

SERVICE-LEARNING - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Every independent service-learning project must be pre-approved by the Service-Learning Coordinator PRIOR to beginning the project. All service-learning projects must address a real community need and include Preparation, Action, and Reflection.

1. RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Q: *My child is heavily involved in our religious organization. What activities will count for service-learning hours?*

A: There are many activities through religious organizations that students can use to earn service-learning hours. These include: preparing and serving meals to homeless; working in shelters; clothing/food/book/toy drives; community improvements/renovations; participating in community clean-up projects; or participating in vacation bible school (if not teaching religious content).

As specified by the federal guidelines on the separation of church and state, service that is conducted for religious practice cannot be counted for service-learning hours. This includes activities such as Altar services, Acolytes, choir, teaching and/or assisting in the teaching of Bible/Sunday school, and setting up for religious services. The State's Attorney General assigned to MSDE drafted the following statement to provide clarity on the issue:

"According to our legal counsel, the US Supreme Court has consistently ruled that in order for a public school, school system, or the State to abide by the First Amendment of US Constitution, actions approved by the school, school system, and State must have a secular purpose, have a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits the practice of religion, and must avoid excessive governmental entanglement with religion. Our attorney believes that granting a student service credit for teaching religious education would violate all three of the components just described and would therefore be unconstitutional."

2. LIBRARIES

Q: *Can my children do their service-learning hours at our community library?*

A: Yes, however, they may not replace a paid employee and should be engaging in direct services with the patrons (e.g., literacy program for children, computer instruction). Many of the public libraries have programs designed to allow students to participate and earn service-learning hours.

3. **DAY CARE FACILITIES**

Q: *Can my child earn service-learning hours at a licensed day care center?*

A: Yes. All child labor laws must be followed and the center must be licensed by the state of Maryland (*a copy of the license must be attached to the pre-approval form*). Students must be working directly with children to promote healthy child development. Acceptable activities may include reading to/with children, assisting with arts and crafts, supervising recreation time, completion of learning activities that provide school readiness, tutoring, etc...

Additionally, students cannot be paid or used in place of a paid employee and the business cannot financially benefit from the student's participation (i.e., additional children cannot be brought into the day care facility because the student is present).

4. **BABYSITTING**

Q: *Can my child babysit for free and have it count for service-learning hours?*

A: No, students cannot babysit for neighbors, friends, or family for free and earn service-learning hours. However, if the student is providing a service that helps address a community need, such as supervising children on site during a PTA meeting or a community health meeting (such as Alcoholics Anonymous or political forum), these hours could count.

5. **CLERICAL/CUSTODIAL**

Q: *Does clerical/custodial work count for service-learning hours?*

A: Clerical tasks may be a **component** of many valuable service-learning projects. However, these tasks must be done in a nonprofit organization and cannot be more than 25% of the service experience (e.g., answering phones, stuffing and labeling envelopes, collating, stapling, filing, faxing). Work that is considered custodial or janitorial cannot count as service-learning hours.

6. **TEACHER'S AIDE**

Q: *Can my child work as a teacher's aide and earn service-learning hours?*

A: Yes, if it is direct service for other students such as tutoring or creating educational displays or resources. However, making copies, grading papers, washing boards, cleaning the classroom, etc... is considered clerical and cannot be more than 25% of the experience. Students may also work within the school office, library or with the school nurse provided the experience still meets the program guidelines 9..

7. SCHOOL OR COMMUNITY-BASED PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

Q: *Can my child earn hours for participating in music/theatre productions?*

A: Students cannot earn hours for participating in a school performance or competition (such as the spring music concert). However, if the group is voluntarily performing in public (e.g., community parade or event, performing at a senior citizen center during the holidays) then students can earn service-learning hours for their service.

8. WORKING FOR INDIVIDUALS

Q: *Our neighbor is in need of special assistance. Can my child help and earn service-learning hours?*

A: Depending on the circumstances, this may be allowable as a service-learning project with appropriate preparation and reflection on the issue affecting the neighbor. Students should speak with the school service-learning coordinator to see if an activity could be developed into a quality service-learning experience. All activities must be pre-approved. Please note that any approved project would only be allowed on a temporary/limited basis with strict oversight due to the difficulty of verifying the hours.

