

# Increase Students' Academic Engagement with Districtwide Service-Learning

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**Solutions**  
*to the Dropout Crisis*

# The National Youth Leadership Council

- Advancing the Field of Service-Learning
  - The National Service Learning Conference®
  - Public Policy and Advocacy
- Developing Young Leaders
  - National Youth Leadership Training
  - Youth Trainings using *SMART. Youth Solutions to the Achievement Gap*
  - Project Ignition
  - Youth Advisory Council
- Supporting Educators
  - Generator School Network
  - Customized Professional Development Programming
  - Resources
  - Model Development



# Service-Learning

A method of teaching and learning that engages young people in service to their communities and ties their service directly to learning objectives.

It positions youth and adults as partners, emphasizing critical thinking and problem-solving, and helping them take on real issues of concern to the school and community.

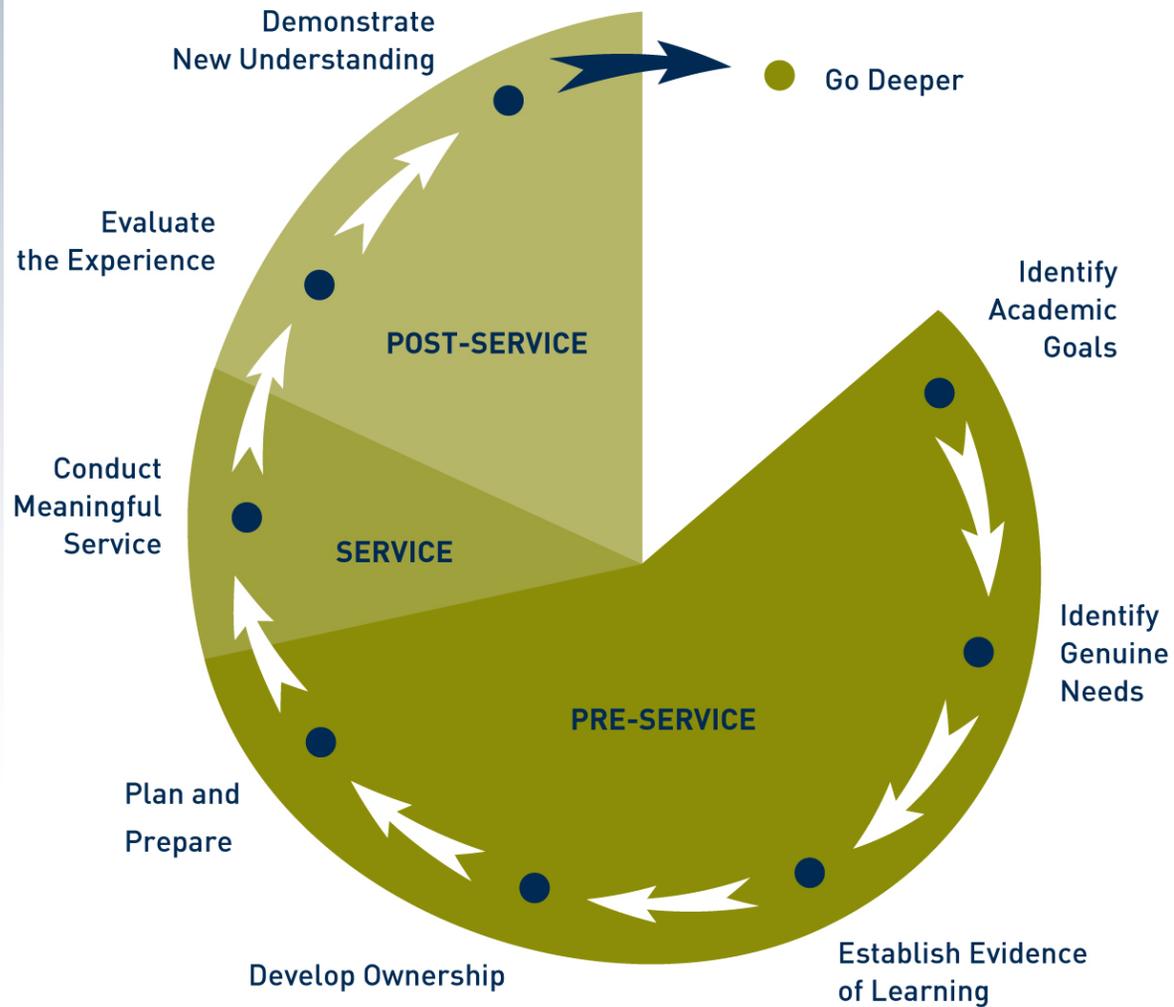


# The K-12 Service-learning Standards For Quality Practice

- Meaningful Service
- Link to Curriculum
- Reflection
- Diversity
- Youth Voice
- Partnerships
- Progress Monitoring
- Duration and Intensity



# The Service-Learning Cycle





“Service-learning is not one more thing on the plate. It is the plate.”

