

Where Does Service Learning Start?

By Andrew Hoover, Middle School Principal, American School of Bombay

At the American School of Bombay (ASB), our mission reads: “We inspire all of our students to continuous inquiry, empowering them with the skills, courage, optimism, and integrity to pursue their dreams and enhance the lives of others.” When our community charged itself and future community members with this mission in the fall of 2005, they left a lasting legacy, a challenge, and an inspiring opportunity to “enhance the lives of others.”

In his book, “Good to Great,” Jim Collins argues that good is the enemy of great. Greatness is inherently the deliberate and enduring process of striving to be better. When ASB made making a difference in the lives of others a part of its mission, we committed to getting better at engaging our community and our NGO partners, and to helping our students understand better the issues and challenges that characterize the world around them.

As a mission driven school, we also cherish our core values. Each of our nine core values, urges all community members to be thoughtful and self-aware participants in a learning community. Two values, above the others, however, demand that we ask ourselves hard questions about how we relate to each other and to our community:

- Each person has equal intrinsic value.
- Embracing our interdependence is vital for community to flourish.

At ASB, we strive to find in others the same humanity we recognize in ourselves; and, we seek to make ourselves stronger through individual and community relationships.

Service learning starts at the top. At ASB, we have built service into the DNA of the school through our mission and core values. The legacy, the challenge, and the opportunity are before us as simple and real as reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Since embedding service learning into the ideological framework of ASB, we have sought to make it a part of our school culture. In our effort to build sustainable programs in a transient community where most families and teachers tend to stay for about three years, we engaged three key processes:

1. Define the learning outcomes, EC-12, that we want our Community and Social Responsibility (CSR) program to address
2. Clarify the criteria to select and nurture community/NGO partnerships

3. Describe the separate “architectures” of appropriate programs for elementary, middle, and high school programs

Building service learning into the culture of the school is ultimately what our mission and core values call us to do. Every classroom in our elementary school, every grade level in our middle school, every advisory in our grades 9-10 and every individual in our grades 11-12 programs are now working with our NGO partners to make a difference in Mumbai and within each of us.

Service learning starts with our DNA and now it's up to us to continue to extend our ideals into the everyday life of the school.