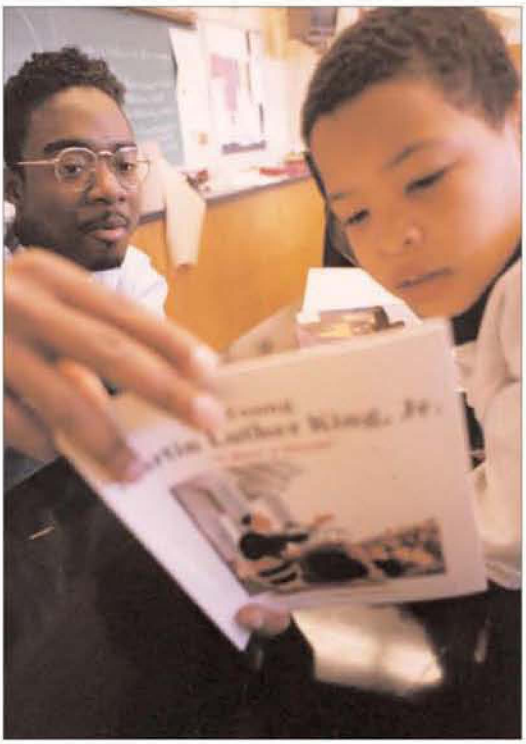
SERVICE-LEARNING in action

Looking for ways to make classroom or service activities more engaging and effective?

Whether you're a teacher or work in a community-based organization, Service-Learning In Action will help you use service-learning to:

- strengthen and enhance academic and personal learning outcomes; and
- enrich community service experiences with active reflection.

Through service-learning, students are able to connect academic curriculum with their real world service experience — whether in their neighborhood, at a local food bank, or in a distant rainforest. As service-learning becomes part of a school culture, its implementation affords a range of experiences and opportunities which motivate students' participation in their community. Service-learning enables teachers to involve their classes in developing plans and ideas that they transform into meaningful community action together, allowing students to emerge as leaders. The results of this engagement are memorable lifelong lessons that foster a stronger society for us all.



Can teachers meet academic standards through service-learning? *Absolutely.*

Service-learning helps students see the relevance of their studies as they develop skills and apply content knowledge in a real-life context. Through service-learning, classroom practices—such as research, reading fiction and nonfiction, interviewing, and documenting—are performed in myriad ways during service within the community. This allows students to see real, tangible changes brought about by their own efforts both in their communities and in themselves. They collaborate with others, learn persistence and responsibility, and actively participate in civic life. Education and service connect meaningfully through service-learning.

This guide to the basics of service-learning for K-12 practitioners is a companion to the Learn and Serve America video, *Bring Learning to Life*. Learn and Serve America is a program of the Corporation for National & Community Service, created by Congress and the President to promote service-learning. To obtain the video, *Bring Learning to Life*, or to find out more about service-learning, contact Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse toll-free at 1-866-245-SERV (7378) or visit www.servicelearning.org.

When service-learning is applied with structured intent that connects classroom content and skills to community needs, students:

- apply academic, social, and personal skills to the improvement of their community;
- make decisions that have real, not hypothetical, results;
- grow as individuals, gain respect for peers, and increase civic participation;
- develop an appreciation of school and the value of education;
- experience success no matter what their academic ability level;
- gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community, and society; and
- develop as leaders who take initiative, solve problems, work as a team, and demonstrate their abilities through helping others.

These proven academic and social results have helped validate service-learning as an effective and respected practice that is being widely employed in K-12 classrooms across the country. Service-learning is a valuable teaching method where learning is enriched through service to others in a process that includes time for reflection on the service experience and demonstration of the knowledge and skills acquired.

Fostering the vital engagement of students with their communities, service-learning is not simply a preparation for some future involvement with the world; rather, it facilitates students' active participation with their present community, showing them that their education allows them to make a meaningful difference in the world now.

5 Core Components of Service-Learning

Investigation

Young people begin their research on the community problems of interest. They may conduct a needs assessment or other form of determination of community needs. Once they choose a need they would like to address, students conduct some form of research to document the extent and nature of the problem and establish a baseline for monitoring progress. At this stage, youth often identify the community partners with whom they will work. If the young people identify the area of interest based on the opportunities being provided by the community partner, the investigation typically involves documentation of the need.

Planning

In this component, sometimes called planning and sometimes called preparation, young people, often working with community partners, plan the ways in which they will meet the community need. Planning may include developing a common vision for success, deciding what to do, determining who will do what, creating timelines for completion, listing materials needed and costs, and including how funds will be procured.

Action

All participants implement their plans by engaging in the activities that will meet the community needs. This is the actual service portion of service-learning.

Reflection

At each stage, participants engage in some form of activity that allows them to think about the community need, their actions, their impacts, what worked and did not work, the ways in which their work contributes to the common good, and/or similar types of analytic thinking. Final reflections often include measures or other ways to gauge impact.

Demonstration/Celebration

These activities go hand in hand as young people show others, preferably in a public setting with those that have influence, what they have accomplished, what they have learned, and the impact of their work. Celebration of the learning and impact follows the demonstration.

Shelley Billig, RMC Research, 2008.

Standards for Quality Practice

Below are the eight standards for quality service-learning practice. Supported by rigorous research, these standards are proven to be essential elements of a high quality service-learning experience and are more likely to produce positive outcomes for students. For each standard there are several indicators. To see these indicators or to learn more about the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice, visit:

www.nylc.org/objects/publications/StandardsDoc.pdf

Meaningful Service.
Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.

Link to Curriculum.
Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.

Reflection.
Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.

Diversity.
Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

Youth Voice.
Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

Partnerships.
Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.

Progress Monitoring.
Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.

