [By Eliza Hallabeck](#)

Middle Gate lead teacher Susan Ruddock welcomed the students in attendance to an assembly on Monday, January 9, and explained the students will be writing to members of the United States Navy aboard the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* Air Craft Carrier through the Newtown-based Valentines For Troops effort.

During the introduction assembly for the 2012 Valentines For Troops at Middle Gate, Respect, Responsibility, and Diversity (RRD) Club advisor Brian Kowalsky also shared information about the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* and the president after whom the vessel was named. Superintendent of Schools Janet Robinson also spoke during the assembly as the guest speaker for the event.



Superintendent of Schools Janet Robinson spoke during an assembly at Middle Gate Elementary School on Monday, January 9, to help start the 2012 Valentines For Troops effort at the school. — Bee Photo, Hallabeck

"They are out there risking their lives every day, so we can come here to school and learn," said Mr Kowalsky to the students.

Ms Ruddock also thanked the teachers who volunteered to be part of the Valentines For Troops program at the school during the assembly.

Each year, volunteers with the Valentines For Troops effort work to find and list addresses of deployed personnel to send letters and care packages to, and later work to help proofread and pack the letters written by students and care packages for shipment overseas, to places like Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Japan, and to ships at sea.

While the effort is predominantly directed at students, Valentines For Troops Project Chair Donna Monteleone Randle, a former US Army captain, Signal Corps, says adult volunteers are also welcome to write letters or help expand the effort.

When Dr Robinson spoke to the students, she shared information about her father, who served as a pilot on an aircraft carrier during his military career.

Dr Robinson told the students that while air craft carriers are large vessels, the landing and take-off area on an air craft carrier is shorter than those used at airports. To compensate for the difference in the distance, Dr Robinson said a system of hooks and cables are used to catch a plane when landing on an air craft carrier, and, as one student said, a "sling-shot" type boost is used when planes take off from the vessel.

"Not only is it brave to be a pilot on a carrier," Dr Robinson said, "but there are many people on a carrier that have many different jobs."

Dr Robinson's father, she said, could be away from his family for nine months at a time while serving on an aircraft carrier, like the men and women the Middle Gate students will be writing to through the Valentines For Troops program.

Her father could miss an entire school year with his family, she said. Dr Robinson also described what it was like to wait for her father's return, watching for the dock for small speck on the horizon to grow into an air craft carrier.

"Your letters will make them think of their own kids, their own home," said Dr Robinson.

In closing for the assembly, Ms Ruddock told the students they may or may not hear from the servicemen and servicewomen they write too, but, if teachers do get a return response, Ms Ruddock asked them to share the news with her so she could in turn share the responses with the Middle Gate community.

Anyone interested in volunteering with the effort or signing up to write a Valentine's Day card or creating a personalized package can contact Ms Randle by e-mail at [ndrandle@charter.net](mailto:ndrandle@charter.net) or by calling 203-364-9772. The Valentines For Troops effort also has a Facebook page, Valentines for Troops Newtown CT.

Ms Randle also said community service hours can also be given to young people who volunteer with the effort.