

# Service Learning Club: A Targeted Social-Emotional Development Project

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## Purpose

We had students whose deficiencies in social skills hampered their interactions in the classroom environment. This led to a difficulty in cooperative academic tasks, which ultimately led to those and other students experiencing frustration during (what should be) engaging tasks. The purpose of the project was to **empower students** and **develop their collaborative skills** through **social-emotional learning**.

## Whole Child Tenets

- Healthy
- Safe
- Engaged
- Supported
- Challenged

## Basic Premise

In order to provide targeted support for social-emotional learning, we needed an authentic context that would not ostracize students. In other words, *we did not want students to know they were selected for the program because they had poor social skills*. So we told them we selected them because we saw potential in them – a true statement. We chose service learning as a context, because it was already a district and school focus and it provided an emotionally **'safe'** way to **engage** students.

With service learning as the context, we **challenged** the students in the group to design, implement and market a service project as a team. The idea was to provide them with **support** and development of leadership and social skills – to teach them how to work with others as a team to accomplish a common goal. Research shows that the mental **health** of students is improved when their self-efficacy and motivation improves. We viewed this project as a way to develop students

## Operational Details

**Who** - Students demonstrating a need for social-emotional development were chosen based on input from teachers, the counselor and administration.

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**How Many** – The group size was small, to be effective for targeted intervention– under 10.

**Frequency** – The students met every week during the school year, for 45 minutes each session.

**Adult leaders** – The school psychologist and school counselor led the ‘club,’ but brought in guest leaders periodically, including the principal, social worker, a teacher, the treasurer and the curriculum facilitator (lead teacher) when appropriate. Adult leaders served as consultants to the student group. For example, when they were developing a proposed budget, they consulted with the school treasurer. This demonstrated to students that leaders consult with and collaborate with others when making decisions.

**Activities:**

- Students participated in teambuilding activities, ‘how to be a team player’ and ‘leadership development’ activities.
- Students brainstormed ideas for a service project, based upon observations made around the school and learned how to compromise regarding a decision.
- Students decided to develop an educational activity center and literacy station for toddlers/preschoolers in the front office area. This provided a needed service for the school – a way for parents to engage their younger ones in productive and educational experiences while parents were there for other reasons.
- Students wrote a small grant proposal to get funds for their project and received \$500
- Students learned how to make a budget for their project and learned how to work through disagreements about task assignments, materials selection, timeline and other details.
- Students executed their project with support and coaching from various adults.
- Students organized an unveiling of the new activity center, wrote to the community paper and wrote a blurb for the parent newsletter.
- Students won an award and the students were recognized at local public event. The project and the students were featured on our website and in local media. This project truly celebrated and promoted the Whole Child tenets, and gave students a sense of purpose and accomplishment – a feeling that had been rather rare for these students.
- Students reflected on their project and wrote letters of advice to be given to next year’s club (based upon prompts such as ‘how to work as a team’, etc.)



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