Duration and Intensity.
Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

National Youth Leadership Council. *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice.* St. Paul, MN: NYLC, 2008. www.nylc.org/objects/publications/StandardsDoc.pdf

Service to others takes many forms and has many names and connotations.

In a school context, examining different types of service helps to clarify and define service-learning as a teaching method.

Volunteerism:
Contributing time without pay.

Community service:
Helping the community by choice or through court requirement. This may or may not be associated with academics, curriculum, or reflection.

Service-learning:
A teaching method that:

- Enables students to learn and apply academic, social, and personal skills to improve the community, continue individual growth, and develop a lifelong ethic of service.
- Focuses on both the service and the learning.
- Is appropriate for all students and all curricular areas.
- Encourages cross-curricular integration.
- Helps foster civic responsibility.
- Provides students with structured time to reflect on the service experience.

Who benefits from service-learning?
Students, teachers, the school population as a whole, and the community benefit from well-designed service-learning programs. Benefits vary depending on program implementation and what occurs through investigation, planning, action, reflection, and demonstration/celebration. The lists below have been compiled by school and community stakeholders based on their service-learning experiences.

Benefits of Service-Learning

Through service-learning programs:

Students may:

- Increase motivation to learn and engage with subjects.
- Make decisions and solve problems.
- Improve academic knowledge and performance, including critical thinking and communication skills.
- Cultivate responsibility for self and others.
- Develop ability to work well with others.
- Replace stereotypes with respect for others.
- Become more knowledgeable about community resources available to them and their families.
- Experience civic responsibility.
- Begin to develop a lifelong commitment to public service and learning.

Teachers may:

- Experience renewed enthusiasm for teaching.
- Improve communication and understanding among students.
- Increase relevancy of education for students.
- Provide additional role models for students.
- Learn about community organizations and how they serve the populace.
- Identify resources to enhance educational opportunities for students.
- Bring the classroom and community together.

Schools can:

- Combine academic development with civic and social responsibility.
- Strengthen career outreach programs.
- Develop community partnerships.
- Publicize educational opportunities available for students.
- Involve more parents and other family members to increase students' sense of the value of school.
- Give students a sense of the practical importance of what they are learning.
- Develop a more inclusive, cooperative school climate and culture.
- Increase confidence in the school system.
- Improve public relations.

Communities can:

- View young people as valued resources able to address community problems and concerns.
- Lend expertise in a particular issue area.
- Become more knowledgeable about school programs and needs.
- Collaborate in planning service-learning projects.
- Participate in student learning.
- Publicly acknowledge the contributions of young people.

Establishing Curricular Connections: Points of Entry

1. Identify an existing program or activity to transform into authentic service-learning.

- Select an activity or already existing project.
- Examine it for cross-curricular learning opportunities that meet or enhance academic standards.
- Exchange resources and ideas with teachers, students, and community partners.

For example, **Canned Food Drive:** Before students bring in cans of food, classroom activities included studying nutrition, visiting the receiving agency to identify needed foods, and reading related literature. Students led peer discussions of social issues, replacing stereotypes with an understanding of hunger in their community. Graphs of food collected and articles on impact and continued need were printed in school and community newspapers.

2. Begin with standard curriculum, content, and skills, and then find the natural extension into service.

- Identify the specific content and skill areas to be addressed.
- Select an area of emphasis that supports or adds to classroom learning and addresses learning standards.
- Look for additional learning opportunities in other subject areas.

For example, **Learning History through Discussion with Elder Partners:** To be better informed about current events and improve listening and communication skills, students met weekly with elders at a senior center. Shared experiences included studying news events, learning about aging, interviewing, collaborating on oral histories and photo essays, and displaying results in the school and public library.

3. From a theme or unit of study, identify content and skill connections.

- Begin with a broad theme or topic, often with obvious service implications.
- Identify specific content and skill areas.
- Select a service application.

For example, **The Individual's Role in Society:** While learning about the individual's role in society, teachers encouraged students to consider options for civic participation. Curriculum included reading nonfiction stories of adults and young people contributing to their communities, researching local agency needs, providing regular assistance to an agency, and publishing an informative pamphlet on the agency for young people.

4. Start with a student-identified need.

- Identify student skills, talents, and interests.
- Students define a problem, a need, and solutions.
- Students lead implementation as the teacher facilitates, adding learning opportunities.

For example, **Transform an Empty Lot into a Community Garden:** A student initiated a conversation about starting a garden in an empty lot near the school. With teacher guidance, academic standards were met as students communicated with a government agency regarding property use, read a novel about a community garden, conducted Internet research to find funding sources, partnered with special needs youth to maintain the garden, and donated the harvest to a local shelter.

5. Partner with a community-based organization to identify local assets and needs.

- Community requests assistance, perhaps through an agency that has worked with the school before.
- Teacher, students, and community partners identify learning opportunities.

For example, **Tutoring/Literacy:** Responding to a request to participate in a city-wide book collection to benefit local youth, teachers in several grades collaborated on cross-age projects: older students helped younger children write and illustrate bilingual books on mutually agreed upon themes. Books were donated to youth clubs, hospitals, and day-care facilities. Student representatives served on a city committee to plan future literacy activities.

From *The Complete Guide to Service-Learning* by Cathryn Berger Kaye, M.A., ©2004. Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, MN; www.freespirit.com.

Taking Action In Our Community

Step 1: Think about the needs in our community. Make a list.

Step 2: Identify what you know.

- Select one community need:
- What is the cause?
- Who is helping?

Step 3: Investigate to find out more by conducting research through:

- Media (i.e., books, Internet, and television)
- Personal experience and observation
- Interviewing experts or people knowledgable about this issue
- Conducting surveys

Step 4: Plan for action.

- To help our community, we will:
- To make this happen, we will take on these responsibilities:

Who	Will Do What	By When	Resources Needed

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