



K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice

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In *Growing to Greatness 2007*, we presented the history of the development of standards for service-learning and shared promising research-based practices to improve student outcomes. For decades, the echoes of “quality matters” were evident in many evaluations and research studies. Without fidelity to quality, service-learning does not live up to its promise of positive outcomes; but with quality, significant impacts on participants have been found in the areas of academic performance, civic engagement and responsibility, personal and social skills, career aspirations, reduction of risky behaviors, and more (Billig 2007; Weah 2007).

Over the years, quality has been defined in various ways, but only recently has the research base provided strong direction. In last year's volume, we presented the Principles of Effective Practice. With this volume of *Growing to Greatness*, we celebrate the collective work of many communities around the country in refining those original principles and translating them into the new K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice.

The Process

The road to these standards and indicators began in 1989, with a Wingspread Conference on the principles of practice for combining service and learning. Subsequent significant efforts included the ASLER standards in 1993 (Alliance for Service-Learning Education Reform 1995) and the Essential Elements of Service-Learning in 1998 (National Service-Learning Cooperative 1999). With new research supporting the predictors of impact, new principles of effective practice were drafted last year (Billig 2007).

Service-Learning: A philosophy, pedagogy, and model for community development that is used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.

Since then, the research has been synthesized and extended, and experts convened to draft new standards and indicators based on research and professional judgments. These new standards and indicators then were vetted through a series of “reactor panels” made up of young people, teachers, school and district administrators, community members, staff from community-based organizations, policy-makers, and others interested in service-learning. These gatherings, all of which followed the same format, were held across the country — from Washington DC to Hawaii, from Maine and Minnesota to Florida. The heartland held the most reactor panels: two in Ohio, one in Michigan, one in Illinois, and one in Nebraska. In all, 21 panels took place from July to January. Participation ranged from as few as seven people to as many as 250 in each panel.

The reactor panels used the same standards-setting process that has been used in many states to develop content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. Each of these panels considered the edits of previous panels, revising the standards and indicators to ensure they included the strongest aspects of quality, and to make them clear, measurable, and actionable. The result of this convergence of research and practice was the development of standards and indicators of quality service-learning practice. In the end, the original eight principles of effective practice and the original 75 indicators became the following eight standards and 35 indicators. While the journey was long, the results were a set of crystallized ideas set forth in simple, attainable, and measurable forms.

Implications for Key Audiences

Practitioners

- Provides a common set of well-defined expectations for high quality practice.
- Prompts in-depth discussions of practice to help educators reflect on and improve their practice.
- Provides framework for outside evaluation of practice (e.g. the Certificate of Excellent Practice).
- Provides professional development guidelines for pre-service and in-service teachers and for professional development of community members and community-based organizations.
- Provides guidelines for monitoring progress and sustaining continuous improvement.
- Provides consistent language to use for discussing quality.

Researchers

- Provides guidance for operationalizing practices and testing constructs that serve as moderators or predictors of impact.
- Promotes the formation of a common research agenda for improving impacts.
- Helps researchers engage in hypothesis testing and asking additional questions about practice to promote understanding.
- Provides additional guidance for evaluations.

Policy-makers

- Provides guidance for policy creation at local and state levels.
- Provides criteria for evaluating funding proposals and programs — locally, and at the state and federal levels.
- Provides guidance for teacher licensure and recognition.
- Suggests consistent language for policy change and advocacy.

