Is service-learning happening at your child’s school? Talk to teachers and administrators to find out whether service-learning is already taking place at your child’s school.

Yes! What now?

1. Let your support be known! Talk to your child’s teachers and/or school administrators to find out how you might be able to help.

2. Make sure those in charge of service-learning at your child’s school are aware of all the great resources available through the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.

3. Consider working with the PTA—the parent, teacher, student association—or another parent/teacher organization to develop a plan for parents to be of support to teachers. The PTA recognizes that collaboration with the community strengthens schools, families, and student-student, service-learning is an excellent way to do this.

No. What now?

1. Take copies of Bring Learning to Life materials to your child’s school to inform teachers and administrators of the benefits of service-learning.

2. School administrators may welcome articles on the impacts of service-learning in education. Consider working with the PTA—the parent, teacher, student association—or another parent/teacher organization to develop a plan for parents to be of support to teachers. The PTA recognizes that collaboration with the community strengthens schools, families, and student-student, service-learning is an excellent way to do this.

3. For more about service opportunities in your area and additional resources, visit Learn and Serve America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse “Resources for Parents” page at www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/parents/index.php.

Books can help you learn more, see examples of service-learning projects, and promote service-learning in the community.

- The Busy Family’s Guide to Volunteering: Do good, feel good, make a difference as a family by Jenny Lynn Friedman, Little Tree Press, 2003, An informative and fun way to involve families in community service.

- A Guide for Parents: Helps students make connections with community service, service-learning, and community service projects, with more than 300 examples of service-learning service projects.

- The Parent’s Guide to Service Learning: A practical guide to helping students make connections between school and community.


Visit www.servicelearning.org or call 1-866-245-7378, ext. 130 to order free copies of Bring Learning to Life materials.

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Find out more

Resources

This guide to the basics of service-learning for parents is a companion piece to the Learn and Serve America video, Bring Learning to Life. This eight-minute video offers insights from teachers, principals, and students who have experienced the benefits of service-learning, and provides an introduction to service-learning as an effective support to academic achievement, increase student engagement, improve social behavior, build civic skills, and strengthen community partnerships. The video, available in VHS, CD-ROM, and DVD formats, also includes two television public service announcements (30-second PSA and 30-second PSA).

www.servicelearning.org or call 1-866-245-7370, ext. 130 to order free copies of Bring Learning to Life DVDs, posters, and the teachers’ getting-started guide Service-Learning in Action to share with your school. Across America, service-learning is helping students perform better in school while improving their communities through service. By connecting classroom lessons with community service projects, service-learning allows young people to contribute to solving problems by helping others in their school community, their neighborhood, or around the world. When students apply what they are learning in ways that help others, the results are memorable. Students gain new knowledge that lasts a lifetime. While learning, they develop the ability to contribute to a better society and see the benefits of service-learning.

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What Is Service-Learning?

A Guide for Parents provides information about your role in supporting your child's service-learning experience and explores the effective way of teaching. Service-learning takes place in schools and youth groups across America. Your involvement can make a difference! Simply put, service-learning allows young people to contribute to solving problems by helping others in their school community, their neighborhood, or around the world. When students apply what they are learning in ways that help others, the results are memorable. Students gain new knowledge that lasts a lifetime. While learning, they develop the ability to contribute to a better society and see the benefits of service-learning.

What does service-learning look like? Here are a few examples.

Elementary children in Florida studied the consequences of natural disasters through books and newspaper articles and by interviewing city officials. They determined that families need a place to gather their important papers in case of evacuation. So the children designed a large envelope with a checklist for this purpose. They added tips about recovering pets and other advice to make a difficult situation easier. Students distributed the envelopes to families through school and community organizations.

Middle school students in Pennsylvania learned about the health consequences of poor nutrition and lack of exercise. They wanted to do something to change those habits for themselves and their families. So students conducted health fairs to educate their neighbors and worked with their English teachers and families to create a cookbook with healthy recipes. Family recipes. Then, because it was difficult to find fresh produce, students worked with their math, social studies, and shop teachers to open a fruit and vegetable stand for the school and community.

High school students in Oklahoma investigated how a local creek became polluted. In social studies, they researched the history of mining that led to the problem. They learned which school and community organizations.

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Service-learning can be defined as a teaching method that involves service. With service-learning, students connect academic subjects, meet real community needs, become active learners who contribute ideas, make decisions, and solve problems, discover benefits for everyone involved, get to work with community partners and develop as active members of society.

How do students benefit from service-learning?

Studies show that service-learning can develop students’ knowledge and abilities in many ways. Through service-learning programs and experiences, students may:

- increase motivation and desire to learn;
- develop responsibility, make decisions, and solve problems;
- improve in many academic areas;
- have a better sense of self;
- develop the ability to work well with others;
- experience positive relationships with peers and community members;
- replace stereotypes with respect for others;
- be exposed to career options;
- be better prepared for college and the workplace.

