

SERVICE LEARNING HOURS:

During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, recommendations and restrictions change frequently and rapidly. Most critically, everyone needs to follow the State and national guidance and regulations issued to keep everyone safe. The Superintendent of the Maryland State Department of Education will issue any school policy changes. Please continue to follow that guidance.

As all of this unfolds, many young people and school systems are asking what they can, cannot, should, or should not be doing in relation to service-learning. Schools are closed, but many students either want to be helpful and support their communities during this pandemic and/or want and/or need to earn service-learning hours towards fulfillment of the current service-learning graduation requirement.

As physical distancing is required right now, the best option for young people looking for ways to be of service to others would be through indirect and advocacy service-learning projects they can engage in at home.

News stories abound right now of creative, thoughtful young people taking the initiative collecting and assembling essential supplies for at-risk populations (hygiene kits that include hand sanitizer, wipes, soap, etc. for people who are homeless; food baskets for people who are food insecure; activity kits for people who are homebound, etc.).

Technology provides unique opportunities for students to reach out, support, and encourage people who are the most isolated. Nursing homes and care facilities have needed to stop all visitation in order to protect their residents who are most at risk from COVID-19. But technologies like ZOOM, Skype, Google Hangouts, WebEx, and FaceTime could allow youth to still interact with these populations who are feeling especially isolated. Students could arrange with facilities, using video conferencing technology, to perform music for residents, organize a sing-a-long, play games, hold a virtual prom, read together, and visit.

There have been calls for community support in the creation of masks, gowns, and face shields that can be used by hospitals. Students who are interested and able with access to materials and equipment like sewing machines or 3D printers might decide to engage

in those actions. Students could also participate remotely in long-established activities with organizations like [Project Linus](#), [Casey Cares](#), [Kids Helping Hopkins](#), [Cool Kids Campaign](#), [The Ronald McDonald House](#), [Believe in Tomorrow](#), and [The Children's Inn at NIH](#), etc. to provide support.

Students could also engage in advocacy projects from home: emailing leaders advocating on issues on which students have conducted research and want to see policy changes; creating social media campaigns on various issues, including promoting critical COVID-19 safe behaviors such as the need to physically distance ourselves from one another. Keeping physical distance does not have to mean social isolation, and students can help the community understand ways to remain connected despite keeping physically apart.

High quality indirect and advocacy service-learning projects can be done from home as long as students work to meet [Maryland's Seven Best Practices of Service-Learning](#). Students need to be encouraged as they research the issue they are working on to vet their sources of information.

Please share it with your parents and students as you deem necessary. I suggest that you email your students and parent community, and attach the form. Remind them to make a copy of the emails sent.. We must have a way to verify this.