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—Janet Salvoni

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Community School Magazine: What is the goal for community service in your division?

Toni Coleman: In the Middle and Upper Schools, the goal is 100 percent participation. Every student is expected to be involved in at least one service project during the year.

Janet Salvoni: Participation is key at the Elementary School, too. Each class, as a group, gets involved in projects they care about. The adoption of the WOW Projects last year (a county-wide initiative that empowers students to support local nonprofit organizations with their time, energy, ideas, and funds) really got the children thinking about needs in this community and how they can make a difference.

CSM: How did you come to take on this responsibility?

TC: I volunteered, of course!

JS: Community service has always been important to me, and it is something that I have tried to incorporate into each school year that I had a classroom. For example, in third grade, my class partnered with “Coats for Kids” and collected warm clothing each fall. In first grade, we collected toys for a toy drive and stuffed animals for the animal shelter. When I became the Head of the Elementary School, it seemed a natural fit to coordinate efforts across the entire division.

Claire Cassidy: I was asked to coordinate this program. I have always been passionate about community service, so it was a job I was happy to take on.

CSM: Why is community service important to the students in your division?

CC: To quote Winston Churchill, “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.” At a time when young people are transitioning to adulthood, learning about the joy of service to others helps them define what life is about.

TC: In Middle School, students begin to figure out who they are and how they fit in. By performing community service, helping others becomes a part of a student’s identity.

JS: It is so important for children to learn that we need to take care of each other and this earth. It is never too early to start practicing kindness, empathy, and stewardship.

CSM: Are students naturally enthusiastic or do they need to be coaxed?

JS: The kids in the Early Childhood Center and Elementary School are always excited to help others. In

fact, the faculty often has to help them narrow down their focus because they want to help everybody. This leads to great conversations regarding resources and abilities.

CC: I have been truly amazed at the enthusiasm that there is for community service. Whenever I put out a request for volunteers, I am inundated with students who want to help.

TC: Many come in understanding that it is an expectation. A few need to be coaxed, but most just need to be reminded.

CSM: What are the biggest challenges you face in this role?

TC: The biggest obstacle is getting students to record and turn in their hours!

CC: For me, the biggest challenge is trying to do all this while still being a full-time math teacher. It’s a time-intensive job at the Upper School level – not just coordinating projects, but participating in them.

JS: At the Elementary School level, the challenges have more to do with the ages and abilities of the students. Not every nonprofit deals with topics that are appropriate or interesting to young children, nor is every opportunity accessible to a nine-year-old.

CSM: What is the most interesting or unusual project that has come across your desk?

CC: I enjoyed coordinating our Community Service Day project this fall, which involved seed collection as part of the restoration of our valley following last summer’s fires. I felt it was a unique opportunity to drive home community spirit in my students.

TC: The WOW Projects have sparked creative and exciting ideas at the Middle School level. Last year, they included designing and planting a pollinator garden, beginning construction of a boardwalk through Silver Creek Preserve, and extending the service of Idaho’s Bounty.

JS: This year, it’s been wonderful to watch the second graders work with the Wood River Ability Program. They screened a movie, *Dolphin Tale*, to bring awareness and to solicit donations to support the nonprofit’s work in the community. That same week, students worked with the group directly on Dollar and were able to try some adaptive gear.

CSM: Why is it important to have a culture of service at Community School?

JS: Children need to be invested in the world around them. Through these projects, our students learn the value of helping others and they learn to be thankful for the gifts in their own lives.

TC: Through community service, students recognize that they can make a difference. Time spent improving the environment or the lives of others on a local level can build a sense of accomplishment that students can carry forward, inspiring possibilities wherever they go.

CC: Our students are some of the more fortunate young people in the country. Many will take on positions of great leadership in their future careers. I believe that with privilege, there comes a responsibility to assist the less fortunate.

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