

Beardsley School’s “sTeeniors” Project

School/City: Beardsley School, Bridgeport

of Participants: 28 Students, 20 Adults

Total Service Hours Completed: 682

Academic and Social focus areas: Reading, Writing, Cooperation, Community Awareness, Respect

Mrs. Schirizzo’s she set a goal of using service-learning to help improve her 6th-grade students’ literacy and critical thinking skills. After the class completed a YES service-learning workshop, the students discovered that they had a collective interest in working with senior citizens. They wanted to break down some of the barriers that prevent young people and seniors from working together and understanding each other. From those ideas, the “sTeeniors” pen pal project was born, in conjunction with nearby Eisenhower Senior Center.

The sTeenior pen pals exchanged three sets of letters during the project and planned a year-end meeting. Through the exercise, students learned more than letter-writing technique: they gleaned some of the rich history that can be brought to life when senior citizens have a chance to share their stories. Mrs. Schirizzo noted the impact that the letters had on one student in particular, an English-language learner struggling to keep up in class: “He wouldn’t put it down! He read that letter over and over again, showing it to anyone who would listen. I couldn’t believe it!”

When the day came for the sTeenior meetup (?) hosted by the Eisenhower Senior Center, temperatures reached nearly 100 degrees, and several seniors were not able to make it to the center. Although there were more students than seniors, the participants were not discouraged. Instead, they took it as an opportunity to use their critical thinking skills to uncover reasons why some seniors were unable to participate. Students evaluated the circumstances and came to insightful explanations for their missing senior partners. Their analysis recognized seniors had transportation, health and safety issues, which were complicated by the high temperatures. In the process, the students gained a new perspective on the daily struggles many seniors face.



A student-senior team works together to complete the scavenger hunt at the Eisenhower Senior Center



Bridgeport Mayor Bill Finch showed his support of the sTeenior Project.

The students chose to improvise their meeting plan by recruiting additional seniors at the Center to join them in their planned group scavenger hunt. They formed combined teams of seniors and students to complete their activity. The scavenger hunt was also an eye-opener for the students. They learned that some people need extra time to move and complete activities. The students demonstrated great respect and care for the seniors by holding open doors and offering up their seats so that seniors could be more comfortable. Many seniors commented that they had not expected the students to be so respectful and polite – a barrier broken down!

The day was a great success. Seniors and students taught each other popular dances, sang songs, and enjoyed the center’s swimming pool. Teams completed interest surveys together and discussed the differences and similarities in growing up in different eras. Students then served lunch for the group, and were treated to a surprise visit from Bridgeport’s Mayor Bill Finch, before returning to Beardsley for a reflection activity. When students were asked if they found this program worthwhile enough to repeat next year, their answer was a resounding “YES!”