

## WHY SERVICE – LEARNING?

Using service-learning in afterschool programs offers unique opportunities for young people to experience a new type of learning in an informal setting. As Rivka Burstein-Stern writes in *United We Serve: Afterschool and Service-Learning*:

*“The benefits to kids are numerous and varied – a chance to learn about and explore their community, the opportunity to engage in hands-on activities with observable community benefits, increased knowledge of their potential as change agents, exposure to parts of their community that they may not have previously encountered – and the afterschool space offers the flexibility to provide a variety of service-learning opportunities, as well as the time to think about and process those opportunities.”*

In service-learning, students use academic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs. The approach increases student engagement, improves educator efficacy, and develops powerful bonds among young people and their communities. This can happen in school and out of school.

The practice fits under the larger umbrella of “positive youth development” theory, a perspective that arose in the 1990s, which takes a strengths-oriented approach in which young people are understood to be community assets.

### Why is service-learning good for youth?

- It’s an effective tool to promote **youth engagement** in the community.
- It teaches students to **apply skills and knowledge** in real-life situations and extends learning beyond the classroom.
- It provides **engaging and productive opportunities to work with professionals** and community members.
- It has positive impacts on **academic outcomes**, such as complexity of understanding, problem analysis, problem-solving, critical thinking, and cognitive development.
- It increases a sense of **personal efficacy**, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development.
- It increases **intercultural understanding**.
- It develops an understanding of **social responsibility**.
- Service learning allows young people to **apply, practice and grow SEL** competencies.
  - Self-awareness
  - Self-management
  - Social awareness
  - Relationship skill building
  - Responsible decision-making
- Service-learning offers opportunities to build, reinforce, and **apply 21st Century Skills**, like creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking.
- It is a strong predictor of a **commitment to civic participation**.

## Why is service-learning is good for local communities?

- It meets **real community needs**.
- It builds **collaborative partnerships** between schools or colleges, universities and other institutions and organizations.
- It engages **parents and other adults** in supporting youth learning.

## What are outcomes for youth engaged in service-learning?

- Promotes connections and bonding
- Builds self-esteem and empowers youth
- Promotes value formation
- Career exploration and skill development
- Accommodates different learning styles
- Exposure to different kinds of people
- Promotes constructive risk and expression
- Reciprocity— young people give and receive

An informed citizenry is the foundation of a democratic society. With service-learning, students become informed citizens by researching community needs, identifying projects, connecting with experts who can teach them sustainable strategies, and applying their academic skills to real world needs. Service-learning answers the question "Why do I need to know this?" with students as the drivers of their goals.