K-12 Standards and Indicators for Quality Service-Learning Practice			
Duration and Intensity	Link to Curriculum	Partnerships	Meaningful Service
Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.	Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.	Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.	Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.
<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service-learning experiences include the processes of investigating community needs, preparing for service, action, reflection, demonstration of learning and impacts, and celebration. 2. Service-learning is conducted during concentrated blocks of time across a period of several weeks or months. 3. Service-learning experiences provide enough time to address identified community needs and achieve learning outcomes. 	<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service-learning has clearly articulated learning goals. 2. Service-learning is aligned with the academic and/or programmatic curriculum. 3. Service-learning helps participants learn how to transfer knowledge and skills from one setting to another. 4. Service-learning that takes place in schools is formally recognized in school board policies and student records. 	<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service-learning involves a variety of partners, including youth, educators, families, community members, community-based organizations, and/or businesses. 2. Service-learning partnerships are characterized by frequent and regular communication to keep all partners well-informed about activities and progress. 3. Service-learning partners collaborate to establish a shared vision and set common goals to address community needs. 4. Service-learning partners collaboratively develop and implement action plans to meet specified goals. 5. Service-learning partners share knowledge and understanding of school and community assets and needs, and view each other as valued resources. 	<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service-learning experiences are appropriate to participant ages and developmental abilities. 2. Service-learning addresses issues that are personally relevant to the participants. 3. Service-learning provides participants with interesting and engaging service activities. 4. Service-learning encourages participants to understand their service experiences in the context of the underlying societal issues being addressed. 5. Service-learning leads to attainable and visible outcomes that are valued by those being served.

K-12 Standards and Indicators for Quality Service-Learning Practice			
Youth Voice	Diversity	Reflection	Progress Monitoring
Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.	Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.	Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.	Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.
<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service-learning engages youth in generating ideas during the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. 2. Service-learning involves youth in the decision-making process throughout the service-learning experiences. 3. Service-learning involves youth and adults in creating an environment that supports trust and open expression of ideas. 4. Service-learning promotes acquisition of knowledge and skills to enhance youth leadership and decision-making. 5. Service-learning involves youth in evaluating the quality and effectiveness of the service-learning experience. 	<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service-learning helps participants identify and analyze different points of view to gain understanding of multiple perspectives. 2. Service-learning helps participants develop interpersonal skills in conflict resolution and group decision-making. 3. Service-learning helps participants actively seek to understand and value the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of those offering and receiving service. 4. Service-learning encourages participants to recognize and overcome stereotypes. 	<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service-learning reflection includes a variety of verbal, written, artistic, and nonverbal activities to demonstrate understanding and changes in participants' knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes. 2. Service-learning reflection occurs before, during, and after the service experience. 3. Service-learning reflection prompts participants to think deeply about complex community problems and alternative solutions. 4. Service-learning reflection encourages participants to examine their preconceptions and assumptions in order to explore and understand their roles and responsibilities as citizens. 5. Service-learning reflection encourages participants to examine a variety of social and civic issues related to their service-learning experience so that participants understand connections to public policy and civic life. 	<p>Indicators:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Service-learning participants collect evidence of progress toward meeting specific service goals and learning outcomes from multiple sources throughout the service-learning experience. 2. Service-learning participants collect evidence of the quality of service-learning implementation from multiple sources throughout the service-learning experience. 3. Service-learning participants use evidence to improve service-learning experiences. 4. Service-learning participants communicate evidence of progress toward goals and outcomes with the broader community, including policy-makers and education leaders, to deepen service-learning understanding and ensure that high quality practices are sustained.

Next Steps

While the standards have been established, important dissemination, implementation, and research steps lie ahead. Some next steps include:

- Workshops on standards and indicators at the annual *National Service-Learning Conference*, and other professional conferences
- A set of white papers that summarize the research behind each of the standards
- New professional development offerings
- New self-assessment tools

In addition, researchers will need to test the standards and indicators as predictors of outcomes, and the variations that appear to work best — for whom and under what conditions. Young people, educators, community partners, policy-makers, and researchers all have vital roles in this next phase.

Conclusion

Practitioners have known that service-learning has the potential to be a strong catalyst for change. Increasingly, research confirms that high quality service-learning experiences strengthen people, schools, and communities (Billig 2004).

These standards are offered with the hope that they will prove to be a significant tool in achieving the larger goals of service-learning: educational improvement, community development, and social change.

The reference edition of the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice is available for free download at www.nylc.org/standards.

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