

meant to evoke the spirit of caring in those involved as well as provide a constructive context for their knowledge.

Q: Are there different kinds or categories of service?

Service can take many forms. Usually, though, the “service” in service learning can be classified as direct service, indirect service, advocacy, or research.

- **Direct Service:** Students’ service directly affects and involves the recipients. The interactions are person-to-person and face-to-face, such as tutoring younger children or working with refugees. Students engaged in direct service learn about caring for others who are different in age or experience, develop problem-solving skills by following a sequence from beginning to end, and see the “big picture” of a social justice issue. Interacting with animals is also included in direct service, as is on-site environmental work, such as restoring a wetland area or constructing park benches.
- **Indirect Service:** With indirect activities students do not see the recipients, however, their actions benefit the community or environment as a whole. Examples can include stocking a food pantry, donating picture books to a preschool literacy program, collecting clothing for families living in a shelter, or creating a newsletter for a retirement community. Students engaging in indirect service learn about cooperation, working as a team, taking on different roles, organizing, and prioritizing. They also gain specific skills and knowledge that relate to academic content reinforced through application.
- **Advocacy:** The intent of advocacy is to create awareness of or promote action on an issue of public interest. Central to the word is *vox*, which is Latin for *voice*. Through advocacy students provide a voice for an issue, particularly when members of a population may not be able to speak for themselves. Related activities include writing letters, sponsoring a town meeting, performing a play, public speaking. Student advocates learn about perseverance and understanding rules, systems, and processes. They also experience civic engagement and working with adults.

- **Research:** Research activities involve students finding, gathering, and reporting on information in the public interest. For example, students may develop surveys or conduct formal studies, evaluations, experiments, or interviews. They may test water or soil, check the speed of cars passing by their school, or conduct environmental surveys. The students in the Introduction who surveyed local elms for Dutch elm disease are a good example of this kind of service. By participating in research-based service learning, students learn how to gather information, make discriminating judgments, and work systematically. This leads to enhanced skills in organization, assessment, and evaluation.

We need your service, right now, at this moment in history. I’m not going to tell you what your role should be; that’s for you to discover. But I am asking you to stand up and play your part. I am asking you to help change history’s course.

—President Barack Obama, upon signing the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, 2009

Q: Is one type of service learning better than another?

Each of the service categories offers unique benefits to the community and to the students. When the underlying causes and effects of an issue are investigated and understood, all types of service can provoke questions that continue to engage students in study and learning. Students involved in service continually apply and develop their knowledge in ways that meet and enrich the academic curriculum.

That said, a caution is worth noting related to indirect service. If students who have the ability to experience all four forms of service only have indirect opportunities, a subtle message may be communicated: that we can keep issues and problems distant or at arm’s length. Research confirms, particularly with high school students, that direct service and advocacy have the greatest long-term impact on knowledge gained and personal value recognized. Also, younger children are developmentally prone to learning best with concrete involvement.