

Planning for Service Learning

Group/Class: Elementary Grade Level

Topic: Environment; Compost and Waste Management

Prepare

Essential Purpose or Question for Service:

How can teaching others about helping the environment enable us to be better students and citizens?

Service Need to Community or Others:

There is too much waste in our community that could be recycled. If the students and community are informed about options for composting, they can choose to participate.

Service Idea: Give it to the Worms
Promote composting at school and in the community.
Investigation of the Need:
Talk to a local group on general composting information, such as Eat Greater Des Moines Food Rescue project or Green Iowa AmeriCorps; have them speak to the students. Interview a food service school employee to learn how the school currently handles unused food. See how students can begin weighing amount of food wasted.
Preparation and Planning:
Study ecosystems, hear guest speakers from local composition initiatives such as Iowa Department Natural Resources (DNR) or Eat Greater Des Moines. Create chart to record waste quantities and reduction. Prepare video presentation on waste management.
Action:
Partner with Eat Greater Des Moines and learn how to build and incorporate compost. Monitor school food waste, donate compost soil to community or school garden, host parent information night with site tour and composting lesson.
Reflection:
Keep journals made from recycled paper (students can create paper recycling collection centers in their school to use for this), weekly meetings to review project success, annual review of progress with DNR and/or Eat Greater Des Moines partners.
Demonstration to Others:
Distribute a newsletter "Worm Ways" to school community. Participate in Chinese New Year parade in March as a giant worm while handing out "Give It to the Worms" brochures about worm bins and composting in Des Moines.

Organize

Service Learning Project Parameters:

Discuss budgeting needs with Eat Greater Des Moines, DNR, or Green Iowa AmeriCorps to gain an accurate understanding of what should be expected for financial needs. See if they will be able to support your efforts since composting aligns with their mission. If they cannot, see what other partners they have who would be able to support you through donations, etc.

Duration/Timeframe of Service Learning Project:

This is a long-term project students will be responsible for through the school year with communication and action. At the beginning, a day a week can be spent on the project, spread out among multiple subject areas. As the process grows more established, 2-3 hours a week can be spent up keeping and monitoring the project. Students may have roles during lunch or other parts of the day.

Youth Voice and Choice:

After investigating the need, students can establish progress plans and roles. Students will reflect with weekly journaling and provide feedback and ideas.

Facilitator Reflections

Skills Developed

Experiencing and Exploring Diversity:

Students used the composting as a way to discuss different foods people eat and their cultural connections. After learning more about Chinese New Year, they added another level of understanding diversity. In creating their brochure, students considered who their audience would be and wrote to a range of populations in the community.

Involvement with Project Management:

Students measured the reduction in garbage waste at school. They also visited each classroom at the beginning of the year to inform students about the compost, and revisited at the beginning of February to see how many students used the compost and how many planned to use it.

Learning About Careers:

Students learned about careers in city development and collective impact to food composition efforts and waste management.

Strengthening Social, Emotional, and Character Traits:

Students strengthened their perseverance and patience. Patience was especially challenging at first since the students wanted results; they wanted everyone to use the compost bins to see the compost “magic” happen! By charting progress, they became more patient and saw how the activities and success evolved over time.

Making Global Connections:

The connection with Chinese New Year added to our sense of celebration occurring in many parts of the world. This was an exciting notion for the students to understand.

Developing Leadership:

Students worked diligently on organizational skills, which are definite traits of leaders. They planned the collection for the compost, formed speaking teams, and tracked details that were essential to progress.

Additional Attributes

Curriculum Connections:

- Social Studies/History-Studied environmentalist with community partners
- Math-Graphed waste quantities
- Science-Studied life cycles; reviewed ecosystems, waste reduction, and composting; maintained compost
- Language-Created Spanish-language signs to place by the compost
- Art and Music-Designed poster campaign
- Technology-Made a brochure and newsletter
- English-Designed a campaign to promote use of school composting and reduce waste at school, wrote letter to parents describing project, wrote newsletter, planned and wrote brochure

Public Awareness or Presentation:

Students wrote a newspaper article reported on the worm at the Chinese New Year parade. Students made presentations and gave tours to parents and community members, including residents of a senior living community.

Other:

Considering how this project can be sustained for next years class, or with these students in future grade levels.