



STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM PROJECT SUMMARY SHEET

SCHOOL: Brooklawn Middle School

ACTIVITY: SERVE THE SOLDIERS

DATE(S): December 2009-January 2010

CATEGORY: Service

ADVISOR NAME: Lou Miller

ADVISOR E-MAIL: lmiller@njasc.org

PROVIDE A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THIS PROJECT:

In November 2009 we received an e-mail from 1st Lt. Joe Zdaniewicz, a former NJASC State Officer and LTC Junior Counselor. Well into his first deployment, Joe and the members of his army unit were starting to feel beaten down by the heat turned to cold as the holidays approached, and in need of some reminders of home. The Student Council Community Service committee decided to start a collection of letters, cards, and personal items for his unit. Rather than sending items in time for Christmas, the committee decided to send the items in January. The idea was not only to give more time to collect items (takes 2-3 weeks to ship to APO), but to have them arrive after the holidays when the added attention of the season has long since faded. We collected 13 large postal boxes of letters, cards, and personal items in just two weeks. The items were shipped in early January, and were delivered to the unit at the end of that month. The items collected went to over 25 servicemen and women who showed their appreciation through e-mails, letters, and photos. Also, (now) Captain Zdaniewicz is arranging for a flag flown over his base in Afghanistan to be sent to Brooklawn as a token of appreciation.

DESCRIBE THE PLANNING & EXECUTION OF THIS PROJECT:

This project began as a discussion in our Community Service committee, and led to an effort that would involve the entire student body. Major decisions made by the students included the following:

1. What items should be collected? After reading e-mails from 1st Lt. Joe Zdaniewicz, the items most wanted by troops were letters/cards showing appreciation, books, puzzles, games, balls, socks, gloves, and snacks like beef jerky. Therefore, these would be the types of items asked for on flyers, posters, etc.
2. When should the items be collected and shipped? Once the committee decided to ship the items in January to "combat" the post-holiday blues, it allowed for collection throughout the month of December. The cost to ship these items (about \$15 per box) would be paid for by the Student Council.
3. How would it be publicized? The Community Service committee worked hand-in-hand with the Publicity Committee to make posters that would be hung all over the school, and create flyers to be posted in strategic locations as well as on our council web site at www.BrooklawnSA.org. The Executive Board and advisors also contacted all Reading/Writing teachers in the school, encouraging them to incorporate this activity into their classroom instruction. Nearly the entire department did and as a result hundreds of letters were written and included in the final shipment to Afghanistan.
4. How would collections take place? It was decided that the Student Council room would be our main collection area, with items separated by grade level. We conduct a Spirit Point competition each year, and the committee decided to award Spirit Points to the grade that donated the most items over the designated two week period in December. No other incentives were offered for donations.
5. How would the items be organized for shipment? After the collection period ended, members of the Community Service committee met and decided to have each postal shipment box contain a variety of items. The original intent was to have one postal box for each soldier, with a separate box for all the letters and cards. We did not know at the time that over 25 soldiers would benefit.

DESCRIBE THE BENEFIT OF THIS PROJECT BENEFIT TO SCHOOL AND/OR COMMUNITY:

The impact of this project on the soldiers of the U.S. Army 19th Engineering Battalion was obvious. They were reminded of how giving and caring the young leaders of our nation really are, and how appreciated their service to our country and toward a better Afghanistan really is. The impact on the morale of this unit was profound, as evidenced by the letter 1st Lt. Zdaniewicz wrote to our Student Council after his unit received the donated items.

As for the impact on our Student Council and Brooklawn Middle School, it was also profound. Several of our students have brothers, sisters, or parents that are involved in the current overseas actions of our armed forces. This project gave them an opportunity to share their own personal family concerns as well as their appreciation for our troops, working toward (and in some cases leading) a group effort to demonstrate such concern and appreciation on a large scale. This project also provided a renewed awareness throughout our student body and school community of the service to our country freely given by millions of young men and women at a time when it has regrettably too often been forgotten.

It was great to see the English department actively integrate this project into their curriculum. In doing so, they developed the writing skills of students in all grades and levels while providing additional meaning to the words that our students wrote. The result was not only excellent instruction within the district curriculum, but a meaningful learning experience that produced hundreds of letters showing deep appreciation beyond the many gifts that were also collected and shipped to Afghanistan.

The appreciation shown by 1st Lt. Zdaniewicz and his unit was certainly a measure of success; perhaps even more impressive was the manner in which our school community came together to support, organize, and carry out this project. "Serve The Soldiers" has had a lasting impact on all involved.

EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THIS PROJECT, REFLECTING ON ANY POSSIBLE CHANGES YOU MIGHT CONSIDER:

Our "Serve The Soldiers" project had the following objectives:

1. To collect various personal items for the men and women of an United States army unit in Afghanistan, and then ship them overseas to this unit to show our appreciation for their service.
2. To gain an appreciation for the service to our country provided by the young men and women of our military, and to show them tangible evidence of this appreciation.
3. To establish a personal connection not only to the servicemen and servicewomen of this unit, but to all of our military personnel stationed overseas.
4. To enhance our Student Council Community Service program by extending their dedication to service beyond the boundaries of our school and local community.

In terms of these objectives, "Serve The Soldiers" was extremely effective. Our student body and faculty embraced this project and a renewed sense of patriotism could be seen in many of them. We were also honored in June 2010 to have this project chosen by the Alliance for Student Activities as the 2010 National DifferenceMakers Award winning project for middle level schools.

Looking back at what we did, there was some confusion early on about exactly what items should be collected. In the beginning, there were certain items donated that military regulations prohibited us from shipping. Because of the tight timelines we were working under - we got this project started only days after receiving the letter - we did not do enough research about what was acceptable and what was not until right before we started collecting items. We would recommend that anyone doing a project like this take the time before they begin to review the rules for shipping to APO/FPO addresses so that they do not have to turn away donated items.