

## **Casey Cares and So Do We! – Persuading for a Cause**

### **By Marissa Spears**

Perry Hall Middle School students in conjunction with their Language Arts Non-Fiction Unit read, analyzed, and evaluated newspaper articles, websites, and news footage surrounding the Casey Cares Foundation and the fire that wiped out their offices and warehouse earlier in the summer. After contacting Casey Cares to find out how they could help, the students began learning about tone and persuasive letter writing. Students created persuasive letters that were sent to pizza places all over the state asking for gift certificates to help Casey Cares rebuild their Pizza and Movie Night program. The project culminated in a breakfast where the gift certificates were passed from the students to Casey Cares.

#### **Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project (e.g. health, education, environmental or public safety need)?**

The Casey Cares Foundation is a local organization that works to bring smiles and fun to the lives of critically ill children and their families in the mid-Atlantic region. They are based in Maryland, and their offices and warehouse burnt to the ground this summer in a massive fire that destroyed almost everything. After my students heard about this tragedy, they decided that they would like to help the organization. I contacted the organization to determine a current need, and they asked for the gift cards from the pizzerias.

#### **Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to school curriculum (e.g. what course outcomes were met and/or how did the project reinforce or enhance student academic learning)?**

The persuasive letter covers one of the major writing objectives in the BCPS 7th grade language arts curriculum. Throughout the non-fiction unit, the students also had to analyze various forms of non-fiction so I substituted the suggested materials with various non-fiction media that highlighted the efforts and tragedy of Casey Cares. We were able to utilize the same worksheets and still meet the same objectives outlined in the curriculum.

#### **Best Practice 3: How did you reflect on your experience throughout the project?**

The students have continually reflected throughout this process by writing journal entries or responding to writing prompts after analyzing and evaluating different non-fiction media dealing with Casey Cares. They also used writing prompts to reflect on the guest speaker from Casey Cares and the process of writing a persuasive letter. The major reading objective of the non-fiction unit asks students to read a biography or autobiography of a person and present a booktalk. I offered extra service-learning hours to any student who could connect this project to our service-learning project by researching the link between the person in their biography and a critical illness. They then had to write a journal entry from the point of view of the person in their biography reflecting on the person's connection with a critical illness and how it has impacted their lives.

#### **Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project?**

The students took control of their own learning and showed leadership in the classroom by staffing various committees that each had a role in ensuring the success of the service-learning project. The students were asked to contribute ideas and brainstorm the steps that we would need to take in order to successfully complete this project. I collected and streamlined their suggestions and wrote up different committee descriptions based on their input. The students then selected a committee to participate in and assumed responsibility for that portion of the project.

**Best Practice 5: What community partners did you work with on this project (e.g. non-profits, civic organizations, business that provided donations, etc.)?**

The plan asked students to establish community partnerships by writing persuasive letters to local pizzerias asking for gift cards in \$5 - \$10 increments that will be donated to the Casey Cares Foundation. To further prepare the students and establish another community partnership, I also hosted a guest speaker from the Casey Cares Foundation who helped us write a fundraising letter, which can be described as a persuasive letter with a more specific purpose.

**Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project?**

I worked with several teachers over the summer at the behest of Maryland State Department of Education to write plans for a variety of service-projects that met the same objectives in the Voluntary State Curriculum (VSC) as the various units implemented by the different curricula used throughout the state of Maryland. One of the plans that our group designed was meant to complement a non-fiction unit, which is addressed in the seventh grade language arts curriculum in Baltimore County Public Schools (BCPS). I knew that I would be teaching this curriculum, and so with the help of my colleagues, I was able to plan for this service-learning over the summer. We drafted a unit plan that could be intricately linked to the BCPS 7th grade language arts non-fiction unit so that I could use it this year. Upon returning to school, I also wrote a plan that would specifically address the way that I would be implementing this project into my curriculum.

**Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project?**

Throughout the non-fiction unit, the students also had to analyze various forms of non-fiction so I substituted the suggested materials with various non-fiction media that highlighted the efforts of Casey Cares. This helped to familiarize the students with the Foundation and the Foundation's work and tragedy. By using the same worksheets and meeting the objectives outlined in the curriculum, I was able to prepare students for their service-learning experience and their upcoming benchmark. The guest speaker from the Casey Cares Foundation also helped us become more familiar with the fundraising process.