



FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on service-learning projects, parents may want to check out the following Web sites:

USA Weekend's Project Tools
http://www.usaweekend.com/diffday/tools/guides/teachers_guide.html

National Service Learning Clearinghouse
<http://www.servicelearning.org/>

Youth Service America
<http://www.ysa.org/>

Learn and Serve, Corporation for National & Community Service
<http://www.learnandserve.org>

Institute for Responsive Education
<http://www.responsiveeducation.org>

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
<http://www.ncpie.org>

ACTION IS WORTH A THOUSAND LESSONS

Students who participate in a service-learning project often finish the project with memories that last a lifetime.

Thanks to a grant from the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, fourth and eighth grade students in the Asheville City School System, along with teacher education students from UNC-Asheville, were able to examine current issues in local government and reflect on each individual's role as a citizen in their community, their state, their nation and the world. One of the most important lesson students learned from their experience was that "they have a voice that is heard by local officials."

After interviewing two members of the Asheville City Council, one Asheville Middle School student realized that taking an active part in learning about your community by reading newspapers, watching the news, and talking to people about their community concerns helps citizens be more involved. "If you understand the issue, you are more likely to be a part of the solution. We need to find ways to keep the community informed about what is going on and why they need to be involved," she said. Another student was a little more direct when asked what she learned from the project. "Be involved or you can't complain."

Through the efforts of the Wade Edwards Foundation, Wade Edwards Learning Lab, Carolina Global Schoolhouse and the North

Carolina Civic Education Consortium, Broughton High School students in Wake County learned how hard—yet rewarding—teaching can be. In their service-learning project, Link2Learn, students taught computer skills to senior citizens twice a week, over a three-week period (both in the fall and spring), at the Wade Edwards Learning Lab. Students also created a notebook filled with a step-by-step curriculum, lesson plans and activities. At the program's conclusion, the senior citizens were a little more comfortable with word processing, sending emails, and venturing out on the Internet. Students learned how to share their knowledge with others and gained insight to another generation.

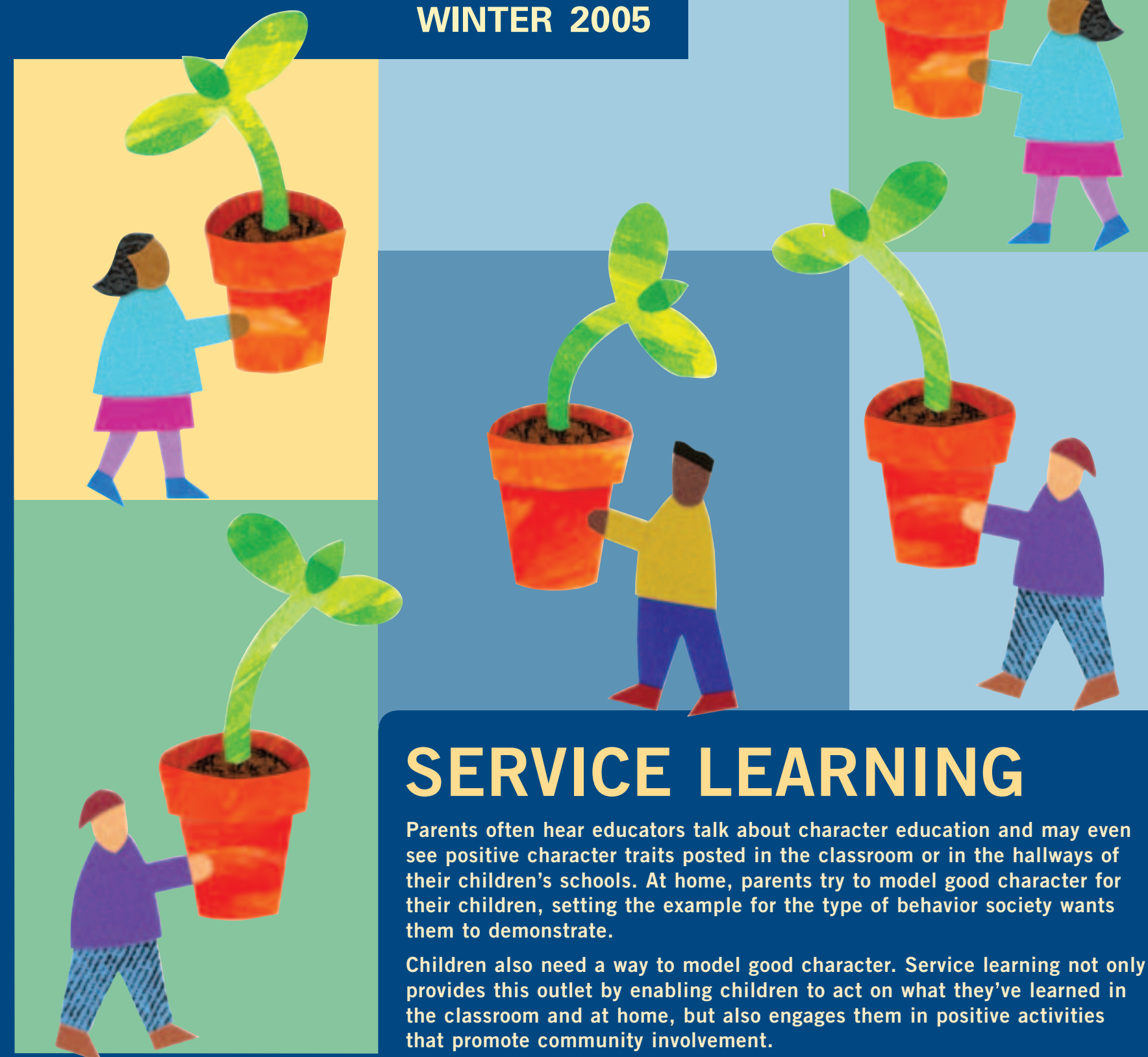
One student said that when she looks back on the Link2Learn experience, she would remember the stories, the laughs and the respect she had for elders. "I will remember how the simplest things pleased and excited many of the seniors. It was a really cool experience," she said. Another student said that he would always remember his partner's "good laugh, big smile, and the way they had a great time working together and learning together. The experience taught us what it is like to teach rather than to learn. I will remember these people and this experience for a long time."

