

Educating for the 21st Century

If every student is to become a productive, successful adult, we must create schools that provide an education which is both rigorous and relevant. No longer can we judge the success of our schools on mastery of content alone. We must move schools forward in embracing the full range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will allow students to be successful in a global world. Service-learning is an essential strategy in providing a rigorous and relevant curriculum which will prepare students to succeed in the 21st century.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills has identified a collective vision for the 21st century. Their report includes five key elements of 21st century learning:

- **Core subjects.** Mastering the content of the traditional core subjects remains an important educational focus.
- **21st century content.** Global awareness, financial and economic literacy, civic literacy, and health and wellness awareness are additional content areas which need to be addressed.
- **Learning and thinking skills.** Students must learn to use subject matter knowledge through mastering skills in critical-thinking and problem-solving, communication, creativity and innovation, collaboration, contextual learning, and information and media literacy.
- **Information and communications technology (ICT) literacy.** Skills in using technology to gain subject matter and 21st century content as well as apply that knowledge through using learning and thinking skills in the 21st century context are critical.
- **Life skills.** Life skills of leadership, ethics, accountability,

Our communities depend on citizens who have developed the integrated, critical thinking that is required to meet the challenges of an interconnected world. By learning to apply the knowledge and skills within the context of a global community, students deepen their understanding and increase their ability to think critically and solve problems.

The health of every community, small and large, is strengthened as students learn to see issues through the eyes of others, joining in partnership as they work to better the world around them. Service-learning asks students to identify real community issues that are related to the content-specific skills being addressed within the classroom. A strong sense of belonging and of being needed by the larger world is created as students use those skills to create sustainable change.

A quality education is one that intertwines individual achievement outcomes with educating for the common good. Education must embrace a broader purpose with implications that reach far beyond the individual, deepening the interdependency of individuals whose skills and abilities are needed by those around them. Using the skills and knowledge gained from the core curriculum in carrying out service-learning projects joins the vision for 21st century learning by calling upon students to look deeper, reach higher, and grow as individuals and contributing citizens.