Dr. Beth Folger, Guilford County Schools



NATIONAL DROPOUT PREVENTION CENTER/NETWORK AT CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

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# The Crisis In School Engagement

- Only half of all students feel involved in and enthusiastic about school.
- Half of high school students are bored in school every day.
- One in 5 high school students has thought of dropping out.
- Minority and low income students are less engaged in school than majority and middle income students.



# Issues In Focus

- Declining engagement
  - Diminished sense of belonging to academic environment and its goals
  - Diminished civic engagement
- Too few systemic solutions
  - Disjointed, temporary, and a product of only a few stakeholders in the system
  - Do not take into account realities of resources
- Students are too often inadequately educated or dropping out



# Why Are Students Disengaged?

- Learning experiences that lack meaning and purpose
- The older students are, the less apt they are to see value in school learning.
- Only 25% of high school students believe that school is providing them with skills for adult life.



- A climate that makes you feel you don't belong
- Students who have a sense of school belonging feel that those in their school care about them and their learning.
- Students who have a sense of school belonging:
  - have higher expectations of academic success and see greater value in school learning
  - have higher grades, better attendance, and fewer problem behaviors
  - Are less apt to show emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and actions, substance abuse



- U.S. students score at the international average on measures of school belonging.
- 25% of U.S. students have a low sense of school belonging.
- The belief that “no adult in this school cares about me” is a prominent reason for student dropout.



# What Is Engagement?

- All students have a sustained commitment to academic learning in all aspects of their school experiences.
- All students demonstrate an increasing degree of school and community belonging throughout their school experience.



# Engaging Community

- Responsibility for academic learning for all students
  - What is the role of the community?
  - What is the role of family?
- Sustainability
  - Clarity of purpose
  - Clarity of interests
  - Stakeholders engaged



# Student Attributes

Service-learning is well suited to address qualities that increase student's sense of engagement

- Autonomy
- Belonging
- Competence
- Relatedness
- Civic Development



# How Are These Attributes Addressed?

Service-learning produces positive outcomes in students':

- internalized desire to engage in meaningful learning
- social connections tied to their academic environment
- understanding of the public purpose tied to their academic environment



# Studies Show Service-Learning Increases Engagement In Academic Work

- Low SES students who participated in service had higher achievement motivation, attendance, and grades than students who did not participate (Scales et al., 2006).
- Service-learning students in grades 7-12 were more cognitively engaged in English Language Arts and students in grades 3-5 had higher cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in school than comparison students (Meyer et al., 2004)
- Participants in Learn and Service had significantly higher school engagement than comparison students (Melchior, 1998).



# Expanded Ownership of the Learning Environment

- Helps schools meet their core purpose
- Addresses the hopes of
  - teachers
  - students
  - community
  - families
  - institutions
    - engages all
    - makes student learning the business of the people



# Assumptions

- The learning environment is a major influence of student engagement.
- The district's current initiatives can be better aligned to support student engagement in meaningful learning experiences.
- Systemic problems require systemic solutions.



# Core Beliefs

- School districts are the best lever of change in education.
- Districts have the capacity to accomplish this initiative and benefit from third party support.
- Third party support must be organized and sustainable – “summer workshops” or one day professional development trainings will not create the support for change that is needed.





# Why Is NYLC Invested?

- Targeted Research
  - What can service-learning accomplish?
  - What are school districts obligations?
  - What works in professional development?
- Lessons learned in Guilford County Schools as well as other key initiatives



## Learn

Continue to develop your service-learning practice with NYLC's professional development resources.

### All Topics

Browse or search all topics available on the GSN

### Developing Young Leaders

Topics on the role of youth and youth voice in service-learning.

### Supporting Educators

Topics designed specifically to help enrich educators' service-learning practice

### Convening the Field

Topics containing supportive research and tools to help standardize service-learning

#### Topics

##### Featured

Tough Minds Tender Hearts: Reflection to Support Service-Learning

[Show Topics](#)

#### Help

The Learn main page is the portal into the GSN's professional development resource database. Browse by listing all topics, or by one of the main categories: Developing Young Leaders, Supporting Educators, or Convening the Field.

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# Districtwide Initiative Process

- Develop district leader
  - school, staff, student, and community support for initiative
  - district-developed theory of change
- Align resources for context specific model
- High quality professional development in service-learning of principals and teachers
- High quality leadership training of youth and mentors
- Sustained support and evaluation



# Third-Party Engagement

Schools must say “no” 1,000 times to good ideas to ensure it remains focused on what is most important and what is achievable

- Where schools say “yes” is where they must succeed.
- Where they have determined their greatest values are being addressed is where focus must remain.
- Third party organizations should not want to transform themselves into the district’s “yes.”
- Third party organizations should desire to know from the start that their goals and practices align.



# Districtwide Systemic Approach

- School systems cannot meet our deepest educational aspirations alone.
- Communities should not simply be in the role of consumer.
  - Communities need new routes to understand and engage in the education of their youth.
  - Marginalized populations need better routes into the educational experience.
- Service-Learning is a model that can help address these public disconnects to schools.





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