

Student/Parent Guide to Community Service

Overview

The District of Columbia was one of the first large urban school districts in the country to include community service as a graduation requirement. The community service requirement, in conjunction with other graduation requirements, aims to successfully prepare students to be global leaders in the 21st century.

All community service hours (CSH) must be non-paying voluntary service, meet a recognized need in the community, and be performed at an organization that has a current tax ID number/EIN set by the Internal Revenue Service. CSH may also be performed at a federal, state, or local government agency, as these agencies provide some regulatory service or enforcement and are responsible for the oversight and administration of a specific government function.

DCPS only guarantees community service activities will count toward your graduation requirement if they are pre-approved by the school-based community service coordinator and/or central office community service coordinator. Getting your community service project pre-approved also provides an additional layer of protection for DCPS students and helps prevent any ethical and/or safety concerns. Any community service hours submitted without pre-approval are subject to denial, as they may not meet the best practices standard set by DCPS.

Community Service is an independent act of providing a needed service to a person or persons. It helps:

- To foster a life-long habit of serving others;
- To increase a student’s sense of social responsibility and civic engagement;
- To provide opportunities for students to identify and engage in issues impacting their community;
- To provide access to real-life authentic experiences that will prepare them for postsecondary success.

At DCPS we are committed to ensuring students have a well-rounded education and develop an orientation towards serving others. This is achieved through one of three ways:

1. **Direct service** refers to face-to-face engagement between students and beneficiaries of the project/community services.
2. **Indirect service** refers to support provided by students for others engaged in direct service.
3. **Advocacy** refers to activities or tasks engaged by the student with the purpose of trying to influence citizens and policymakers to change their behavior, encourage action, and/or increase awareness around a community need.

Examples of Acceptable Community Service Activities	Examples of Unacceptable Community Service Activities
Tutoring students at another school or during an afterschool program (Direct Service)	Helping a student with work during class or as a favor to a friend
Participating in school-wide/district events, such as planting trees for beatification day (Direct Service)	Helping a teacher or custodian clean classrooms because they are short-staffed
Cheerleading team providing planning and logistical support for a food drive for the homeless (Indirect Service)	Cheerleading team organizing a fundraiser for new uniforms or team t-shirts
Conducting office assistant tasks to support a fundraiser and/or a school wide/district sponsored event (Indirect Service)	Making copies for the secretary or teacher, or answering the phone during the day because the secretary is not available
Coordinating a letter campaign to change a community issue or a DCPS issue (Advocacy)	Writing letters to the principal because you don’t like the lunch that was served
Presenting/speaking at a city council meeting to advocate for additional school funding to ensure all schools have adequate supplies (Advocacy)	Presenting or speaking at a school assembly to get students to vote for student government positions

Community Service Requirement

Students must complete 100 hours of community service to earn a standard DCPS diploma. *Starting in school year 2018-19, eighth grade students may earn up to 25 hours of community service.*

School-Based Community Service Hours Guidelines

- Community service hours can only be completed during non-instructional time. Instructional time is defined as required class or practicum time that leads to earning a credit or certification.
- Students can earn community service hours when working on a service learning project during non-instruction time as an extension to the service learning project; for example: *a biology class investigates pollution in the Anacostia River. The service activity could include a class participating in a clean-up effort coordinated during non-instruction time.* School-based service learning projects provide an opportunity for students to make real-world connections through academics, while supporting community needs.
- All school-based community service must be pre-approved with signatures from the community service coordinator and principal/designee prior to student being able to accrue valid hours. The documentation must be included in the student's cumulative folder and documented in the student information system, which is currently Aspen. Hours accrued prior to pre-approval will be subject to review by the community service coordinator to determine whether they may be applied toward the graduation requirement.
- Community service hours may not be granted if the student is the recipient of the service. For example, the student cannot receive tutoring services and count those hours for community service. However, if the student is providing tutoring services while partnering with an approved school-based program, the hours gained during non-instruction time can be applied toward community service.

