

Veterans Partnership Committee

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Windsor Knolls Middle School (WKMS) Veterans Partnership Committee, in cooperation with the WKMS student government, 8th grade band, 6,7 and 8th grade chorus and life skills classes planned and implemented a program honoring veterans in observance of Veterans Day 2001. Our partnership is comprised of staff, students, faculty, parents and representatives from five different veterans organizations in our area. Members of these organizations and other veterans from our community were invited to attend a school flag raising ceremony on November 9th, followed by a school assembly run by members of our veterans committee and SGA, and featuring musical talent from our students. Refreshments and a luncheon were prepared and served to veterans by our PTSA, Veterans Committee and Life Skills classes. The SGA planned and implemented a patriotic door decorating contest and each Home Base made chains with students names to show our united patriotism. The school was decorated everywhere in red, white and blue, and teachers hosted over 20 veterans in various classrooms, all in an effort to recognize the past and present service of our military.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? Veterans have been overlooked often in many communities throughout our country, so it was our goal to thank them for their service to our country. This service was made even more real after the events of 9/11/01. The terrorist attacks made many people in our nation feel helpless, yet empowered to do something. Our project gave us an avenue to give back something to those who protect our country, now and in the past. Our program underscored the *Character Counts!* initiative of Frederick County Public Schools, with a special focus on the Pillar of Citizenship.

Our entire school community, including our veteran partnership groups, was helped by this project. Our students were given an opportunity to take charge of a project that they could plan, participate in and make adjustments to for the future. The veterans and their organizations that participated in our program were recognized and thanked for their commitment and service to our nation. The Commander of the VFW in Mt. Airy was killed in the Pentagon attack and our program recognized his sacrifice to our nation by presenting plaques to both the Post and his family. We also recognized the family of one of our teachers who was called to active duty for homeland security, and the families of two previous students who are currently serving with our teacher. On this day we brought together the entire Windsor Knolls Community to show our patriotism.

Two years ago we became a Korean War Commemorative Partner and dedicated ourselves to conducting 3 activities per year for 3 years that honored veterans from this era. After contacting local veterans organizations, we found that not only veterans from the "Forgotten War" were interested in participating and supporting our school events, but so were all of their veterans. These organizations and their members are a priceless asset to our communities, yet go underutilized. We have within each organization people who exemplify the Pillars of Character, and who are also living pieces of American History. One veteran shared his experience as a child visiting Gettysburg in the 1930's and seeing very old men in strange uniforms. Later he found out that these men were there for a reunion of drummer boys from the Civil War! Wow! What an incredible link to our history, and yet we rarely ever tap into it. We felt that veterans are often forgotten in the hustle and bustle world of our lives today, and that we needed to do more to recognize their service.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? As part of the Social Studies curriculum, students learn both World and American History. Students were able to see and question veterans as eyewitnesses to history. Through class discussions, students were able to place the 9/11 events into an historical perspective. This program highlighted our *Character Counts!* initiative as well. Through the various programs this day, students could take an active role in contributing positively to our school environment,

giving them some ownership of the activities that take place at WKMS. When students are empowered, the school environment becomes more positive and academic achievement increases.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? Throughout the entire project, we had periodic meetings with the entire committee on planning the project and evaluating the impact of each aspect of the program. After the program was over, students were asked to reflect in individual classes on the importance of observing Veterans Day, as well as write thank you letters to our community's veterans highlighting the importance of their service to our country. The student and adult committee is still reviewing the entirety of the program to make changes for next year.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Students helped in all aspects of this project. Using their creativity, they made a plan for decorating the school, preparing a luncheon, greeting and escorting our guests, as well as running the assembly. Two students were selected to be the Masters of Ceremony during the assembly, and other students from the SGA and Veterans Committee helped to hand out awards and recognition certificates. Students also were given the opportunity to participate in a patriotic essay contest and winners were announced during the assembly. The Life Skills classes planned a luncheon, set the tables and served the veterans. Other students took the role of reporters and photographers for our school newspaper.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? We had many community partners starting with our veterans groups - American Legion Gold Star Post 191,; Counties Four VFW, Mt. Airy; Korean War Veterans Chapter 142, Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 304 and Fort Detrick - Command Sgt. Major Niko. We also received donations of flowers from Beall's Florist in Damascus, MD, and food discounts from County Market.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? We held countless meetings for the past year in preparation for this year's program. Students became a part of our program in the Spring of this year, and have taken an active role in planning this program as well as others for veterans. We also maintained constant contact with our veteran partner organizations through phone calls and letters, and asked that each send a representative to our meetings (which they happily did). This was a school wide coordinated effort with more than 30% of our student population directly participating in the day's program (band, chorus, veterans partnership, SGA, Life Skills Classes), and almost all of our Home Bases decorating doors to show their patriotism.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? Our students gained a great deal of knowledge about how to plan and implement a major project. They also learned about the history of Veterans Day, and the Pillars of Character. Many students used multimedia applications to produce posters, flyers, and letters in support of the program, but mostly our students learned how to put aside their differences and work together to achieve a common goal - to honor Veterans.