

## Presentation to SAC on Jan 9, 2017: The Senior Connection

### HISTORY

About four years ago, the District conducted a massive mail survey of the population it serves. Only 4% of respondents were 'over 65' while Census data indicated between 12-15% elderly population: at least 2/3 of elderly opinion was not represented in the responses.

Two years ago SAC appointed a Committee to address this communications gap, and it recommended not another survey, but rather some activities to draw the Schools and our Elderly population closer together.

Last year a successor Committee developed an idea for a planning body, composed of High School Seniors and Senior residents of the District, which would actually plan/develop such projects. This 'Senior Connection' would be comprised of about 6 high school students and another 6 senior citizens'. We found a great institutional partner, Sycamore Senior Center, to provide the elderly members. Then the Sr Center abruptly closed .....right after we made our report!

So this year we inherited a good design called The Senior Connection but it lacked a crucial component: elderly folks who could participate in the planning and development of joint projects between the youth of our school system and the elderly residents of the School District. Our challenge was to repair that gap and get Senior Connection active and productive.

### OUR APPROACH

In order to get this project off the ground this year we took several steps:

- 1) Identified several possible community groups that could help us connect with senior citizens in the community;
- 2) reached out to those groups to identify members of those groups whose role has something to do with senior citizens
- 3) invited representatives of those groups to join a steering committee along with some students to plan activities
- 4) held an initial meeting of those representatives and students.

### OUR OUTLOOK

There are benefits that not only the senior citizens, but also Sycamore students will gain from the project. Many senior citizens are isolated, need to get out of the house, and can get a sense of fulfillment from sharing their wisdom and experience. But the benefits for the students are many.

Students are learning important skills from this project: Leadership, organization, cooperation, working with a team, communication and one other very important asset—

the operative word in the name of our project “connection”. That is, the students will gain a new ability to understand human relationships in a more mature way, learning to put themselves in another person’s shoes, and through that to help the seniors to feel valued, understood, and appreciated.

### INITIAL ACTIVITY

1) making sure that students are really committed to connecting with senior citizens versus just in it for service credits or to build a resume; 2) that we should find a way to recruit more students and screen those students to be sure their commitment is genuine; 3) that we should focus on “connection” in the true sense of the word, helping senior citizens understand and form relationships with students and vice versa.

One suggestion from the representatives was at first to simply get together a group of senior citizens and students, have refreshments for them, and let them share things like what it was like for them to be teens in their day, how it’s different now, what teens are going through these days and what senior citizens are going through these days. Out of that should come some ideas for specifically what further activities the project can do. The group seemed enthusiastic and committed to monthly meetings for the rest of the school year.

Our goals are to continue to have monthly meetings, add more community and student members, explore projects for making the “senior connection”, and implement some of them. An additional goal is to assure that the project continues by recruiting students who will still be at Sycamore next year, so that they can provide leadership for continuing the project into the future.

### SELECTION OF STUDENT MEMBERS

Student members will recruit genuine members, at first through face-to-face conversations so that we can gauge the interest level and commitment of our recruits. It takes a certain maturity to see the value of conversation between younger generations and older generations. We want to make sure our student recruits are genuinely interested. Lastly, the seniors and the students must have a chance to build rapport with each other. This is important so that there is a strong foundation between all the members before we continue with projects.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

♥ That the Committee continue to develop the Senior Connection and make progress reports to SAC during the remainder of this school year.

♥ That SAC appoint and support a successor Committee next year, and continue the Senior Connection as an ongoing activity, if warranted by results this year.