

**SCHOOLS AND  
COMMUNITIES**

**CREATING  
PLACES  
OF LEARNING**



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"IT TAKES A  
WHOLE VILLAGE  
TO EDUCATE  
A CHILD."

AFRICAN PROVERB





America is in transition. We are learning that working together is better for both individual growth and for becoming a more productive society. In a sense, we are rediscovering our roots—a democracy dependent on the power that comes from people participating with each other in making a better life for all.

This transformation is evident in different segments of our society. In the business community, the industrial model of authoritative management under which workers performed discrete assigned skills is giving way to collaborative workplaces. Employees more and more are being asked to make decisions together; to be responsible together for quality; and to see “the whole picture,” not just a narrow piece of it.

Schools, too, are changing. Realizing they cannot meet all the challenges of improving education alone, educators are reaching out to establish partnerships with other institutions, agencies, and community resources. Schools are striving to create cooperative learning environments and implement instructional methods that will foster skills and abilities to think critically and creatively; to be reflective and flexible; and to make ethical judgements and act and follow through on them.

In recent years most of the partnerships between schools and communities have focused on improving the services provided to youth such as social and health services or increasing the



number of adult volunteers providing services to students. While these partnerships have merit, they do little to develop new structures for improved learning that involve students, teachers, administrators, and community members in the educational process. In order to create the learning environments necessary to improve student learning and foster desired skills and abilities; new partnerships must be formed that will help transform schools and communities into places of learning and positive development for all youth.



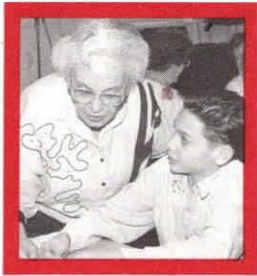
## REFORM IN THE MAKING— THE ROLE FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

SERVICE-LEARNING—  
A METHOD OF  
TEACHING AND  
LEARNING THAT  
COMBINES ACADEMIC  
WORK WITH SERVICE  
AND SOCIAL ACTION.  
STUDENTS LEARN BY  
DOING THROUGH A  
CLEAR APPLICATION  
OF SKILLS AND  
KNOWLEDGE WHILE  
HELPING TO MEET  
NEEDS IN THE SCHOOL  
OR GREATER  
COMMUNITY.

The major reforms taking place in education have been evolving over several decades. Since the early 1970's, reports on the restructuring of education have criticized the isolation of schools from their communities; the lack of the students' responsibility for their learning and involvement in the educational process; and, traditional instructional methods that foster passive learners.

Reports focusing on vocational training and other school-to-employment efforts found that traditional approaches neglected to help students apply their learning to the world of work. Experts in the field have recommended a number of strategies that suggest involvement in community activities through pre-employment training, apprenticeships, cooperative education, internships and community service. All of these approaches combine academic instruction and hands-on experiences in the community. These methods help students focus on the "how" and the "why" of learning.

Business interests, too, recognize student participation in their communities as good preparation for work. Various studies involving the business community define the skills needed by future entry level workers. These skills include abilities to: apply knowledge and basic skills; communicate effectively; work collaboratively; think critically; understanding and use technology; and demonstrate leadership.

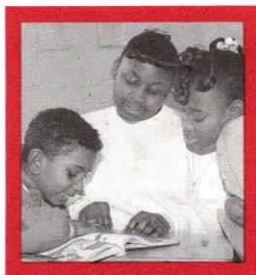


New knowledge about how students learn best also underscores the importance of real-world contexts. By performing real tasks and observing others do expert work, young people see how to apply their learning. They find it intrinsically more valuable and motivating; this is one reason why; in addition to earning money, so many students hold part-time jobs. Even though the jobs may not demand much from them, they at least give them responsibility and a chance for hands-on learning. When the same context is provided in school, such as through doing research and writing reports for community groups, young people understand how their knowledge is used to bridge school and the world they will soon enter.

This hands-on, real-life approach is particularly important for groups which the schools traditionally have not served well. Racial and ethnic minority youth show their alienation from traditional schooling through high dropout rates. Such alienation requires approaches that address individual needs, connect young people with adult role models and integrate social, cultural, and human difference into the educational process. If *all* students are to succeed, the varied opportunities available in communities need to be a part of schooling.

**Service-learning** is an effective method of instruction and teaching that incorporates many of the recommendations aimed at improving education for all students. Through service-learning experiences students derive meaningful





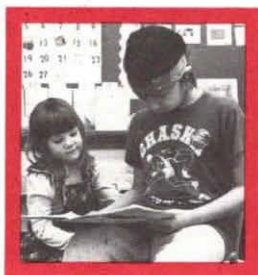
learning from their experiences in the community while, at the same time, benefitting others and developing a life-long commitment to civic responsibility. Furthermore, the collaboration that evolves between schools, business, government, and organizations through service-learning helps communities to maximize its resources to contribute to the positive growth of their young people. All benefit from this collaborative effort.

