

# Dropout Prevention and Students with Disabilities: The Role of Service Learning

Service learning is a teaching method that does what the name implies: It helps students with or without disabilities learn lifelong skills through service to the community. It can take place in schools and in youth or community organizations.

The benefits can be significant. National research\* shows that service learning improves social behavior, builds civic skills, and promotes a sense of belonging to and responsibility for the wider community. When students have these traits, they are much more likely to be engaged in their education and stay in school.

Unlike volunteering, this method ties learning directly to the service by including the following steps:

- **Preparation:** Students do research through reading, interviewing, or visiting people or places in order to understand the community and its needs.
- **Action:** Students develop a plan to transform what they've learned into practical strategies to benefit the community.
- **Reflection:** After implementing their plan, students reflect on what their project means to the community and how they might improve it as they continue to serve.
- **Demonstration:** Through presentations, written articles, or Web postings, students show others what they've done and learned.

Service learning can take many forms. Members of Club Latino at Richfield High School, Richfield, Minn., for example, have worked with school staff to clean up parks, teach dental hygiene to younger students,

and serve meals at community shelters. In each case, the service was tied to the learning steps mentioned above.

What can parents do to promote service learning?

- Find out if service learning projects are available at your student's school or in your community. The Corporation for National and Community Service is one place to start: [nationalservice.gov/state\\_profiles/pdf/MN\\_CT.pdf](http://nationalservice.gov/state_profiles/pdf/MN_CT.pdf).
- Inform your school and local community-based organizations about service learning and the resources available.
- Promote awareness of service learning by placing the topic on parent meeting agendas.
- Encourage your student's participation in a service learning project.

Service learning is an effective way to help students stay in school. Parents, students, schools, and communities can work together to keep children in school and benefit the community at the same time. Students who participate in service learning say, "I want to go to school" instead of "I have to go to school."

*\* For further information and research statistics on service learning, you may contact Learn and Serve America, 866-245-7378 (toll free) or [servicelearning.org](http://servicelearning.org).*