		<p>One in a series of publications produced by North Carolina Newspapers in Education with support from the North Carolina Press Association and the Public Schools of North Carolina (State Board of Education Department of Public Instruction). Watch for other tips for helping your child during the coming months.</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">MTG122004</p>
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MAKING the GRADE

WINTER 2005



SERVICE LEARNING

Parents often hear educators talk about character education and may even see positive character traits posted in the classroom or in the hallways of their children's schools. At home, parents try to model good character for their children, setting the example for the type of behavior society wants them to demonstrate.

Children also need a way to model good character. Service learning not only provides this outlet by enabling children to act on what they've learned in the classroom and at home, but also engages them in positive activities that promote community involvement.

WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

Service learning is a teaching method that combines academics and action. Students use a variety of resources to learn about local concerns and problems and then devise ways to address the problems. They carry out their action plans and follow up their work with reflection and analysis. In so doing, service learning connects meaningful community service experience with academic learning, personal growth and civic responsibility and goes beyond extracurricular community service. Students develop a personal connection to what they are learning and apply skills and concepts introduced in the classroom.

The California Department of Education's Civic Responsibility Work Group in its December 2003 report, "Linking Service and Civics through Services-Learning," found that an effective service-learning experience "leads to an increasing sense of civic responsibility in youth, engages them in instruction that is grounded in knowledge of government and political institutions, and teaches the aspects to influence social, political, and economic change. These are the skills that protect civil liberties in a democratic society."

WHY IS SERVICE LEARNING IMPORTANT?

A national study of the Learn and Serve America program suggests that effective service learning programs "improve a child's academic grades, increase attendance in school, and develop personal and social responsibility."

Service learning teaches children that they can and should be active participants in their community. Children see themselves as being part of the solution and making a difference in their community.

What makes service learning so special is that it not only makes the community better because of the service provided, but it also provides children with a powerful learning experience. Strong, lasting connections between our youngest citizens and the community as a whole are forged through the service-learning experience.

EXAMPLES OF SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

- peer mediation program for school
- local stream watch program
- school recycling program
- playground or park improvements for accessibility by all
- grocery delivery program for the elderly and disabled
- tutoring programs for younger students



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND SERVICE LEARNING

The National & Community Service found that parents who are involved in their children's education show that they value learning and good character, set high expectations, stay informed about their children's progress, and monitor their children's activities. Parental involvement can be a strong indicator for a child's success in school.

