All across America in thousands of schools service learning is changing the way communities think about education.

The great thing about service learning is it gives you this opportunity to go out into the world and do things hands-on.

You know it's that moment where the lightbulb comes on and everything kind of connects.

This is the most important initiative we have at the school.

Service learning is a teaching strategy. It's a tool. It helps educators become better teachers.

Service learning is a teaching method that links community service to the classroom. Students work together on community service projects that help teach everything from science and math to writing and history.

When children are engaged in service learning projects it helps to tie the basic components of academics with real-life experiences.

These projects meet real needs in the   community. And research shows that service learning engages students, improves critical thinking, and teaches to importance of teamwork and communication.

So it actually takes the learning kids are doing in school and their body of knowledge and their ability to think analytically and to apply that to a problem in the community.

By engaging students in the world beyond the classroom service learning opens new doors and brings learning to life. Service learning builds enthusiasm for academics by putting students in charge of their own learning. Ms. Counter's [assumed spelling] class has chosen to study the issue of wheelchair accessibility.

And they go out, they do neighborhood walks, they map what they do on an accessibility map. And then they move from there into contacting people who can help to get places that are not accessible to become accessible. There are a lot of ways that our service learning project directly ties into the curriculum. We are really doing a lot of work with mathematics right now. So the math really   ties in with drawing to scale and working with ratios and fractions and things like that. They do oral presentations. They do a lot of writing and reflections and that really ties in with all the literacy foundation blocks they that they need to excel.

It's exciting. It's alive. It's meaningful. When students are feeling part of the learning process and not an object of the learning process then they can truly be engaged.

Whether it's studying social studies, math, science, or language arts service learning challenges students to demonstrate what they've learned by applying it to new situations. As part of their history class students are restoring an historic house that now serves as a youth hostel.

There were five out of ten youth hostels that were shut down and so we thought that by preserving at least one we could benefit our community.

When students came to us last year and they wanted to renovate the hostel we decided that we would do some historical   research for the property itself.

Students studied history by creating a timeline of the house.

As we worked on the timeline we also filled in with world events in U.S. history.

Service learning definitely does impact academic preference when you bring it back to the classroom. Not only are they meeting the standards but they're interested in what they're doing. I mean, what a great opportunity for these kids to touch living history.

We did our timeline during class and after school we visited the site. We took notes on the site, what needed to be done, the painting, the new roof that we're doing. We started out with one grant which helped out a lot.

That project included skills in math to calculate like for instance like shingles on a roof.

We're going to use a trigonometric ratio that describes this angle. I'm calling that theta right now just because in mathematics it's often referred to by it's   Greek letter.

We figure everything out using math. Math is the key to everything.

Go down roughly ten foot. ^M00:03:56 [Sound of power saw] ^M00:03:58

Before service learning I was just an ordinary student causing mischief during class. After service learning started, I got so involved into it I started paying attention more; picked up my grades.

Service learning works. I've seen the impact it has had on the community and most importantly on children.

Our school has improved dramatically in terms of the SAT, in terms of the total school scores on proficiency assessments.

Our benefit has been tremendous in terms of scholarships, in terms of increased academic achievement, in terms of increased attendance rate.

I also see a big difference in student citizenship skills and I think the relationships that I see developing between students and teachers.

Service learning definitely brings learning to life for students because they're not stationery. They're in the real world. They're doing things, moving about. They're engaged. They're problem solving.

Service learning also strengthens ties between schools and the community.

Here at the library we help teach seniors to help themselves on their computer, to be able to access the internet, to be able to write up a letter if they want to.

Many patrons who come in here who have never even used a computer before. So I thought if we can have high school kids here to help just with the basic computer questions, that would be a great help to the patrons.

Well, I need to lot of help. I don't know Word. You know, I don't know how to make things bold. I'm really new to this stuff. And he helps me so much. And you know, he's so knowledgeable.

It's a good feeling to help people out. You know a lot of people, elderly people, come in and say my son gave me a computer and I don't know what to do with it. At school I take a web design class. Last week there was this woman who came in. Her job was not doing so well. So she asked me if there was some way that she could use to internet to help her job out. And I said, Yeah. You could make your own web page. My skills learned in that class classroom helped me to help her.

It has been a great experience all around. The students have benefited because they're able to apply the knowledge that they've learned in the classroom. They're also getting a great opportunity to interact with the public. The staff have benefited and the patrons have had a great benefit because they're need is being met.

It gives you a good feeling to be able to know that you're needed somewhere.

Service learning works. Today more than 30% of all K through 12 public schools engage students in service learning. And the numbers are growing.

I think that principals have an obligation to look at service learning as a way of improving their schools. I can guarantee that a service learning program will help.

Service learning is something that evolves. It's not hard to do. Every community has the American Red Cross, Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs.

There are many, many resources out there. Other teachers are great resources. The higher eds in the community. You can get started with the simplest engagement day. Just get involved with Martin Luther King Day of Service or Make a Difference Day and see how the kids respond. And when you see that spark of excitement in kids then you know this is something really good for your school.

The benefits are tangible, they're real, they're measurable if you're looking at standards. It's really a win win for everybody.

Learn and Serve America is a program of the federal agency the Corporation for National and Community Service, the largest funder of service learning in the country. Learn and Serve America provides grants, technical assistance, and other resources.

It's the best thing in the school. Academics will remain forever. Students will read, students will do math problems, but this is really about how we can help students develop.

I think that schools that are considering it need to do it because not only does it help academically but it gives a better sense of citizenship. What it's like to go into the community and help and make a difference.

A reason to learn and a way to learn that makes us lifelong learners. That's service learning.

To find out more about service learning and how to get your school involved visit learnandserve.gov.
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