



Community Service Learning
For
Thomas County Middle School
MERIT Program

Guidelines for Teachers, Parents, and Students

Community Service Learning For Thomas County Middle School

Purpose of Community Service Learning (CSL)

To extend learning beyond the classroom and into the community, to promote civic responsibility through active participation in service experiences, to foster a sense of caring for others, and to develop a habit of volunteer service to those in need.

What is Community Service Learning?

Community Service Learning (CSL) is an educational process, which enhances the quality of life within the school and the community. Community Service Learning combines instruction, 21st Century Skills, and voluntary participation in supporting activities or obtaining contributions of goods.

What are the benefits of Community Service Learning for Middle School Students?

- Students receive an invaluable learning experience outside of the normal classroom setting.
- Service learning places curricular concepts in the context of real-world situations.
- Students analyze, evaluate, and synthesize these concepts using problem-solving skills, while at the same time helping their community.
- Students generate positive school-community relations and relations within the school.
- Students experience a good feeling of people helping people.

**The key to determining whether or not the service meets the criteria is asking the question,
*Who benefits from the service?***

The answer should be:

***Those organizations which are identified as an educational institution, those with non-profit status,
Or an individual in need.***

What types of activities constitute Community Service Learning?

- Activities which benefit the school or community provided that the community organizations benefiting from the services are non-profit, with the exception of hospitals, nursing homes, or educational activities.
- Activities which are not self-serving for a student or the student's family member.
- Activities which **are not tied to a grade** (i.e. - Musical performances with school groups to such places as nursing homes, will not count if the activity is tied to a grade in the music class.)
- Activities which render service to individuals who cannot otherwise provide for themselves.
- In order to receive the MERIT designation, a student **must earn a minimum of 20 service hours** each year.
- **Six** of those hours may be earned through donations or contributions to charitable organizations. The remainder must be earned through service activities.
- **Up to ten (10) hours** may be earned each summer and applied to the first nine weeks hours.
- Students are encouraged to explore various opportunities. **No more than 10 hours should be earned at one location.** Exceptions may be allowed, but students should receive prior approval.

What types of activities MEET the criteria of Community Service Learning?

- Participating in service projects as a member of a service club or community organization.
- Students who leave school to participate in an elementary school, as a part of an **instructional program** approved by the principals in each school may receive service credit for the instructional time rendered.
- Reading to the blind.
- Volunteering one's services at a local hospital, nursing home, etc.
- Volunteering one's service to individuals, i.e. senior citizens or the disabled.
- Hosting outside groups for school festivals.
- Volunteering for the Board of Elections or political campaigns.
- ALL tutoring (not paid); including tutoring done before or after school, during lunch, or study hall.
- Outreach programs of religious organizations and other non-profit organizations, which provide service to the poor, sick, needy, etc.
- Participating in events, i.e., marathons, walks, races, which benefit **charitable organizations**. One hour of service credit will be awarded for each hour of service provided to the charity. Students may **NOT** receive credit for more than four (4) hours.

Schools may establish criteria for school sponsored events as deemed appropriate.

Activities that qualify for service credit MUST:

- demonstrate volunteer, non-paid service.
- benefit an educational or a non-profit.
- benefit hospitals, nursing homes, or an individual in need.

Activities that qualify for service credit MUST NOT:

- be self-serving for the student or the student's immediate family member.
- be tied to a grade in any way.
- be tied to a class requirement/assignment.

Individual projects not specified in these examples may be accepted. Students are responsible for identifying and establishing service activities. **Check with teacher if unsure.**

What procedures must be followed in order to receive CSL credit?

1. Since not all activities are approved, students and parents need to be aware of which services qualify or do not qualify. Teachers can guide students on the appropriate activities.
2. Each student will provide the designated teacher with a signed Service Learning form, certificate, or other means of valid documentation which indicates the type of project completed, the dates of the project, and the amount of hours spent to complete the project. Such documentation will require the signature of the adult responsible for coordinating the efforts of the project. A parent signature will not be accepted unless the parent was the responsible party. All forms for a student should not be signed only by a parent.
3. As each project is completed, the designated teacher will provide a signature confirming credit for service rendered.
4. The designated teacher will review forms at the end of each nine weeks. A running total of hours will be placed on report card envelope. Any questions or discrepancies must be addressed within one week. This allows students two weeks after the end of each grading period to resolve discrepancies and turn in any missing documents. **Students will not receive credit for previous service after this grace period.**

Quick Tips for receiving Community Service Learning Credit

1. Choose the appropriate Community Service Learning activity/activities.
2. Perform the service project(s).
3. Submit a completed **Community Service Form** to your teacher. It is best to do this as soon as possible. Make sure that all sections of form have been completed.
4. Verify totals on back of report card envelope. Any discrepancies or questions should be handled promptly.

Check your Community Service Form for the following:

1. date(s) of service,
2. number of service hours provided,
3. name of the person or organization benefiting from the service provided,
4. description of the service performed, and
5. name, signature, and contact information (phone or e-mail) of the adult supervisor of the service.

