

Educators “Educated” on Student Air Force Opportunities

What happens when an educator, an AFA chapter president, and a passionate STEM advocate steps onto an Air Force base for an immersive recruiting experience? For Laurie Orth—educator and chapter president of East Georgia AFA—the Air Force Recruiting Service’s (AFRS), Enlisted Accessions, Educators Tour at Goodfellow Air Force Base became far more than a visit. It was a *fast-paced, eye-opening look at the people, training, and purpose behind today’s Air Force, revealing to educators how service members are developed not just into airmen, but into confident communicators, technical experts, and future community leaders.*

At **Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas, on July 21-22, 2026**, twenty-four educators, high school counselors, and after-school program leaders took part in the Educators Tour, gaining an inside look at Air Force careers such as intelligence, medical services, fire protection, security forces, logistics, and communications.

Highlights of Laurie Orth’s Educator Tour:

After a long day of travel from Georgia, it was great to visit and get to know a few of the educators in my van from San Angelo Airport to our hotel. Upon arrival, we were treated to a welcome reception, hosted by Col. Kristy L. Moore, Deputy Commander, AFRS, and attended by recruiters, educators, base, and community leaders. The U.S. Air Force Band of the West provided music for the event, and I was excited to get to visit with the band members since I am very musically inclined. I saw first-hand how connected the Air Force really is when I connected again with Goodfellow Air Force Base commander, Col. Matthew Norton, who had been the former commander of the 480th ISR Group stationed at the United States Army Base, Ft. Gordon, in Augusta, Georgia, who I had met a few years earlier.



A first look at the mission

The first full day began with an overview of Goodfellow’s history and mission, followed by a deep dive into career fields many civilians rarely see up close. Rather than focusing only on aircraft, the tour highlighted a broad range of specialties that keep the Air Force operating daily.

In the medical group, we met junior enlisted Airmen who confidently briefed them on their roles in areas such as flight medicine, immunizations, optometry, dental care, pharmacy, and laboratory services. One demonstration on tourniquet use was especially memorable, showing the seriousness and urgency of medical response training. Other stops included interactive exercises, such as triaging patient scenarios and participating in hands-on medical activities. For me, *one of the strongest impressions was seeing how well these young Airmen communicated.*

Later that day, the group visited Security Forces, where they saw another side of Air Force readiness. We observed working dogs, equipment demonstrations, and training scenarios that showed the demands placed on personnel responsible for installation security and law enforcement.

The tour also included a look at the many support career fields that help sustain the force, from logistics and civil engineering to human resources, communications, and force support (Personnel). What a full day of immersion to our Air Force.

Day Two

The second touring day spotlighted some of Goodfellow's most demanding training pipelines, including intelligence and firefighting. In the intelligence training area, educators learned how selective and academically rigorous the field can be. Airmen in the program study topics ranging from coding and electronics to orbital mechanics and seismology.



The firefighting training visit offered a different kind of intensity. We saw the physical demands of the profession, temperatures over 100 degree Fahrenheit, the scale of the training facilities, and the urgency of a career field that remains in high demand. The message to educators was practical and direct: *students entering these fields need resilience, discipline, and the ability to receive corrective guidance.*

Conversations with instructors emphasized that many high-achieving students struggle when they encounter failure for the first time in a high-stakes environment. Educators, they said, can better prepare students by challenging them, teaching perseverance, and helping them build strong communication skills before they ever sit down with a recruiter.

Among the most unforgettable moments of the tour was a visit to a static MiG-23 display, where we were allowed to climb into the cockpit of the former Soviet aircraft. For me, it was a rare and vivid reminder of the history, technology, and global context behind military training.





That experience was followed by a *virtual reality* demonstration that allowed participants to explore Russian equipment and digitally revisit the same aircraft they had just seen in person. *It was a creative, modern example of how the Air Force is adapting its instructional methods to engage today's learners.*

The group also visited training spaces where educators saw how the Air Force is rethinking instruction itself—moving beyond outdated slide decks and toward more immersive, student-centered approaches.

The Human Side

Beyond the technology and training, the tour also revealed the deeply human side of Air Force life. Briefings from chaplains, legal professionals, and resilience personnel showed how the service supports Airmen through personal crises, family challenges, and mental health needs. Those conversations underscored something easy to miss from the outside: *the Air Force invests heavily not only in technical preparation, but also in the well-being of its people.*

Educators Play an Important Role

For me, the Educators Tour brought it all together. It showed how the Air Force develops young

people into skilled, confident professionals while opening doors to training and opportunities, and potential careers, in intelligence, medicine, communications, logistics, and fire protection. It also reinforced the **important role educators play in helping students discover life opportunities**. By the end of the Goodfellow tour, I left with more than notes, photos, and stories. I realized I had gained a *clearer understanding of how educators, parents, recruiters, and community leaders can work together to guide students toward meaningful training, jobs, and career futures.*



As an educator and chapter president of East Georgia AFA, I was in awe of how the AFA mission

– *to promote dominant U.S. Air & Space Forces as the foundation of a strong National Defense*, and AFA's Educate mission pillar – *AFA Educates the public on the critical need for unrivaled aerospace power and promote aerospace and STEM education for a technically superior and professional workforce to ensure national security* – and how it directly impacts our Air Force.

AFA's efforts to encourage and support STEM, and the next generation of Air and Space Force leaders through youth competitions and camps, national and local awards, educator grants, scholarships, professional development opportunities, and programs, directly impact our nation.

This educator tour, sponsored by the Air Force Recruiting Service, made me fully realize how critical educators are in teaching, challenging, encouraging, and ensuring students have an awareness of the many opportunities available in our communities and nation. It was evident to me that the Air and Space Forces offer job and potential career opportunities our youth should be aware of, and potentially to take advantage of. Educators are well postured to connect STEM education with both commercial and military opportunities.

Connecting students to the knowledge, skills, and career pathways that support both personal growth and national service creates the outcome for which educators strive!

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