

Wildcats Make a Difference

*Washington Junior High School
Naperville, Illinois*

More than 220 students from Washington Junior High School got in the volunteer spirit last school year, thanks to Wildcats Make a Difference. Through the project, students in Grades 6 to 8 were encouraged to volunteer at local organizations in their community.

The School Family Community Partnership (SFCP) at Washington instituted the program two years ago to help encourage students to contribute to the community.

“The Wildcats Make a Difference program ties in perfectly with the community contributor aspect of [our] mission statement and meets one component of the School Improvement Plan,” an SFCP co-chair said.

The SFCP team had the main responsibility for maintaining the program. Teachers and administrators provided support by announcing volunteer opportunities, updating the web site with Wildcats Make a Difference information, and encouraging students to participate.

The SFCP promoted the program in morning and lunch announcements to students, and in informational blurbs in the school newsletter for parents. SFCP designated a leader to keep track of updating the volunteer opportunities as they changed.

Between September and June, more than 220 students at the school spent some of their after-school hours entertaining senior citizens at local retirement homes, or stocking church pantries during food drives. The American Cancer Society asked some Washington students to help with its annual Walk for Life campaign. Outdoorsy students volunteered to help maintain the grounds at the local arboretum. Many other projects for and with the community were conducted.

The SFCP and everyone else involved wanted to be sure the students were recognized for their contributions. Washington Junior High staff asked all students who participated

in any volunteer work to fill out a form on the school’s web site. On the form, students described who they worked with and what they did. SFCP staff encouraged them to include pictures of their work. Once the forms were complete, school administrators posted the forms on a large bulletin board in the school’s cafeteria.

The project cost the school about \$125 to implement, with district grant money used to pay the bills.

Washington saw an increase in volunteerism this year, which translated into many benefits for the school, its students, and the greater community.

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