

HALLMARKS OF EFFECTIVE SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMS

Service and service-learning can be used to teach any subject and meet a wide variety of community needs. However, to provide valuable service, build civic skills, and increase student achievement, project and program designers may wish to consider including some of the following practices, which program experience has shown to be effective:

- ✦ Service activities should be of sustained or significant duration. Program experience suggests that a minimum of 40 hours over a school year is necessary to yield positive results for students and the community.
- ✦ Teachers or afterschool program coordinators or sponsors need to work with students in order to draw the connections between what the students are doing and what they should be learning. Even if service activities are conducted outside of class, it is important that the project have clear and specific learning objectives.
- ✦ The service that students perform should have a strong connection to the curriculum they are studying or to their afterschool activities.
- ✦ The relationship between service and democratic practices, ideas, and history should be made explicit in order that students see service as a civic responsibility.
- ✦ Project participants should be given time to reflect on their service. That may involve asking students to keep a journal, or having teachers and organizers lead discussions or coordinate activities that get participants to analyze and think critically about their service. These activities need to be planned, not left to chance.
- ✦ Students should have a role not only in executing the service project, but also in making decisions about its development. Students should be involved in leadership roles in all phases of the project.
- ✦ In order to ensure that service is really useful and strengthens community ties, strong partnerships with community groups based on mutually agreed upon goals, roles, and responsibilities are essential.