



The Learning by Serving Program

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The Learning by Serving Program is the Baltimore Freedom Academy's flagship program. Our school's programmatic thrusts are law, leadership, and service and staff members work tirelessly to provide opportunities for our students to be successful. Through the service program, students serve in the community at local schools, hospitals, museums, and non-profit organizations. This program is a part of our school's advisory program where students are given the opportunity to reflect upon what they have done and put what they learn into action.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project (e.g. health, education, environmental or public safety need)? Several community needs are being met through our program. In creating the program, we contacted several local schools and agencies to identify needs in each organization. Many elementary schools recognized that they were greatly in need of mentors and tutors for their students, non-profit organizations and local agencies determined that they were in need of self-motivated volunteers who could work independently and that would assist in meeting the organization's mission. For our students, we created a survey to identify their areas of interest, and matched them with an available agency.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to school curriculum (e.g. what course outcomes were met and/or how did the project reinforce or enhance student academic learning)? The Learning by Serving Program is a part of our school-wide advisory program. The Advisory Program's curriculum is centered around teaching students' life skills such as being academically prepared for college, taking responsibility for their actions, developing healthy relationships, developing leadership skills, problem solving, and becoming leaders in the community in which they live. The advisory program provides a theoretical vehicle for learning, while the Learning By Serving Program provides students an opportunity to show they are internalizing what they are learning.

Best Practice 3: How did you reflect on your experience throughout the project? Students reflect upon the activities they participate in through journaling, class discussions in advisory, and role-playing activities.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Students are taught responsibility in several ways. They are responsible for getting to their site each week, carrying out their duties effectively at the site, and getting weekly evaluations completed.

Best Practice 5: What community partners did you work with on this project (e.g. non-profits, civic organizations, business that provided donations, etc.)? Our school was successful in establishing partnerships with several schools, local agencies, hospitals, and museums. This endeavor was accomplished by soliciting the organizations and then meeting with those that were interested in participating in the program. We have created a community newsletter that we send to our partners to update them on what is

happening with the program, and to provide an opportunity for students to share their experiences.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? Through the help of staff members, parents, and students, we created a database of community organizations that were invited to partner with our school. Over the summer and during September, we visited these organizations, shared information about our school, and asked how we could be of service. Students also assisted in locating agencies to participate in the program.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? The service program is a component of our advisory class, where students are learning skills that increase self-esteem, leadership skills, academic development, and professionalism. Students learned many skills through their advisory class. They continue to develop and reshape those skills as they reflect upon their experiences and progress through the school year. Students learned about the type of work they would do at service sites, appropriate interpersonal interaction in various settings, and specific skills needed for various service jobs. The service-learning program allows students to develop organizational skills and become familiar with work in a professional environment.