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Attitudes In Reverse® Honors Liz Machado, Hopewell Valley Regional School District Teacher, as a *Partner in Hope*

PRINCETON, NJ, October 1, 2026 – Throughout more than 27 years as an educator for students in kindergarten through 12th grade, Liz Machado has “seen an increase of anxiety, stress, trauma and other emotional challenges that affect our students’ ability to learn and thrive.” She combines her passion for education with commitment to support children’s mental health during the school day with her Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®)-Certified Therapy Dog Nico. Machado will be honored with a *Partner in Hope Award* during AIR’s 10th Annual Taste of Hope event, which will be held on October 22, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Princeton Marriott at Forrestal, Princeton, NJ.

Machado currently teaches third grade at Bear Tavern Elementary School in the Hopewell Valley Regional School District (HVRSD). “I feel blessed to work in a district that believes that supporting a child’s emotional well-being is just as important as supporting academic growth,” she shared.

“We are thrilled to honor Liz for all she has done with Nico and children. In fact, two of her students spoke at our Taste of Hope event last year, sharing heartwarming stories of how Nico is supporting them and their friends,” said AIR Co-Founders Tricia and Kurt Baker. “We look forward to our ongoing partnerships with Liz and Nico and other HVRSD AIR Dog Teams to strengthen students’ mental health and, therefore, their potential to thrive in every aspect of their lives.”

Machado Shares the Positive Influence of AIR and its Certified Therapy Dogs

“I first learned about AIR through my daughter. As a freshman in Hopewell Valley, one of her friends tragically took her life. Tricia Baker and the AIR Dogs team came to the school to support students as they grieved,” Machado said. “My daughter shared how much comfort the therapy dogs brought to everyone. She told me that having the dogs there created a sense of calm and made it easier for students to open up to counselors about their feelings. The AIR dogs truly supported students through such a heartbreaking experience.”

“I later had the opportunity to experience the impact of one of the district’s first AIR school-based therapy dogs. Dr. Rosetta Treece brought her dog Bruno to my classroom to support two struggling and reluctant readers,” Machado said, referring to HVRSD’s Superintendent, who will also receive a *Partner in Hope Award*. “When the boys learned they would have the opportunity to read to Bruno, they were excited to pick a book and work on their reading fluency. In fact, they reminded me

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when it was time for them to work on their reading. They even volunteered to read to a kindergarten class beforehand because they wanted to impress Bruno.”

“The day Bruno visited my classroom, I witnessed a kind of magic I had never seen in my teaching career. With Bruno at their side, the boys took turns reading their book and showing Bruno the pictures – all in front of their peers. Bruno gave the boys the confidence to believe in themselves. It was in that moment that I realized the extraordinary impact a therapy dog could have on a child's emotional well-being, and I became interested in becoming an AIR Dog handler,” Machado shared.

“As Nico's handler, I have the privilege of witnessing AIR's influence. I've seen students who arrive at school anxious or overwhelmed become calm after spending just a few moments with him. I've watched children who struggle to express their emotions begin talking while petting Nico,” Machado said. “They keep his trading card close by, using it as a bookmark or for moral support during a test. He has helped de-escalate difficult situations, build trusting relationships, and create an environment where students feel safe, accepted and understood.”

“I believe AIR's potential is limitless. Every school deserves the opportunity to experience what we have been so fortunate to witness in Hopewell Valley. At a time when mental health challenges continue to rise, organizations like AIR are not simply making a difference—they are becoming essential,” Machado said.

“Every day, AIR reminds people that they are seen, heard, valued and not alone; that asking for help is courageous; and that healing begins with connection. That is the gift AIR has given to my family, students, school community and me. It is a gift I hope to continue sharing many days through Nico,” she added.

Machado will be honored along with *Champions of Hope* Scott Moore, PE, CSP, Founder and Owner of Moore Engineering; Hal English, Retired from Princeton Mercer Regional Chamber of Commerce and Robbinsville Councilman, and Carol Rickard, LCSW, MSW, Founder of Well YOUNiversity and Stress SMARTER Systems; and fellow *Partners in Hope*; Dr. Rosetta Treece, HVRSD Superintendent, and Rayan Shah, high school student, leader, golf champion and mental health advocate.

AIR is most appreciative of the Taste of Hope event sponsors: Prevention Sponsors - Moore Engineering and Princeton Brain & Spine; AIR Sponsors - J. Robert Bratman, Esq., Stark & Stark Attorneys at Law and Szaferman Lakind Attorneys at Law; Faith Sponsors - BeTheLi9ht Foundation and Hartford insurance; Dignity Sponsor - Sasha's Sitters; Love Sponsors - Cynthia M. Bratman, Psy.D., Capital Health, Joe & Deborah Charles, Robert & Paula Dunn, Leary, Bride, Mergner & Bongiovanni, P.A., Mayor Hemant & Punit Marathe, Oaks Integrated Care and Dawn & Scott Zack; and Half-Day Classroom Presentation Sponsors - Hofing Management and Renzi Legal Resources.

AIR is equally grateful for the participating restaurants and dessert, wine and spirit vendors: *Restaurants* - Aljons Pizza & Restaurant, Amalfi's Kitchen & Bar, Bonefish Grill, Brickhouse Tavern, Buffalo Wild Wings, Iron & Ivy at Princeton Marriott, Madras Dosa, Outback Steakhouse, P.F. Chang's, Romeo's Pizza, Ruth's Chris Steak House and Texas Roadhouse; *Desserts* - Aunt Lullie's

More

Cookies, Carella's Chocolates, Everything But Plates, Little Pink Cakes, Seasons 52 and Starbucks; *Wine & Spirits* - A & A Distributors, Aldez Tequila, BuyRite Liquors, Lofted Spirits and Wines with Causes.

To register to sponsor and/or attend the Taste of Hope event and meet Nico and Liz or make a donation, please visit <https://toh.ngo/>.

Any business donating a \$1,500 Dignity sponsorship or higher can receive a Mental Health Lunch & Learn. Any questions can be directed to Tricia@air.ngo.

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Attitudes In Reverse® (AIR®) was established by Tricia, Kurt and Katelyn Baker of Plainsboro, NJ, in 2010, soon after their son/brother Kenny died by suicide following a long battle against severe depression and anxiety. Their mission is to save lives by educating students about mental health, related disorders and suicide prevention. Since January 2011, they have presented to more than 260,000 students in elementary, middle and high schools and colleges in New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Missouri, Texas and Arizona. AIR also offers the AIR Dogs: Paws for MindsSM program, bringing dogs into schools to help students de-stress and engage in the conversation about mental health. In addition, AIR trains and certifies Emotional Support Animals and offers a lunch-and-learn program for businesses. For more information about AIR, please visit www.air.ngo or call 609-945-3200.