



Louisiana 4-H Service-Learning Initiative Information Sheet



Service-Learning Background

Service-learning combines service to the community with student learning in a way that improves both the student and the community. According to the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, Service-Learning:

- is a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of communities.
- is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program and the community.
- helps foster civic responsibility.
- is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the education components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled.
- and provides structured time for students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

Service-Learning is the connection between the curriculum and the communities. Schools, students, and communities work together on project-based lessons. As a result, students return to the classroom with greater interest in what happens in the classroom. The National Commission on Service-Learning describes Service-Learning as: "...a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities."

Benefits of Service-Learning

The following information will provide a summary of Service-Learning, ways that involving students of all ages in projects can have a positive impact on schools and students. *According to the Service Learning Outcomes* from *The Service Learning Planning and Resource Guide* by The Council of Chief State School Officers, Service-Learning offers many benefits. Among the benefits to schools are as follows:

- Paradigm shift - teachers as coaches and facilitators; student responsibility for their own learning.
- Motivated learners engaged in authentic and significant work. Cooperative learning environment.
- Teachers as reflective practitioners engaged in planning, curriculum development, and inquiry.
- Collaborative decision-making among administrators, teachers, parents, students and community members.
- Positive, healthy, and caring school climate.
- Community involvement resources, and support in the educational process.

According to the Service-Learning Guide, when service-learning is used in a structured way that connects classroom content, literature and skills to community needs, students will benefit as they:

- apply academic, social and personal skills to improve the community.
- make decisions that have real, not hypothetical, results.
- grow as individuals, gain respect for peers, and increase civic participation.
- experience success no matter what their ability level.

- gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community and society.
- develop as leaders who take initiative, solve problems work as a team, and demonstrate their abilities while and through helping others. (Service-Learning Guide)

According to Service-Learning researchers *Conrad and Hedin*, students benefit from Service-Learning in many ways:

- Personal Growth and Development
 - Self-esteem
 - Personal efficacy and sense of responsibility
 - Moral development and reinforced values and beliefs
 - Exploration of new roles, identities, and interests
 - Willingness to take risks and accept new challenges
 - Intellectual Development and Academic Learning
- Basic skills, including expressing ideas, reading and calculating
 - Higher level thinking skills, such as problem-solving and critical thinking
 - Skills and issues specific to service experience
 - Motivation to learn
 - Learning skills, including observation, inquiry, and application of knowledge
 - Insight, judgment, and understanding
- Social Growth and Development
 - Social responsibility and concern for others
 - Political efficacy
 - Civic participation
 - Knowledge and exploration of service-related careers
 - Understanding and appreciation of, and ability to relate to, people from a wide range of backgrounds and life situations

According to the *Service Learning Outcomes* from The Service Learning Planning and Resource Guide by The Council of Chief State School Officers, communities benefit in the following ways:

- Valuable service to meet direct human, educational, health and environmental needs.
- Schools as resources - School / teacher / student teams serving as researchers and resources in problem-solving and community development.
- Empowerment - School / community partnerships to assess, plan, and collaboratively meet needs.
- Citizenship - Students become active stakeholders in the community.
- Infusion of infusion towards improving the institutional practices of schools and communities.
- Understanding and appreciation of diversity - across generations, cultures, perspectives, and abilities.

Most of the benefits of service-learning are supported by attention to the service-learning project design and implementation. In particular, the quality of the reflection activities and their connection with explicit learning goals tied to standards, the skills of the leader in facilitating understanding, and the degree to which students are given choices in planning, implementing, and assessing their learning are most highly associated with beneficial outcomes.