Hallway of Heroes

Connecting to the heroes in your community

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Every year on the 9/11 Day of Service, schools and communities pay tribute to those affected by engaging in individual and collective acts of service. This year, as the nation prepares to mark the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, schools can honor the everyday heroes who serve their communities. Just like the brave men and women who played such a crucial role in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, our everyday heroes have helped all of us cope with and survive the COVID-19 crisis. This resource guide has been updated to include information and activities related to COVID-19 recovery.

Students can connect with the heroes in their community by sending letters and questions to learn more about their jobs and the sacrifices they make. They can ask about how their jobs changed after 9/11 and during the COVID-19 crisis and find out what motivates them to do such challenging work. Students can then create customized thank you projects and display these projects in school hallways dedicated to community heroes. Local heroes will be invited to an Appreciation Day where they can walk the Hallway of Heroes themselves!

Learn! Questions to investigate before getting started

Have students consider what being a hero means to them.

- Learn more about what happened on September 11, 2001, and the heroic acts of emergency service personnel, many of whom lost their lives that day. This could be done by interviewing those who remember that day and the days that followed, or by visiting 911day.org.

- Have students reflect on the everyday heroes in their own communities. Ask them to create a list of COVID-19 heroes who helped and supported their communities during the pandemic.

- Ask students how much they know about the firefighters, police officers, EMTs, healthcare professionals, delivery people and other heroes who support the community. Provide information about how these heroes live, train and stay healthy. Explain what kind of commitment is required to do the work of a hero. Encourage them to share personal examples about everyday heroes from their own lives and the community around them.

Plan! Helpful hints to prepare for your 9/11 Day Project

Explain the project to students and decide which type(s) of everyday heroes you will be honoring.

- Select a date to honor local heroes with a Hallway of Heroes walk and celebration.

- After securing permission from school leaders, select a hallway in the school to designate as the Hallway of Heroes.

- Create a list of questions to ask the chosen heroes. These questions can include specific information about their jobs, their sacrifices and what they do to protect, serve, or improve the community. Make several copies of the list of questions so each local hero who participates can have one. Include a space for “heroes” to write their names and how long they have been in their chosen professions.

- Have students write their letters to a local hero of their choosing, introducing themselves and explaining that they would like to learn more about what their hero does for the community. Include the list of questions along with the letter and collect all letters together in one packet to send to the firehouse, police station, hospital, or whatever facility is appropriate.
Send the packet of letters with a cover note explaining that students would like to honor the heroes they’ve chosen for the project. Request that individual heroes fill out the answers to students’ questions and, if comfortable, include their names and how long they have been in their job. A photo of the class would be great, too! Make sure to include a deadline date for their responses.

Do! Ready, set, go!

Once the letters come back, have students read them. What can they learn from the letters? What surprises them most? What commonalities can they identify among all of the heroes? What would they want to say to these heroes?

Give students ample time to create projects of thanks for the local heroes. This project should include information about the hero and what he or she has done to protect, improve and serve the community. It can be a thank you letter, a poster, a sculpture, a diorama, a picture, or anything that could be featured in the Hallway of Heroes. Encourage students to include specific information about the hero they are featuring. If possible, get art materials for the thank you projects donated from a local crafts store.

- **Create and send invitations** inviting all local heroes to come walk the Hallway of Heroes on the designated date.
- **Invite parents** and other community leaders so they can also say “thank you!”
- **Come up with ideas** for how the projects can be displayed in the hallway and organize students to help decorate and create the displays. Make a “red carpet” from a roll of kraft paper for the heroes to walk down!
- **Assign different roles for students** on the day of thanks, including greeters, speakers, photographers, videographers, etc.
- **On the day of thanks**, some students can walk heroes down the hallway while other students line up to applaud and thank each hero!

Share your experiences on Twitter, #911Day and #911DayTeacher, and other social media channels. Let the world know what your class did on 9/11 Day to pay tribute to everyday heroes by sharing your good deeds (and pics) on Twitter or Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or other social media channels, using the tag #911Day. The 9/11 Day organization will look for some of the best ones and feature them on its website throughout the week of 9/11 and beyond.

Keep it Going! Ideas to continue your 9/11 Day Project or inspire others to get started.

- Have students write letters about their Hallway of Heroes projects to the local newspapers or listserv so that all community members recognize their local heroes.
- Have students continue communicating with their local heros by sending letters or postcards each quarter.