

Service Learning at Lakota

Our role as educators goes well beyond the foundations of reading, writing and math. Academics will always be the core of our work, of course, but no well-rounded education is complete without instilling in our students core values like leadership, teamwork and community service.

All year long, our students and staff are participating in different activities, big and small, that together add up to something big for the people and organizations that need our help. Sometimes, that impacts the community we all live and work in, while other times, it helps students to see the impact their actions can have on a more global scale.

It's something in education we like to call service learning. It can be intersected with any core subject area or practical skill we might teach – so long as the outcome is one that positively impacts the world around us and emphasizes to students the personal responsibility that comes with being part of a community.

One of Lakota's most spirited and longest-running service activities just kicked off last week. Driven by our school board, the "Eastside vs. Westside Reach In for Reach Out Lakota" food drive is the single largest source of donations all year long for the local food and clothing pantry serving many of our own families. Last year the drive brought in right around 15,000 pounds of donations and stocked Reach Out Lakota's shelves through February.

This activity extends beyond the walls of our schools, too. We invite the entire community to contribute to the cause. Please join us at this year's East vs. West football game on Oct. 28 at Lakota East. Drop off your canned goods and other donations right up until kick-off at 7 p.m.

I'm proud to share that many such efforts are student-led. For example, Lakota West's "Volley for the Cure" in support of breast cancer research through the Susan G. Komen Fund, has raised just about \$100,000 over the ten years the event has been held. A similar effort at Lakota East called "Hawks for a Cure" has added another \$50,000 to the fight against breast cancer. Beyond the dollars, these events create a tremendous sense of community collaboration and pride.

Other efforts, such as last year's "Shoe Project," bubble up from individual students with a passion and a drive to make a difference. This student-directed project collected more than 5,200 pairs of shoes from Lakota families for people in our own backyard and in countries all around the world even. This year, one of our seniors made her Girl Scout Gold Award project a book that she published to help adolescent girls maintain a strong sense of self-esteem. Her efforts funded enough copies for every Lakota sixth grade girl to receive one.

We are an organization committed to student learning through community partnership. While some activities remain a constant, the landscape of service learning around Lakota changes by the year. After all, the best lessons are taught – and the biggest impact made – when we empower students to give back in the causes that inspire them most.

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