

Character Kids Club

*Skaith Accelerated Elementary School
St. Joseph, Missouri*

Helping students be good community members is a school improvement goal at Skaith Accelerated Elementary School. That goal, coupled with the school's character education program, took a group of students into several rewarding community service projects. It also enabled those same students to serve as peer teachers and role models in character education.

A new after-school program, the Character Kids Club, gave older Skaith students the opportunity to be school leaders and active community helpers. In addition, the club touched many audiences—teachers, other students, administrators, and parents, as well as the community agencies that benefited from the students' efforts.

The club includes fifth and sixth graders, chosen for membership based on grades, attendance, behavior, and interest. School administrators hoped that this program, combined with the outreach of its members, would strengthen the school's four-year-old character education program. Club members were required to participate in two service projects. Most of them joined a third voluntarily.

The "Character Kids" worked on the following projects:

- American Red Cross: Students updated more than 2,000 comfort kits with fresh toothpaste and repacked the kits, containing cosmetics and toiletries, for disaster victims.
- The Clothes Closet, a store of used clothing and household items operated by a non-profit organization in northwest Missouri:

The students inventoried the contents of this store in about three hours—a chore that usually takes two or three volunteers several eight-hour days.

- Missouri Division of Family Services: Students created posters promoting foster parenting for two Missouri counties, using the theme, "Foster Parents are Heroes, Be a Hero." Local businesses displayed the posters.

"Each project allowed the Character Kids to give back to the community. It was easy to see on their faces that they knew they were truly helping others. They took the projects very seriously," said the school counselor.

The Character Kids Club's accomplishments ensure that the club will continue next year. There will be more members, more frequent meetings, and more service projects. "Character Kids offered students an opportunity to take a leadership role in putting character education into practice," said the Skaith principal. "The children realized that they, too, can make a difference in the community and even the world."

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