

## BUILDING A BOND WITH A COLLEGE

We began a connection with Wheeling Jesuit College a few years ago by attending a Constitution Day program at the campus. We took fourth and fifth grade students to an all day event that began with a program about the constitution. The day continued with a campus tour and stations of interest for the students throughout the tour. Most of our students had not been to a college campus and they were impressed with the day. A few students made comments inferring they felt the college seemed like a great place to be. Some students felt a little apprehensive about the situation but before we left they all were happy with the day.

The next year our school was fortunate to receive a grant for a videoconferencing unit from the Martha Earp Foundation. Using the unit we were able to connect our third, fourth, and fifth grade students to the NASA site at the same college. They have been able to fly "missions" for NASA each year since. To prepare for the missions the students had training sessions in their classrooms by our teachers who were trained by the NASA program. During the preparation for the missions, the students each had to learn the jobs they would have to perform for mission day. They were meteorologists, hurricane trackers, volcano team members, earthquake monitors, cargo specialists, navigation specialists, statisticians, data reporters, communication personal, emergency responders, evacuation team members, and space mission specialists. These missions centered on math and science skills, which many of our students feel are too difficult or not a skill they need to know. At the end of each mission many students realized how important the knowledge of math and science are in so many career fields.

Before each mission we reminded the students we had been to the campus we were connected to. We hoped this reminder would strengthen the bond with that college for our students. Before or after each mission the students are able to ask the "flight directors" questions such as: what their job was, if they liked their job, and how long they had to go to school for the job.

This year we were positive we had created a bond with this college. During our school wide recycling drive for plastic and paper in April and May we were approached by a student group from the same college and asked for our help with one of their projects! The students at Wheeling Jesuit were

collecting used plastic tableware for the citizens of Dufar, Africa. They explained that some of the African people do not have utensils to eat with so the used plastic ware would be sent to help them. If we helped, that would also keep some plastic out of our landfills. When we spoke with the students and asked if they would be willing to help the college students out, they were excited to do it! Each day six students would take plastic bags and collect all the plastic ware from the lunches. We would then rinse the collection in hot water and save the plastic ware. Our school psychologist would pick up the bags and take them to "our" college. The students collected daily for two months feeling they were helping "our" college to help people less fortunate. They realized this activity also helped us to keep some plastic out of our landfills. I believe the connection with that college continues to strengthen. Mutual cooperation with the college is an idea that works.

Our students realized in order to do the mission jobs in reality they must continue education beyond high school. They are now aware there is at least one college in our area that would allow them to be able to reach higher and achieve more. They also realize that college is not only books but also activities that have a global reach from Smithfield, Ohio to Africa. They also understand that what seems like a small idea can make a big difference in more ways than one. Our students are beginning to realize they can be part of making a difference. Exposure to a college is an idea that works. We coupled our first visit with an educational experience for Constitution Day. The school now contacts us when they have free instructional materials that are web streamed or conferenced. This year we were invited to connect to Senator Byrd's address for Constitution Day through web streaming. Connecting to a college in more than one way is an idea that works. If you want to take students to visit the campus the cost would be whatever your district would deem your responsibility. We have to pay fuel and drivers.

With videoconferencing the campus visit is accomplished without having to leave school. The unit is \$5,000 to \$7,500. Once the unit is purchased future visits are only the cost of the visit. Many videoconferences are free, others do charge. The NASA flights we have used ranged in price from \$125.00 to \$250.00. The Constitution Day activities were free.

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