Example: Your neighbor has a child with a disability and needs assistance with building skills that you can help develop such as reading or fine motor skills.

9. WORKING FOR BUSINESSES

Q: *Can my child work for my friend's business?*

A: All service-learning projects must meet a real community need. Students may be able to earn hours depending on the activity, but a business may not financially profit from the service-learning efforts of our students.

Example: Students can serve at a senior citizen home if they are visiting with residents and assisting with recreational or other approved activities. Students **cannot** work for a business without being paid to earn hours, even under an internship or work study program, unless their service meets a community need such as assisting a restaurant in the planning and serving of a free dinner for the homeless.

10. POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Q: *Can my child campaign for a political candidate/specific issue and earn service-learning hours?*

A: Yes, a student may complete independent service-learning activities for any political candidate or endorse any issue/cause of their own choosing without discrimination as long as it is done completely outside of the school day and does not conflict with the Precepts, Beliefs, and Values of the Baltimore County Public Schools. All activities must be pre-approved and cannot be supervised by a teacher or other employee of the school system. This rule ensures that there is no appearance of the school system encouraging the endorsement of any candidates, issues, or political party.

Activities will be evaluated on an individual basis and BCPS reserves the right to decline activities that may disrupt the educational purpose of the school or has the potential to negatively impact student safety.

11. TEAM MANAGERS/ASSISTANTS

Q: *Can my child earn service-learning hours by being a team manager?*

A: No. While team managers/assistants can be a valuable part of school athletic teams, participation as a manager or assistant does not meet the state requirements for service-learning. However, students assisting in the coaching and supervision of community-based teams (such as those run by Baltimore County Recreation and Parks) may earn hours if they are not paid for their service

12. SCHOOL THEATRE

Q: *My child spends many long hours working on the theatre production at their school. Can he/she earn service-learning hours for this?*

A: Students may earn service-learning hours for school productions only if the production is being used to serve the community or population of people in order to teach, entertain, or promote the arts to those who may have limited access (i.e. performing the play for younger students or for the disabled in order to promote the arts). Students should share how they became involved in the arts and the work that the production takes and encourage others to get involved. Students must get pre-approval from the service-learning coordinator before any hours can be accepted. Activities will be evaluated on an individual basis.

13. SERVING WITH A MUSIC/SPORTS BOOSTERS PROGRAM

Q: *Can my child earn hours by working with the music/sports boosters program?*

A: Students may be able to earn service-learning hours by working with the music or sports booster programs if they are participating in fundraising and/or other activities that provide support to those programs. If a student plans to complete some of their time working at a concession stand for a boosters program, they must be able to demonstrate in writing how their service helped the school community, what they learned through their service, why their participation was important to the success of the booster program and how that service reflects a greater need in the community for volunteers to actively support on-going programs that provide services for the community. The organizers of the booster programs are required to complete preparation/orientation and reflection activities with students for this purpose.

14. SERVING WITH THE SCHOOL PTA

Q: *Can my child earn hours by working with the school PTA?*

A: Students may earn service-learning hours by working with the PTA if they are assisting in fundraising and/or other activities that support the school. Students must be able to demonstrate in writing how their service helped the school community, what they learned through their service, why their participation was important to the success of the PTA program and how that service reflects a greater need in the community for volunteers to actively support on-going programs that provide services for the school and/or community. The PTA is required to complete preparation/orientation and reflection activities with students for this purpose.

15. SUBMITTING COMPLETED HOURS

Q: *How often should students submit their independent hours?*

A: Students should submit their completed service-learning hours immediately after a project has been completed. For long-term projects, school coordinators may allow students to turn in hours periodically throughout the school year. All service-learning hours must be submitted during the same school year in which they were completed. Service hours completed during the summer months should be submitted when school reopens for the subsequent school year. Any hours submitted after this time frame are subject to additional review and will only be counted with special permission from the Office of Service-Learning.

If students or parents have questions regarding any project, they should speak directly with the service-learning coordinator at their school or contact the Office of Service-Learning at 443-809-4496.