Parents also can be a valuable resource to their children for service-learning programs. They can provide information about their community's needs and potential service projects and serve as a sounding board during the project itself,

What Service Learning is –

- links to academic content and standards
- involves young people in helping to determine and meet real, defined community needs;
- is reciprocal in nature, benefiting both the community and the service providers by combining a service experience with a learning experience;
- can be used in any subject area so long as it is appropriate to the learning goal; and
- works at all ages, even among young children.

and is not:*

- an episodic volunteer program;
- an add-on to an existing school or college curriculum;
- logging a set number of community service hours in order to graduate;
- compensatory service assigned as a forum of punishment by the courts or by school administrators;
- only for high school or college students; and
- one-sided—benefiting only students or only the community.

* National Commission on Student Learning

ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT SERVICE LEARNING

One of the many perks of service learning is that children can pick a project that is meaningful to them and benefits the community. It's truly a win-win situation. There are a number of activities students can engage in prior to the selection of a service-learning project to help ensure that their project proves to be a winner for the entire community.

BRAINSTORM POTENTIAL PROJECTS

Service learning projects can be as diverse and unique as the community itself. Brainstorm with your child a number of possible projects based upon their interests. The local media is a perfect place to turn to in order to better understand your community's needs. Encourage your child to read the local newspaper and watch the local news on television for a couple of weeks to identify issues facing your community. Have them cut out newspaper articles that highlight the problem. Have your child write down several problems or concerns the community is experiencing based upon what they read and observe. With your child, brainstorm possible projects they could take on that would help address the problems. Have your children ask themselves if the project is important to them, if it truly serves a community need, and if the project has a scope they can achieve.

IDENTIFY RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships affect everyone's ability to work together to solve problems. Help your child select one or two local political or government officials and have them observe them at public meetings and read about them over time to see how they work with county commissioners or council members, legislators and citizens. Have your child talk about the different relationships these officials have with each other and discuss how those relationships may help or hinder their ability to bring about change. Then have them ask themselves, would they be interested in serving in government, running for office or holding other positions that involve them in service?

RESEARCH THE ISSUE

Once your child has identified the service-learning project they want to pursue, suggest they research the issue by talking with community leaders, representatives of organizations affected by the issue, and local and state government officials. Questions they should ask will help them identify potential causes of the problem, how the community is affected and possible solutions. Based upon this knowledge, your child can then determine his or her best course of action to help resolve the issue.

LOOK AT POTENTIAL PROJECTS FROM ALL SIDES

There are a number of ways to bring about change to benefit the maximum number of people or goals. In trying to resolve a problem, one person may benefit from the change while another may be hurt. Sometimes both parties lose in the end. The suggested change may even cause an indirect problem that wasn't foreseen. It's important when identifying potential service-learning projects that they be thoroughly researched to ensure that the solution being suggested benefits the entire community. With your child, identify a conflict in the newspaper and describe how it may be resolved so that the community as a whole wins.



HELPING YOUR CHILD MAKE THE MOST OF THEIR SERVICE EXPERIENCE

Contributed by the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium School of Government

A 2003 study of North Carolina's young people indicates that parents and family remain the most important civic role models and civic learning reinforced at home can have a lasting impact (2003 Civic Index, NC Civic Education Consortium, www.civics.org). Research also has shown that quality student service experiences can be a very effective learning strategy and foster life-long civic involvement (Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools, www.civicmissionofschools.org). Here are a few suggestions to help your child get the most out of all types of service experiences:

REFLECTION

Once your child has completed a service activity, either through school or otherwise, ask about his or her experiences:

- What need(s) were addressed through the service? Are these important needs? Why or why not?
- Did your child believe he or she made a positive difference in the community or a person(s) life? Why or why not?
- Was the experience what your child expected? If not, how was it different?
- Would your child want to do it again? Why or why not?
- What was the most important thing your child learned from the experience? Why was this important?

CONNECTION TO STUDIES

Help your child think about how the service activity is connected to studies at school. If the experience was class sponsored, you can focus on that course specifically or you can make connections to general studies through such questions as:

- What skills were involved in preparing for or doing the service work (reading, writing, math, research, problem analysis, computers, presentations, science, etc.)?
- How did the experience relate to specific lessons from your child's classes, such as how communities are organized or how government meets needs (social studies), how data collection and chemistry are used to keep our environment safe and clean (science, math) or how technology is used to help people or solve problems (computer lab)?
- What would your child like to learn more about because of the service experience?

CONNECTION TO MEANINGFUL ISSUES

Work with your child in exploring how his or her service experience related to important issues and public debates in the community, state, nation, or around the world. The Web and your local library are great resources for this journey. Some questions to explore are:

- What was the major need addressed by the service experience?
- Is this mainly a local need or do other communities across the state/region have the same need? What about other countries they are studying?