Service-learning is a powerful approach for achieving important academic, personal and cognitive outcomes. Students involved in service-learning show significant improvement in their intellectual, social, and psychological growth. They develop a positive self esteem, favorable attitudes toward others and school, and effective skills in dealing with others. These outcomes are achieved when the following key criteria are present: **planning and preparation; meaningful service to the student and community** — service that meets a real community need or addresses an issue important to the community and student; and, **structured time for students to reflect on what they do during the service experience and how it relates to their academic work.**

Equally important, however, is the effect of service-learning upon the community itself. Valuable services are provided to meet human, educational, health, and environmental needs. Schools serve as resources to communities in solving community problems and for community

development as students become active stakeholders. By becoming a strong partner with the schools in developing opportunities for experiential learning, communities are, in essence, redefining their roles in the development and education of youth.

Service-learning can be effectively integrated into academia as well as skills training instruction. While often an elective or adjunct to academic courses, service-learning also connects well to vocational education. Programs which include services based on classroom learning—e.g., construction and remodeling of housing, child care, or food service for the elderly—motivate students to link their classroom projects with employment possibilities for them in their communities.



## SERVICE-LEARNING IN ACTION

While service-learning embraces certain criteria, it can take many forms in schools. The most obvious one is as a class assignment. For instance, primary-grade students might go on field trips to community agencies with "buddies" from upper grades and then do whole language activities together. The primary-grade students tell their stories about the trips to the older students who write them down. The younger students illustrate the stories and, together, the students produce lively, interesting books for the primary-grade classes.

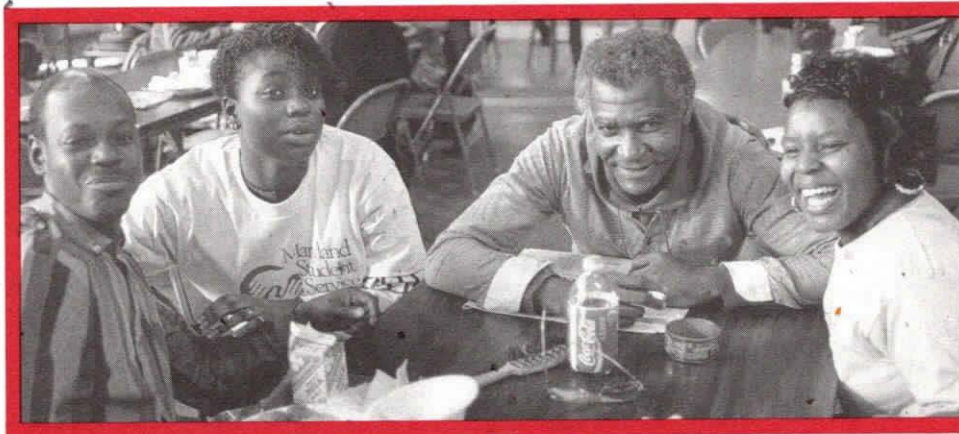
Service-learning can follow a theme. A school might select "growing older" as a year-long project. Elementary students could adopt "grandparents" from the community, visit them and write them frequently. Older students could develop oral histories from conversations with the "grandparents" and help them with personal needs, such as budgets and letter writing. Not only would all students learn about aging, but they would make their studies of language arts, social studies, and math more relevant and interesting.

Service-learning can also be used as a base for interdisciplinary teaching. In one community, students work with government agencies monitoring the pollution in a local river. The project combines science and math instruction, English (they write reports based on their science study), art (they illustrate the reports), and social studies (they research the history of the river and the region). In this example, the service activity becomes the core of the learning objectives.

In the most comprehensive use of service-learning, all subject areas relate in some way to the community. Students apply their foreign language instruction by serving as translators for non-English speaking people in the community. Their science instruction involve local zoos, animal shelters, and nature centers. In English class they write publicity for community agencies and conduct surveys to analyze the work of programs. As part of social studies the students work with political leaders and groups to learn about the government process. In civics or government class they learn how businesses and public agencies function by helping them with community projects. Apprenticeships provide more formal frameworks for connecting schools with community resources.

In all of these different uses of service-learning, teachers combine content instruction with meaningful service experiences for more effective learning. Service-learning provides students opportunities to be involved in a series of concrete actions and events from which they construct meaning and which serve as the foundation for learning all core subjects. Service-learning is an essential element of the objectives of education.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING A SERVICE-LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

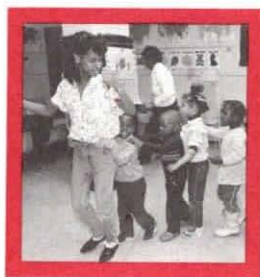


**T**o adopt a new philosophy about learning and to implement it requires the involvement of both policymakers and practitioners. Service-learning needs a supportive environment at all levels. In order to create it:

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### National and state policymakers can:

- Develop policies that support the integration of service-learning into academic programs.
- Promote the development of service-learning initiatives among state and national education organizations.
- Encourage teacher training and staff development institutions to include service-learning methodologies in courses and programs.
- Encourage and support research and evaluation of service-learning as an essential element of educational reform.





