The Role of Service-Learning

Service-Learning in Our Schools

By Kevin English and Deb Moore

Many schools use service-learning on their campus to enhance their classroom content. “Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities;” notes the Learn and Serve Clearinghouse. It is not volunteering. It is an application of academic standards to the project that makes it more than just a volunteer event. “Service-learning provides structured time for thoughtful planning of the service project and guided reflection by participants on the service experience.”

Programs

There are several projects that can be implemented on the high school campus that can promote service-learning. The following two, Empty Bowls and The Solar Project, were implemented at Raymond S. Kellis High School, Glendale, Arizona.

Empty Bowls

Empty Bowls is a nationwide program developed to feed the hungry communities. The Empty Bowls concept was created by an artist/teacher in 1990. “From its humble beginnings as a meal for the staff of one high school, Empty Bowls has spread across the United States and beyond and has raised tens of millions of dollars for anti-hunger organizations,” notes Empty Bowls’ Web site. Raymond S. Kellis took part in this program during both lunches on March 12th. Teachers purchased lunch for $10 that day at the Culinary Café. Lunch included pasta, salad and iced tea as well as the selection of a bowl created by our students. (Teachers could choose a student-produced ceramic bowl, a wooden bowl or a bread bowl.)

This cross-curricular project included...
students will become actively engaged in the process and will take pride in the results. For further assistance, there is a 10-step guideline that can be downloaded at www.nationalserviceresources.org/node/17462.

Impact to Schools and Communities
There are many benefits to the schools and communities from service-learning projects. The two projects listed here will raise money for the hungry in the community and will reduce the ecological footprint of the school. There are additional learning outcomes from the Corporation of National and Community Service. It notes that service-learning:

- Promotes learning through active participation in service experiences.
- Provides structured time for students to reflect by thinking, discussing and/or writing about their service experience.
- Provides an opportunity for students to use skills and knowledge in real-life situations.
- Extends learning beyond the classroom and into the community.
- Fosters a sense of caring for others.

You should try a small project first and then build on that success. Once you get going, you will find out how dynamic and meaningful your classroom can be!

Kevin English
is building trades instructor at Raymond S. Kellis High School, Glendale, Arizona. He can be contacted at kenglish@peoriaisd.k12.az.us.

Deb Moore
is marketing and DECA educator at Raymond S. Kellis High School. She can be contacted at demore@peoriaisd.k12.az.us.

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