Reflection—As they work in communities, students are encouraged to think about their experience. This reflects on what they have learned. Reflection is a part of all learning.

Students who participate in service-learning programs have higher rates of participation in post-secondary education and in volunteering later in life. Research shows that service-learning will:

- generated a greater understanding of the issues and problems of the communities they served;
- contributed; they may write articles, make presentations, or create a website.

Four stages of service-learning

Preparation—Students gather new information or they read, research, interview, and visit places, all leading to a better understanding of real community needs.

Action—Students develop and implement a plan of action, transforming their ideas into practical ways to contribute to the common good.

Reflection—Students consider how their actions made an impact on themselves and others, and ways to improve as they continue to learn and serve.

Demonstration—Students share or tell others what they have learned and contributed, they may write articles, make presentations, or create a website.

How is service-learning different from community service or volunteer work?

Service-learning differs from community service or volunteer work because the education of students and young people is always at the core. Students are actively participating in the process of understanding, integrating, and applying knowledge from various subjects as they work to improve their communities. The question “Why am I learning this?” disappears as they see what they have learned in action.

Research shows that service-learning positively affects youth in three general areas: academic engagement and achievement, civic attitude and behaviors, and social and personal skills. To learn more about this research, information is provided by Learn and Serve America at this website: tinyurl.com/service-learning-go. For more information, contact Learn and Serve America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse www.servicelearning.org.

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Parent encouragement of their child’s involvement in service-learning.

Research shows that service-learning can:

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As educator John Dewey said, “Education is not preparation for life. It is life itself.”

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Is there a role for parents with service-learning?

Parent involvement in schools

Parents bring valuable resources, information, and ideas to service-learning. Consider these ways parents have been partners.

- Parents sit on school boards and talk about service-learning and its importance to students.
- Parents talk to teachers and school leaders about ways to offer service-learning.
- Parents encourage their children about service-learning or volunteer work.
- Parents talk with their child’s counselor about service-learning and its importance.
- Parents support their children in ways that encourage service-learning through financial assistance and volunteer work.
- Parents promote awareness about service-learning by: informing administrators and teachers about service-learning and the advantages it offers; assisting students to create service-learning displays, and integrating or incorporating into their child’s studies.

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- experience positive relationships with peers and community members, replicate scenarios with respect for others;
- be exposed to career options;
- be better prepared for college and the workplace;
- learn about community resource for themselves and their families;
- make a positive contribution to their community;
- begin to develop a lifelong commitment to public service and to learning.

Four stages of service-learning Preparation — Students obtain new information or they read, research, interview, and visit places, all leading to a better understanding of real community needs. Action — Students develop and implement a plan of action, transforming their ideas into practical ways to contribute to the common good. Reflection — Students consider how their actions made an impact on themselves and others, and ways to improve as they continue to learn and serve. Demonstration — Students share or tell others what they have learned and contributed, they may write articles, make presentations, or create a website.

Research shows that service-learning positively affects youth in three general areas: academic engagement and achievement, civic attitude and behaviors, and social and personal skills. To read more about this research, information is provided by teams and service-learning at the website servicelearning.org/gov/pdfs/ct-2024_formatted-service-learning.pdf.

For example, a Philadelphia study found that fifth grade students participating in service-learning program had higher rates than non-participating students in test for language arts and science. Students and teachers showcase service-learning at back-to-school night, writing an article for the school newspaper, assisting students to create service-learning displays, and incorporating or showing Bring Learning to Life materials at parent-teacher meetings.

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Parent involvement in schools Parents bring valuable resources, information, and ideas to service-learning. Consider these ways parents have been partners.

- Parents inform administrators and teachers about service-learning and available state and national resources.
- Parents educate other parents about service-learning so they can assist their children and the classroom.
- Parents attend service-learning conference and stay informed to support students.
- Parents become aware of service-learning, placing service-learning on parent meeting agendas, becoming more aware about service-learning.
- Teachers and students showcase service-learning at back-to-school night.
- Parents can be helpful. Have conversations with your child about community issues. Read books and newspaper articles on the topics with your child for shared experience.

Parent participation in non-school settings Whenever youth gather, service-learning is a way to engage in meaningful activities that benefit everyone. A service-learning approach may include building projects, surveys of community needs, and plans that allow youth to transform ideas into action. Discuss with program staff ways parents can be helpful throughout the process.

“Service-learning is a natural extension of the civic mission of schools—giving students the opportunity to take education beyond the classroom, giving our society a better citizenry. It is a wonderful bridge between the classroom and the community that brings parents and youth to both.”