**State education agencies can:**

- Integrate service-learning into state systemic change initiatives and policies at all levels.
- Assign state staff to coordinate state service-learning activities and to provide technical assistance and networking services to school districts.
- Provide incentive grants to encourage school districts to integrate service-learning into academic curricula K-12 as part of systemic change.
- Provide inservice training and staff development to help schools implement service-learning as a part of curricular reform.
- Set a statewide goal of integrating service-learning into the core academic curriculum and instruction reform.
- Assist local districts in evaluating service-learning programs.
- Examine ways in which service-learning can be integrated with other programs, such as the Drug Free Schools and the Dropout Prevention programs and disseminate the information to school districts.

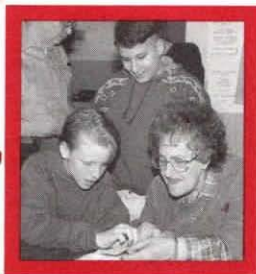
## RECOMMENDATIONS

### School boards can:

- Endorse service-learning as an important component of the education program and goals.
- Promote collaboration between the school district, local businesses, community agencies and higher education campuses to form service-learning partnerships.
- Provide staff development programs for teachers and community members.
- Provide liability coverage and transportation for students.
- Provide additional classroom support, either through budget allocations or recruitment of volunteers from the community.

**School administrators can:**

- Encourage and support team teaching and interdisciplinary instructional methods.
- Provide for flexible class schedules.
- Recognize and support teachers who implement service-learning.
- Establish school/university partnerships that promote service-learning in teacher training and give teacher candidates experience with service-learning.
- Grant teachers release time to attend staff development programs and workshops on service-learning.
- Assist in the recruitment of parent and community volunteers to help teachers with service-related activities.



## RECOMMENDATIONS



### Teachers can:

- Participate in staff development programs on service-learning.
- Develop curriculum to support service involvement in the community.
- Develop programs which help community sponsors to understand the academic goals of the schools.
- Assist in the recruitment of volunteers for classrooms.
- Collaborate with other teachers for: conducting research on possible service opportunities in the community and school; and planning, developing and teaching interdisciplinary service-learning curricula.

### Students can:

- Play an active role in the development of service-learning activities.
- Serve on education and youth development policy making groups at the local and state level.
- Organize independently as advocates for service-learning.

### **Parents can:**

- Advocate and support the infusion of service-learning into education in their communities.
- Assist in planning and doing service-learning activities with the students and teachers.
- Work with their children in the reflection process.

### **Higher Education can:**

- Model the infusion of service-learning into all academic areas.
- Acknowledge student service-learning experiences in college admissions.
- Establish partnerships with schools and districts to develop service-learning development centers for preservice and inservice teacher preparation programs.
- Require service-learning experiences as part of all preservice teacher preparation programs by integrating service-learning throughout all core courses.
- Conduct faculty staff development in service-learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Businesses and Community Agencies can:**

- Endorse the concept of working collaboratively with students for educational purposes.
- Promote connections with schools through professional/civic/collegial organizations.
- Assign staff to be liaisons with schools and to help with the organization of activities.
- Provide staff training to supervise students so that the service experience is a learning one.
- Support the work of a local volunteer center to serve as an intermediary between schools and community agencies.

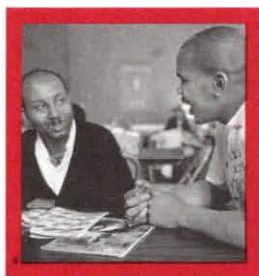
### **Community Members can:**

- Encourage their community organizations to be involved with schools for service-learning activities.
- Recruit and train liaisons in community organization who plan and implement service-learning opportunities.
- Volunteer to assist with school/community collaborations that focus on service as a learning opportunity.



## CONCLUSION

Young people will be better prepared for the next century when they understand and appreciate the meaning of "community" and have had opportunities to serve, to be valued, and to learn. And communities will be stronger when they see themselves as places of learning for the young—and for the leaders of the future. Service-learning opens the door to schools to become part of their communities, and to communities to become valuable sites for learning. When these happen, both the quality of education and the quality of community life will be greatly enhanced.



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*The Council of Chief State School Officers is a nationwide nonprofit organization of the 57 public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in every state, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Dependent Schools, and five extra-state jurisdictions. The Council speaks on behalf of the state education agencies which have primary authority for education in each state and it carries a national influence commensurate with this position. With the support of foundations and federal agencies, the Council undertakes projects, research studies and reports that assist states with new policy and administrative initiatives and assist the federal agencies and foundations in implementing their programs.*

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*The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) is dedicated to developing service-oriented youth leaders. Focusing on efforts to integrate service-learning throughout the K-12 curriculum, NYLC works to forge links between service-learning and education reform. NYLC also offers training, materials, technical assistance, and public policy leadership through a network of regional centers.*

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