Service-Learning: Student FAQ's

What is Service-Learning?
Service-learning is a teaching and learning methodology that connects classroom curriculum with identify community issues and needs. Service-learning engages students in projects that serve the community and build their social, civic, and academic capacities. Each service-learning experience must have three distinct components in order for it to count toward the graduation requirement: Preparation, Action, Reflection. Students can earn service-learning credit by participating in a classroom service project, an after-school project, or a student club service project provided that all three components are in place.

What is Preparation?
Students prepare for their service experience when they have spent time learning about the issue they will work on and/or the organization they will be working with. For example, if students in an Environmental Science classroom work to restore a wetland area, they will learn about biodiversity, the importance of wetlands, and the fact that wetlands have diminished dramatically around the United States during the last century. This knowledge helps students understand why the work of wetlands restoration is so important. If students work with an environmental organization, they will also come with knowledge about the organization. Students completing service-learning hours outside of the classroom must complete a Pre-Service Preparation form prior to a service project.

What is Action?
Civic action takes place in many shapes and forms. The three primary forms are:

- Direct Service – students work to help people or the environment directly by helping at a food pantry, shelter, senior citizen center, natural area, etc.
- Indirect Service – students provide supports to the work of an organization such as creating hygiene kits, raising money, making a micro-business loan.
- Advocacy – students write letters, make phone calls, participate in a rally, recommend new policy or advocate for community improvements or changes by contacting legislators.

Effective citizens learn about the tools of democracy by participating in diverse forms of civic action.

What is Reflection?
When students have a chance to talk about, discuss, or present information from their service experience, they are engaging in reflection. If a group of students conducts a project that addresses the problem of hunger, for example, they will also have an opportunity to discuss, write about, and/or present based on some of the following questions:

- What did we do?
- Did we make a difference?
- How did we change?
- What would we do differently?
- Where will we go from here?

Students earning service-learning hours outside of the classroom must complete a Post-Service Reflection form. Student may also submit their reflections to the Manager of Democracy Learning and Student Leadership for posting on the CPS Service-Learning website at jjschmidt@cps.edu.
How many hours or projects do I have to earn?
All CPS students must earn the equivalent of 40 hours of service-learning in order to graduate. Students may, of course, earn more than 40 hours, and we encourage you to do so. Your school determines the combination of projects/hours you need to qualify for graduation. Consult with your school’s Service-Learning Coach or school website for information. Your school can choose one of the following three options:

- One classroom-integrated SL project and 15 individual hours
- Two classroom-integrated SL projects and 30 individual hours
- Three classroom-integrated projects

All sophomores must earn at least 20 hours or one project or 20 hours in order to achieve junior status. It is a major problem for you, the school, and any potential community organization if you wait until your senior year to earn your hours.

Why do I have to earn 40 service-learning hours?
Service-learning is hands-on, project-based learning that contributes to the common good. Great projects teach important civic and leadership skills while reinforcing and strengthening classroom learning. If you participate in a great project with your heart, soul, and mind, you can enjoy some of the following:

- Participate in hands-on learning;
- Understand the relevance of academics to the real world;
- Positive impact on social problems;
- Learn how to get things done;
- Learn about and explore a potential career interest;
- Address social injustices and work to remedy them;
- Strengthen your civic skills;
- Build your self confidence;
- Give of yourself and enter into caring relationships with others; and
- Develop responsibility for your own learning.

We think it is important for our students to develop these skills and behaviors during their years in high school.

How can I earn my service-learning hours?
Students may earn service-learning hours in the following ways:

- Participate in an approved classroom-integrated service project;
- Participate in an approved after-school project with a teacher or community organization;
- Participate in an approved project of an extracurricular club at your school;
- Volunteer with an approved community organization

How do I select an organization with which to work?
Each school maintains a list of service opportunities and service organizations. Check with your Service-Learning Coach. CPS also maintains a database of approved service organizations. You can view the database and navigate it based on zip code and issues area at [www.cps.edu/servicelearning](http://www.cps.edu/servicelearning). At that site you will find additional websites that list volunteer
opportunities. Select an organization that works on an issue that is important to you and is close to you.

**How are my service-learning hours recorded?**
If you participate in a classroom-integrated, your teacher will submit a classroom list of students who completed the service-learning project successfully. Typically, students earn 15 hours by completing a classroom-integrated project. If you are volunteering on your own, you must carry a time sheet with you and have the organization supervisor sign it. Submit your Pre-Service Preparation and Post-Service Reflection forms to your school’s Service-Learning Coach along with the time sheet in order to receive credit. Your hours will appear on your report card. You can also ask your SL Coach to print a copy of your current hours.

**Do I need approval before I begin my service project?**
Yes. It is extremely important that you receive prior approval for your service project before you begin. Each school’s Service-Learning Coach must grant approval for a project.

**What resources do I have to help me?**
Your school’s Service-Learning Coach or your classroom teacher is one of your biggest resources. Family, friends, or classmates who have already earned hours can be a valuable resource as well. The Service-Learning Coach can help you get connected to many service-learning opportunities throughout the year. You can also visit the CPS Service-Learning Website at [www.cps.edu/servicelearning](http://www.cps.edu/servicelearning) for a list of more than 250 agencies, a calendar, and other ideas for service.

**Do I just show up?**
No. You should always contact the organization first, set up a first appointment and then show up on time. You should also prepare yourself by completing the Pre-Service Preparation form. Be enthusiastic and prepared to support the work of the organization.

**If I performed service in elementary school, can those hours be counted toward my graduation requirement?**
No. You must earn all 40 hours during your high school years. Of course, we do encourage you to be involved in as much serve and activism at all times.

**Can I get paid while I am earning service hours?**
No. If you do get paid, you cannot count those hours toward your graduation requirement. If you work at a for-profit business (restaurant, clothing store) and work some hours without pay, these hours cannot be counted toward your graduation requirement.

**Can I earn service-learning hours by helping family members?**
No. Service-learning is designed to expand your horizons and help the broader community. We want you to learn about new organizations, new issues, and new ideas through your service-learning experience.

**If I go on a field trip or attend a workshop or conference, can I earn service hours?**
No. The only way that students can earn hours by attending raining events or workshops is if the workshop or training is directly connected to a service project. For example, if a group of students attend a workshop about human rights advocacy and then develop a project to free someone who has been falsely imprisoned, the hours spent in training can be counted.