School visits were the main outreach activity during my first year as a JOI coordinator in West Virginia. I have visited 31 schools in various counties and introduced Japanese culture to a total of 3,479 students. Presented topics varied from Japanese school life, Japanese food, holidays and celebrations to Anime and Manga. Kids always enjoyed hands-on activities such as Origami, Calligraphy and chopsticks challenge.

Teachers at schools often tell me that kids in West Virginia rarely have opportunities to be exposed to different cultures. I believe that learning and experiencing a different culture at an early age is important and beneficial. School visits are my favorite activity because seeing kids’ smiles always makes me happy and motivated. I’m looking forward to reaching out to more schools in the following year.
For community outreach, I have given presentations at local libraries, embroderers’ club, church, and universities. These presentations were mainly conducted for university students and adults. For Embroiders’ club, I was requested to talk about Hari-kuyo, needle ceremony, which I was not familiar with and required some research. I always learn something new about Japanese culture through preparations for presentations and interactions with audiences.

One of the biggest events was cooking classes at Huntington’s Kitchen. We made Sushi for the first class and Gyoza for the second. There were about 15 participants for each class. Both classes were successful and I was happy to hear from participants that they had a lot of fun!
For two weeks in June, I participated in the Japanese immersion camp as a teacher. The camp is to teach American kids Japanese language and culture through various lessons and activities only in Japanese. I taught 4th & 5th grade students with another Japanese teacher. It was challenging both for kids and teachers, but we used a lot of gestures and pictures in order to keep the kids motivated to learn. On the last day, It was sad and hard to say goodbye to the kids with whom I had spent so much time and made so many memories.

< Comment from Supervisor >
Meg has been a wonderful asset to the West Virginia Department of Education. We have watched her progress from being a bit timid when presenting to being completely comfortable and confident. Her enthusiasm for sharing her language and culture are evident during her presentations with both adults and children. We were really amazed at how well she did instructing the Japanese Summer Immersion Camp. She is a natural educator and contributed greatly to the camp. As West Virginia is not a very culturally diverse state, programs such as the Japanese Outreach Initiative are extremely important in introducing our students and citizens to other cultures. Meg has brought Japan to the state of West Virginia and her efforts are greatly appreciated.