What is Service-Learning?
*Adapted from materials from National Youth Leadership Council

Definition of Service-Learning

Service-learning is one strategy of education for sustainability. It is a teaching strategy that links service experiences with classroom learning and curriculum. It fosters vibrant partnerships between schools and communities to boost student achievement and improve community health and vitality—environmental, social and economic. Service-learning emphasizes critical thinking and problem-solving, engages participants in and addresses real world issues, and develops and fosters civic skills and participation in youth. Service-learning immerses students in their communities and curriculum. Service-learning is extremely adaptable to grade level, community need, and curricular goals. It enriches learning and engages all students in meaningful ways.

Benefits of Service-learning

Research shows that when service-learning is implemented effectively students’ academic success, civic participation, and character are positively impacted.

**Academic Success**- Service-learning helps students develop academic skills and knowledge and is often associated with increased test scores and grades. Students who participate in service-learning are motivated and excited about learning. Research has shown that service-learning increases student attendance and reduces drop-out.

**Civic Participation**- Service-learning provides opportunities for students to engage in real world problems while learning about and engaging in the civic process. Students act as citizens now and into the future.

**Character**- Service-learning has a positive impact on the social development of youth. Research shows that service-learning increases student’s sense of civic and social responsibility as well as their ability to understand multiple perspectives and relate to diverse groups.
Principles of Effective Practice for K-12 Service-Learning

- **Curriculum Integration**: embedding service-learning experiences in curricular goals and standards that drive student learning of concepts, content, and skills in academic disciplines and co-curricular settings.

- **Reflection**: facilitating continuous reflection before, during, and after the service experiences — using multiple, cognitively challenging methods to encourage critical and creative thinking that addresses learning objectives.

- **Youth Voice**: engaging the vision and leadership of young people as valued contributors to society by integrating their ideas into the selection, design, implementation, and evaluation of service-learning experiences.

- **Diversity**: fostering civil discourse and democratic values through the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences, and through a respect for all learners.

- **Meaningful Service**: applying problem-solving and critical thinking skills to community and civic needs in real-world environments.

- **Process Monitoring**: analyzing student reflections and assessment measures, in combination with project and partner evaluation data, for continuous review and improvement.

- **Duration**: ensuring that service and learning experiences are of sufficient intensity and duration (or are equal to one semester), so that all phases of planning, through project evaluation, are included.

- **Reciprocal Partnerships**: leveraging community assets and promoting collaborative communication and interaction among stakeholders.