Decatur Way...The Way to Grow
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Stephen Decatur High School adopted a new philosophy known as the "Decatur Way...The Way to Grow," promoting student pride, responsibility, respect, and achievement. Building on this theme, resource teacher Tom Sites and I developed a plan that would allow our 20 high school students to become actively involved in our school through service-learning. Our plan allows for our students to plan, construct, and maintain a new courtyard area for our school to be used by the entire student body for various class activities. Unique to other student service-learning projects, this is a "work in progress." This project will allow our classes in the future to remain involved by maintaining the courtyard and designing additional features for the courtyard as requested by the teachers in our building. It is estimated that our project will take two years to complete.

- **Meet a recognized community need**: Our courtyard project recognized a community need found within our school. Currently, our school is going through a renovation process that has left very little area available for art, photography, literature, and other classes to conduct special lessons. In addition, we hope this area will provide a relaxed atmosphere for our adult mentors to meet with our students during the school day. Further, this project will enable students who are traditionally left out of school activities to become actively involved and receive recognition for their work.

- **Achieve curricular objectives**: The courtyard project is incorporated into the government and service-learning curriculum. Students take direct action by planning the layout of the courtyard and working cooperatively in groups during the construction phase. Further, decision making skills are developed in a business-like atmosphere where goals are set and steps organized to ensure success. Students learn how to read blue print plans and take measurements while laying out the design of the courtyard.

- **Reflect through the service-learning experience**: Students reflect on their experience throughout the project in group discussions and by making adjustments to their plans as needed.

- **Develop student responsibility**: Students are responsible for completing the task assigned to them each day. Students are also responsible for making suggestions to improve the project. In addition, a graphic arts student at our school used the rough draft of the courtyard plan and drew it to scale for our students to follow.

- **Establish community partnerships**: Community partnerships have been developed through local businesses to purchase equipment and supplies for our project. Students also work to raise money to fund the project with different organizations in our community. Possible partnerships include Maryland Coastal Bays and other local parent groups that may support the program. Students will be working to develop these partnerships by writing letters and making phone calls.

- **Plan ahead for service-learning**: To prepare for this project, Mr. Sites and I had our class in 2000 work with the drama department at our school to beautify their existing stage and courtyard theater. From this experience we were better prepared to organize our students to begin the construction of a new courtyard for our school. We met with various school personnel to find out their ideas for our new courtyard and how it could benefit other teachers and their classes.

- **Equip students with knowledge and skills needed for service**: To begin we assess our student's existing knowledge and skills in this area through group discussion. Many of our students work outside and already have a basic understanding of vegetation and when it is ideal to landscape. We also use books and the computer to research the types of plants and shrubs that will grow in this area, the type of sunlight needed, and what is available at our local businesses at the best price. To use the machines and equipment, Mr. Sites provided a demonstration explaining all safety precautions that needed to be taken by the students.

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