



Operation Instilling School Pride

By Kay Cross

Best Practice 1: Meet a recognized need in the community

I am the advisor of the National Junior Honor Society (NJHS). In 2004, my members wanted to focus their student service-learning projects on our school community. Our school was going through a transition period. At the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, we had hired 22 new teachers, three new assistant principals, and one new principal. My students felt that it was particularly important for the students in our school to take pride in their school in the midst of all this change. The NJHS members decided to start "Operation Instilling School Pride." One of the projects they selected was to paint all the bathrooms in the school with different themes chosen by the school community. The bathroom facelift had multi-purposes: to cover the graffiti in the bathroom, to have the bathrooms reflect the personality of our student body, and to instill pride in our school community.

Best Practice 2: Achieve curricular objectives through service-learning

I decided to take my social studies themes outside of my classroom setting and work them into the NJHS projects. In our social studies curriculum, two of the themes we focus on are "Peoples of the Nation and World" and "Political Science." Both of these themes focus on equipping our students with the knowledge and skills necessary to become responsible citizens and fit well with the planned project. In the "Operation Instilling School Pride" project, the students were applying what they learned through the social studies curriculum by working with diverse populations, analyzing data, and making decisions that reflected all points of view. They were practicing their citizenship skills in the school community. The members were treating the school like a small United States and polling the students and teachers about the bathroom facelifts. From the surveys, informal interviews, and voting, the students were practicing the skills needed to become informed citizens that respect all cultures' points of view.

Best Practice 3: Reflect throughout the service-learning experience

Each week we would have a meeting to discuss the design of the particular bathroom being made-over. The students would take into consideration the location of the bathroom, the age group that used that set of bathrooms, and the informal surveys done of the students and teachers in the particular hall. Once all the information had been gathered, listed, and discussed, the students would vote on the design for those particular bathrooms. The week after a set of bathrooms was complete, the members would survey the students that used those bathrooms to get their feedback on the results. The surveys were done orally and in questionnaire form. The members would meet after school and debrief about the bathroom makeovers and discuss how the facelift was improving the pride of the school.

Best Practice 4: Develop student responsibility

Student responsibility was developed in numerous ways. The NJHS members were the ones that developed the idea for "Operation Instilling School Pride." As the advisor, I guided them through the decision making process, but ultimately left all decision to the NJHS members. In order for this service-learning project to be successful, the members had to

take on the responsibilities of:

- Obtaining permission to paint the bathrooms;
 - Surveying the student body;
 - Analyzing the surveys;
 - Developing themes for each bathroom;
 - Designing each bathroom makeover;
 - Determining the appropriate colors and stencils to use;
 - Getting a list of colors to the advisor by a deadline so paint could be purchased;
 - Painting the bathrooms;
 - And making sure the team was doing all jobs determined by members.
- I was there through every step to make sure the members kept the goal in mind. If they hit a bump in the road, I would navigate them through the rough spot. Then the students would continue to work on the project.

Best Practice 5: *Establish community partnerships*

A school is usually the first formal experience young people have functioning in a community. Through the school community students learn how to effectively communicate with one another and work together. Our students need to learn the skills required for effectively developing partnerships in life. In order for the service-learning project to be successful, the students realized that they needed to develop partnerships with:

1. Each other;
2. The student body;
3. Teachers and staff;
4. And parents.

That is why surveying the community and soliciting constant feedback was such an important part of this project.

Best Practice 6: *Plan ahead for service-learning*

Every year I have a meeting with my NJHS members to see what projects they want to accomplish that school year. We develop a list and a theme. We picked school pride as our theme in 2003-04. All projects were designed around that theme and the Maryland's Best Practices for Service-Learning. The members' wish for 2003-04 was for the student body to show pride in the school. The NJHS believed that if the student body showed pride in their school, then the outside community would, in turn, have pride in the school.

Best Practice 7: *Equip students with knowledge and skills needed for service*

Service-learning projects should result in both academic and personal growth. The students must be able to learn and grow as people from the project. The lessons they learn should be life lessons that will make them productive citizens in our society. When I prepare my students for service-learning, I ask them to look into their hearts. I ask them to think about the community around them. What can you do to make this community even better than it is? What mark do you want to leave on the community? I want the students to find a personal connection to the projects that are implemented.

I have found that if they make a personal connection, the experience becomes more fulfilling for the members.