

EDUCATION

SERVICE LEARNING

Getting out of the classroom and learning in the community

A community's responsibility involves participating in educating its children. The concept of Service Learning fosters this collaboration.

Service Learning survives under the Cal Serve initiative from the California Department of Education. At the federal level, service learning is known as Learn and Serve America. The designs of these federally funded programs exist as teaching strategies integrating traditional classroom learning with community-related projects.

The implementation of service learning curriculum increases engagement and excitement about coming to school. In addition, studies prove reduced risky behavior among students participating in service learning.

This academic school year is the seventh and last year that the Truckee-Tahoe Unified School District will receive federal funding for this program. Every school in this district is involved with service learning at some level, each with its own site advocate. Despite the termination of the funding, many teachers will continue using

service learning as part of their curriculum.

High quality of service learning is comprised of seven elements: integrated learning, student voice, high quality service, civic responsibility, collaboration, reflection and evaluation. Although each component is important, student voice and civic responsibility are what truly allow students to feel valued by providing their input and making meaningful contributions to their community.

Connections between teachers, community partners, administration, and volunteers create with the assistance of the Truckee River Education Coalition, better known as TREC. This group meets once a month to discuss current projects and raise awareness by bringing in new partners. In our community, science issues and projects tend to gain the most attention.



By Vicki Isacowitz

ON THE CHALKBOARD

The program's funding covers the costs involved, and given the current situation with our environment, these science related projects are

worthy of considerable attention.

A few examples of local service learning include, but are not limited to garden clubs at local elementary schools, cross age tutoring, recycling, irrigation systems, and fire awareness brochures. Knitting mittens, running food drives, in addition to enhancing the beauty and traditions of our community deserves its proper recognition.

The spirit of service learning is to instill a culture of learning in the district. A culture of serv-

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ice involves the intentional shift of approaching classroom learning and community service district wide. In simple terms, service learning promotes good teaching and learning within our classrooms.

Amazing women working within the school district make service learning accessible for local teachers and community partners. Laurie Martin is the Director of Community Youth Development. Sarah Dorland and Sasha Neumann, coordinators and site advocates of the service-learning program, assist her relentless energy and devotion to the community. The former Sierra Mountain Middle School site houses the new

office for service learning. This office provides resources for teachers and a meeting place for project planning.

Sierra High School's current service learning is the adoption of the Bayou LeBatre, which endured the destruction of hurricane Katrina this September. A fundraiser for this project is planned for Dec. 3, at the Sierra Mountain Middle School site on Donner Pass Road. For more information on how to get involved in this particular fundraiser or other service learning projects, contact Sarah Dorland or Sasha Neumann at (530) 582-2517.

— Vicki Isacowitz is a Secondary English teacher who has been educating students since 1996. She is co-founder of Clever Minds Educational Services, providing tutoring for students in grades K-12. Clever Minds Learning Center also offers personal assistance in the college application process.

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