

# Service Learning

**Service Learning** is a teaching / learning method that connects meaningful community service with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility. This method is a powerful way to make the principles and process of our democracy meaningful to students, by giving them guided practice in responsible citizenship.

Service Learning is a method of teaching through which students apply their academic skills and knowledge to address real-life needs in their own communities.

Service Learning provides a compelling reason to learn, teaches the skills of civic participation and develops an ethic of service and civic responsibility. Service learning increases motivation and retention of academic skills as specific learning goals are tied to community needs. By solving real problems and addressing real needs, students learn to apply classroom learning to a real world context. At the same time, students provide valuable services to schools and communities.

Service learning projects emphasize both the service and the learning. By applying classroom content to community settings, service-learning is a way to provide more authenticity and purpose for classroom learning. By contrast, community service emphasizes the habits and skills of volunteerism.

## **Application:**

Teachers, schools and districts throughout the country have implemented service learning.

The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) has developed a matrix, which helps teachers examine the quality of their service-learning activities based on criteria established by experienced service learning educators across the country. The matrix is composed of three **clusters**:

- Learning
- Service
- Critical Components that Support Learning and Service

Each **cluster** consists of **essential elements** as listed below.

### **Cluster I: Learning**

- Service-learning activities establish clear educational goals that require the application of concepts, content and skills from the academic disciplines, and the construction of one's own knowledge.
- Students engage in tasks that challenge them cognitively and developmentally.
- Assessment is used to enhance student learning and to document and evaluate how well students have met content and skills standards.

### **Cluster II: Service**

- Student engage in service tasks that have clear goals, meet genuine needs in the school or community and have significant consequences for themselves and others.
- Service-learning activities employ formative evaluation of the service effort and its outcomes.

### **Cluster III: Critical Components that Support Learning and Service**

- Service-learning activities maximize student participation in selecting, designing, implementing, and evaluating the service project.
- Service-learning activities value diversity in participants, practice, and outcomes.

- Service-learning activities promote communication and interaction with the community and encourage partnerships and collaboration.
- Students prepare for all aspects of their service work, including a clear understanding of the task, the skills and information required to complete the task, awareness of safety precautions, and knowledge about and sensitivity to colleagues.
- Student reflection takes place before, during, and after service; uses multiple methods to encourage critical thinking; and is central in the design and fulfillment of curricular objectives.
- Multiple methods are designed to acknowledge, celebrate, and validate student service work.

## Service Learning Examples

### From Central California Schools

- **Fine Arts:** When the Fine Arts program was cut, middle school students worked with an arts council to raise funds and keep the program.
- **Voting:** To encourage greater voter participation, high school students organized a debate by Supervisorial candidates and held a mock election at school.
- **Street Safety:** A sixth grade class worked to get speed bumps around their school to reduce accidents.
- **Health Education:** A student group produced radio and television public service announcements, in Hmong, about the dangers of second-hand smoke.
- **Police Services Education:** Students translated an educational pamphlet in Spanish to communicate police services in their city.
- **State Soil:** A sixth grade class drafted legislation to declare San Joaquin Valley farm soil as the official state soil in California, which is now a state law.
- **Playground Repair:** High school students organized service clubs to repair broken playground equipment in a city park.
- **Park Clean-up:** A student Community Service Club organized projects to clean graffiti and make other improvements in a public park.
- **Oral Histories:** Students interviewed Native American elders in their community about their point of view of local history, will publish results.
- **Read-a-thon:** Middle school students organized an all-night Read-a-thon to help limited English students and parents learn to read.
- **Story Telling:** High School students created story telling presentations for younger students that incorporated themes of nonviolence, respect, and cooperation.