Elizabeth Bunn”

We know that service-learning benefits young people in a variety of ways. As individuals, service-learning improves self-esteem and self-confidence, and builds personal and social skills that are crucial to success. As citizens, service-learning grows young people into informed and engaged community members. At all levels of government, service-learning builds community capacity by helping to address the needs of less fortunate people. For more information, contact Learn and Serve America’s National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at servicelearning.org.

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Four stages of service-learning

Preparation: Students gain new information or insights as they read, research, interview, and visit places, all leading to a better understanding of real-world issues. Action: Students develop and implement a plan of action, transforming these ideas into practical projects. Reflection: Students consider how their actions made an impact on themselves and others, and ways to improve as they continue to learn and serve. Demonstration: Students—show off what they have learned and contributed, they may write articles, give presentations, or create a website.

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Civic engagement activities linked the skills of producers and improved high school students’ preparedness in reading, math, science, and history (Dávila, A. and Mora, M. 2007)

Students in service-learning had a greater set of social-emotional related skills and aspirations than students who did not participate (Dávila, A. et al., 2006)

Students described an “out lift” mind significant progress in reading and writing, and showed that students displayed more general self-esteem. Attendance and participation rates increased, as did grade point averages and positive attitudes toward themselves and school (Kraft and Whittier 2005)

As educator

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Parent involvement in schools

Parents bring valuable resources, information, and ideas to service-learning. Consider these ways parents have been partners.

- Parents around the country and the teachers about service-learning and available state and national resources.
- Parents attend service-learning conferences to stay informed and involved.
- Parents educate other parents about service-learning so they can assist their children and contribute ideas to the program.
- Parents share their ideas for ways to include service-learning in the classroom.
- Parents show their children how service-learning can benefit everyone.

Parent encouragement of their child’s involvement in service-learning

If your child is participating in a service-learning experience, express support to your child, your child’s teacher, and school administrators. Ask how you can be helpful. Have conversations with your child about community issues. Read books and newspaper articles on the topics with your child for shared experiences.

Parent participation in non-school settings

Whenever you gather, service-learning is a way to engage in meaningful activities that benefit everyone. A service-learning approach may include learning about community needs, surveys of community needs, and plans that allow youth to translate ideas into action. Discuss with program staff ways parents can help. Help create a website.

“Service-learning is a natural extension of the civic mission of schools—giving students a chance to learn outside the same education while giving our society better citizens. It’s a window between the classroom and the community, that brings parents and youth to both.”

Elizabeth Bumster

Western New York Bicentennial

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Dr. William Robinson

Former President & CEO
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

“Schools and college campuses are reinforcing the idea that learning education, including through a great idea called service-learning—so we urge that research academic study not only public purpose-building through community service. We can all join in to contribute, and participate!”

Angus King

Former Maine Governor

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2. Make sure those in charge of service-learning at your child’s school are aware of all the great resources available through the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.
3. Consider working with the PTA—the parent, teacher, student association—or another parent/teacher organization to develop a plan for parents to be of support to teachers. The PTA recognizes that collaboration with the community strengthens schools, families, and student learning. Service-learning is an excellent way to do this.

Support your child’s school. Join a parent/teacher organization to help your child’s school find the resources and opportunities that let your family and your child participate.

No. What now?

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2. School administrators may welcome articles on the impacts of service-learning in education. Resources on this and other service-learning topics can be found on the last page of this publication and by visiting www.servicelearning.org.
3. State Education Agencies receive funding from Learn and Serve America to help build networks of teachers and school administrators, parents, and community-agency partners who are knowledgeable about service-learning and can work to get programs started. Visit your State Education Agency who can help connect you to this larger community of service-learning supporters.

Get involved in other service-learning opportunities. Service-learning doesn’t just happen in school. Inspire at local youth, community, or faith-based organizations to find existing service-learning opportunities or start new ones.

What can I do to be sure service-learning is a part of my child’s education?

Find out more

Resources

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While learning, they develop the ability to contribute to a better society and a better world.

What does service-learning look like? Here are a few examples.

Elementary children in Florida studied the consequences of natural disasters through books and newspaper articles and by interviewing city officials. They determined that families need a place to gather their important papers in case of evacuation. So the children designed a large envelope with a checklist for this purpose. They also added tips on receiving power and other advice to make a difficult situation easier. Students distributed the envelopes to families through school and community organizations.

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Books can help you learn more, see examples of service-learning projects, and promote service-learning in the community.

- Parent Involvement in Service Learning, by Cathryn Berger Kaye, National Dropout Prevention Center, 1999. Part of the Linking Learning with Life series, this publication provides tools and tips for parents in supporting service-learning in schools and engaging in service-learning as a family.

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