

Ag Harvest Campaign

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The Ag Harvest Campaign is a year long project to benefit families in need in our community. The campaign consists of four school-wide food drives throughout the year and more than 40 families participating in the *Plant a Row for the Hungry* campaign. Donations collected through the food drives and garden collections were given to our local food bank.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? We met with representatives of the Hereford Food Bank to see how we could help meet the specific needs of the Hereford Community. Through the campaign we created we provided on-going assistance to the Hereford Food Bank by our in-school food drives and our community outreach (Plant a Row for the Hungry) project. The joy of this project is seeing the students, along with their parents, work together to grow vegetables for the food bank. This is the first time that fresh vegetables and fruits have been a part of the food drive in a consistent, on-going manner.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? Last year, we developed lessons which brought together our curriculum goals and student service-learning needs in the community in a unified project. The Ag Harvest Campaign incorporated lessons which we used in our instructional program. As a part of our 6th grade ag products unit and our 8th grade gardening unit, we were able to provide real-life applications of the skills learned in the classroom to help meet the community problem of hunger.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? Last year, as a part of their reflection activity on the project, we had student write a newspaper article which described the need in the community and how our project would help meet that need. In addition, students advocated for adults in the community to plant fruits and vegetables for the food bank. We also had a display at the Maryland Home and Flower Show depicting the project and describing the community need. Students were available to answer questions about the project and solicit community partners for this project. A display was also manned at our Spotlight on Students program at Hereford Middle School where over 1,000 community people attended.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? The students in the Horticulture Club met every Wednesday after school to work on their student service projects. Students planned, designed, constructed and installed the display at the Flower Show. They also received recognition as having the outstanding educational exhibit at the show. During the food drives students helped organize the donations and prepared them for delivery to the food bank. As a part of preparation, action and reflection, the students raised vegetables in our gardens at school for donation to the food bank and helped organize the meetings for the parents/students participating in the project. Student representatives from our club participated in Maryland's 11th Annual Service-Learning Conference at the College of Notre Dame in Maryland. When they returned they eagerly shared what they learned. The students were recognized for their service to the community by the Office of Service-Learning in Baltimore County Public Schools through the Student Meritorious Service Award Program. One of the students and their parents were on hand to receive the award on behalf of the Horticulture Club.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? Our community has overwhelmingly supported this project. We have partnered with our local food bank to provide needed assistance. As the project developed we contacted businesses in the community for assistance and support. We had several businesses donate items for our display at the Flower Show and also help with the installation of that display. During the Food Drive project, more than 750 parents became partners through their support and donations. We had three local businesses (Foster Brothers True Value, Mason Dixon Farmers Market and Southern States Cooperative in Cockeysville) donate vegetable plants and seeds to all of the participants in the Plant a Row for the Hungry campaign. They were very excited about the project and hope to increase their support in the future as the project develops.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? The seed was planted at a National Gardening workshop I attended last year where I saw how schools used gardening in their programs to meet educational goals and community needs. I met with the food bank and the student service coordinator in our school to discuss ideas for the project and possible ways in which the curriculum and community needs could be met. As the planning continued during the fall, students in my Horticulture Club and ag classes were involved with initial preparation, planning and implementation of this project. As we have progressed on the project we have continually evaluated the outcomes and how we may improve the project in the future. Our project started last fall with our Horticulture Club harvesting our vegetable garden for the project and now it has expanded to over 40 families in our school participating in raising produce. Our local media is excited about the project and is looking at ways in which we can expand to include other interested members in the community.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? Students learned that the needs in the community are constantly changing and that at some point in their lives they may be dependent on the food bank for help. They saw a connection between the community needs and their personal life because some of the families that the food bank services have students who attend our school. The food bank regularly contacts us to let us know what the current needs are before we have a food drive and what types of plants we should grow in the garden for the project. Students then discussed this and were able to articulate their concerns and offer possible solutions.

They learned how this project can make another persons life better. And they learned how to work with adults in their community and in their families. Through the project students learned how to grow food for themselves as well as sharing their harvest with the less fortunate. As this project continues it is hoped that the students throughout their lives will use the knowledge gained to help others in any way they can.