

The Essential Elements of Service Learning

Integrated Learning

Students **learn** skills and content through varied modalities; the service informs the content, and the content informs the service.

Meeting Genuine Needs

Students **identify** and **learn about a recognized community need**. Student actions are **valued** by the community and have real consequences while offering opportunities to **apply** newly acquired academic skills and knowledge.

Youth Voice and Choice

Students experience **significant age-appropriate challenges** involving tasks that require thinking, initiative, and problem solving as they demonstrate **responsibility** and **decision making** in an environment safe enough to allow them to make mistakes and to succeed.

Collaborative Efforts

Students participate in the development of **partnerships** and **share responsibility** with community members, parents, organizations, and other students. These relationships afford **opportunities to interact** with people of diverse backgrounds and experience, resulting in mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation.

Reciprocity

Student benefits evolve through **mutual teaching and learning, action, or influence** between all participants in the learning and service experience; this reciprocity extends to relationships between institutions as well as relationships between people.

Systematic Reflection

Students put cognitive and affective aspects of experience into the **larger contexts** of self, the community, and the world. Reflection may occur before, during, and after service and involves various approaches and strategies; adults provide feedback.

Civic Responsibility

When young people have a role in improving society, working for social justice, and caring for the environment, then they truly understand the **concept of democracy**. Students recognize how participation and the ability to respond to authentic needs improves the quality of life in the community, which may lead to a lifelong **ethic of service and civic engagement**.