Site Supervisors MUST:

- Ensure community service projects meet a recognized community need (not a company need).
- Verify community service hours by completing & signing the CSH project and hours form.
- Serve as a point of contact for DCPS staff and provide supervision when students are completing their CS project.
- Conduct an on-site orientation that informs students of the organizations mission, policies, CSP, and student responsibilities.

FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions about Community Service

DCPS only guarantees community service activities will count toward your graduation requirement, when they are pre-approved by the school-based community service coordinator and/or central office community service coordinator. Below is a list of commonly asked questions about CSH.

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Q: *Can a student complete CSH at their place of worship (church, temple, mosque, synagogue)?*

A: All community service hours must be non-paying voluntary service, meet a recognized need in the community, and be performed at an organization that has a current tax ID number/EIN set by the Internal Revenue Service. (i.e. feeding the homeless, conducting a coat drive, providing tutoring services, etc.) Students cannot earn hours completing worship services, cleaning the sanctuary, singing in the choir, passing out literature.

LIBRARIES

Q: *Can students complete CSH 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). Public libraries have programs that allow students to participate and earn community service hours.

BABYSITTING

Q: *Can students babysit for to earn CSH?*

A: No, students cannot babysit for neighbors, friends, or family and earn community service hours. However, if a student is helping to address a community need, such as supervising children on-site during a school sponsored PTA meeting or a community health meeting (such as SERVE DC), these hours could count.

CLERICAL/CUSTODIAL

Q: *Does clerical/custodial work count for CSH?*

A: Clerical/custodial tasks must be connected to a recognized community need and fit into the category of an indirect service and cannot be more than 25% of the service experience (e.g., answering phones, stuffing and labeling envelopes, collating, stapling, filing, setting-up and/or breaking-down an event). General work that is considered custodial, janitorial, or clerical tasks cannot count as CSH.

TEACHER'S HELPER

Q: *Can my child work as a teacher's helper and earn CSH?*

A: Yes, if it is direct service for other students such as tutoring and is not during the student's instructional time. However, making copies, grading papers, washing boards, cleaning the classroom, etc... is considered general clerical duties and cannot be used toward CSH. When in doubt, speak with your community service coordinator.

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 non-instructional time) then students can earn CSH.

DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITY

Q: *Our neighbor needs special assistance. Can my child help and earn CSH?*

A: With appropriate planning on the issue affecting your neighbor, this may be turned into a community service project. Students or parents should speak with the school community service coordinator to see if an activity could be developed into a quality community service project.

A: All community service 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 community service 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 earn CSH if they work for a business and/or under an internship or work study program.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

Q: *Can my child campaign for a political candidate/specific issue and earn CSH?*

A: No, this ensures that there is no appearance of the school system encouraging the endorsement of any candidates, issues, or political party.

TEAM MANAGERS/ASSISTANTS

Q: *Can my child earn CSH by being a team manager?*

A: No. While team managers/assistants can be a valuable part of school teams, participation as a manager or assistant does not meet a community need.

COMMUNITY SERVICE VERIFICATION FORM

Q: *Why has DCPS adopted a new form?*

A: DCPS has created a new Community Service Verification Form to ensure our students, organizations, and schools are all aligned to DCPS policies and procedures related to community service hours validation. The form provides for accountability from our organizations, students, and school staff. The form also ensures students are reflecting on the experiences they are gaining in the community. Beginning September 1, 2019, all community service hours must be recorded on this form and completely filled-out prior to submission for approval.

SERVICE LEARNING

Q: *Does DCPS use service-learning projects?*

A: DCPS is in the process of developing Service-Learning projects that will count toward CSH. Service-learning is the process where students support real community needs through academic curriculum connections. The Office of Teaching & Learning along with the School Counseling program are developing projects that are vetted and supported through classroom learning. Service-learning projects are tentatively scheduled to be offered beginning in January 2020.

If there is ever a question about a community service activity and/or if it is permitted to apply to a student's graduation requirement, please reach out to dcps.counseling@dc.gov.