

High School Service Learning Requirement: Phase 1

Westlake Board of Education
Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)
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Executive Summary

Westlake High School currently has what it calls a service-learning program that requires students to complete 60 hours of community service (15 hours per academic year) prior to graduation. This requirement is not truly a service-learning program, but rather a community service graduation requirement. Originally, the CAC's research was focusing on the best practices for offering a service-learning program. Since the Ohio Department of Education recently announced new graduation requirements for classes graduating in 2023 and beyond, including a locally offered community service "seal", this CAC report (Phase 1) includes ideas for considering how to structure the requirements for earning the community service seal, in addition to ideas for offering a supplemental service program.

The first consideration for the Westlake BOE and WCSD is to define the objective of earning a WHS community service seal. Will the seal provide an easier pathway to graduation? Or, will the seal recognize students who are passionate about service? Or, does the district want to ensure every student graduates with service experience? Or, will earning the seal enhance a student's college application? Based on the WCSD's objective of earning the seal, not only will guidelines for the number of hours and related service project need to be defined, but the requirements for earning and administering the seal will need to be thoroughly and thoughtfully established and communicated.

The next consideration is whether WHS will offer an additional service program opportunity that goes beyond the community service seal requirements. The same questions listed above must be addressed when deciding the objective of offering such a program and whether to do so, with one observation. If the district primarily wants to offer an opportunity for students to enhance their college applications, then allowing students to voluntarily participate in community service without a graduation requirement might be the best approach. Feedback from Ohio public and private universities revealed that, in general, they do not look specifically at formal, required service as a positive on college applications. Rather, they are more interested in what a student does of their own initiative with their free time.

Whether the Westlake BOE and WCSD decide to just offer the ODE community service seal, or the seal plus another service option, the program(s) must have clearly defined and communicated requirements and guidelines, and have the necessary administrative support and oversight to ensure effective and meaningful student compliance and participation.

Project Definition

Topic approved by Westlake City School District’s Board of Education: Reevaluate current program and identify best practices for service-learning requirement at high school level.

Project Scope: The scope of the CAC’s research is focused on service learning at the high school level.

Phase I Project Focus: The focus of this research is to present best practices for service-learning programs while addressing:

1. WHS student perspective
2. College/university perspective
3. Peer high school perspective

Phase II Project Focus: This additional research will be presented in April 2020.

4. Community organizations perspective

ODE Graduation Requirement - Community Service “Seal”: With new Ohio Department of Education graduation requirements, including a locally defined community service seal, the CAC’s ideas for consideration focus on how to structure the requirements for earning the community service seal and, if necessary, the requirements for an additional service program.

Introduction - Service-Learning vs. Community Service

While researching service-learning programs and community service requirements in other high schools/school districts, it became apparent that the various types of programs/requirements could be grouped into 3 different categories.

1. A true service-learning program where the service activity/project is integrated with the curriculum. Per Youth.gov, service-learning is defined as follows. (<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering/service-learning>)

The term “service-learning” was defined in Federal legislation for the first time in the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (as amended through December 17, 1999, P.L. 106-170; Section 101 (23) and reauthorized through the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009):

The term “service-learning” means a method

1. *under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that*
 - *is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;*

- *is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and*
- *helps foster civic responsibility; and*

2. *that*

- *is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and*
- *provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience.*

2. A community service graduation requirement.

3. Voluntary community service that is not a graduation requirement.

Each type of service program has benefits, and many overlap, however, there are some differences, as indicated in the following chart.

Key Benefits	Service Learning	Required Community Service	Voluntary Community Service
Enhances classroom learning & connects students' experiences with academic concepts	X		
Integrated into curriculum	X		
Structured time for self reflection	X	X	
Development of social skills, civic engagement skills, personal development & self confidence	X	X	X
Builds positive relationship with school and community	X	X	X

For this Phase 1 report, the CAC's research of service-learning/community service considered input from current WHS students regarding the existing service program; colleges/universities' admissions departments; and peer high schools' programs.

Current Westlake High School Program

The current WHS service-learning program became a graduation requirement about 10 years ago. While the requirement is called a service-learning program, it is actually a community service requirement. The key components of this graduation requirement are:

- 15 hour of community service per academic year, for a total of 60 hours over 4 years
- Students choose the service activities in which they participate
- No approval of the service activity is required either before or after service occurs
- Service performed as part of school clubs' service activities counts towards requirement
- Service related to school events qualifies (e.g.Open House, parent/teacher conferences)
- Students must have a verification form signed by an adult overseeing each service activity
- Students must write a brief, reflective paragraph on one service activity
- Administration of program is not centralized
 - one individual inputs students' service hours;
 - one individual communicates service opportunities on website;
 - counselors and/or assistant principals meet with students not meeting requirements

Westlake High School Student Perspective

To gather feedback from Westlake High School students regarding WHS's existing "service-learning" graduation requirement, 350 students in grades 9-12 were surveyed during English classes in February 2020.

Students responded to several key questions about the high school's service learning requirement.

- **How do students learn about the service requirement & opportunities?**
- **How many hours do students serve per year?**
- **When do most students obtain their service hours?**
- **Where do students serve?**

Observations:

- The survey results indicated that students learn about service opportunities in a variety of different ways.
 - Guidance counselors
 - Family and friends
 - WHS clubs and organizations
 - District website
- It was also largely agreeable among students that the service learning requirement is an effective way of involving students in the community
 - Some went further to say students would not volunteer without this prerequisite

Analysis:

- Students may participate in more meaningful volunteering if there was a central source to gather information and communicate about service learning.
- Scattered locations of service engagement suggest that students are encouraged to participate in small, short-term activities rather than more long-sustained service commitments and/or service projects.
- If students will be required to complete a community service project in the future...
 - A single source informing students about opportunities may give students more reason to choose one cause or one passion that they would like to pursue for the service learning requirement.
- Changes to the program's infrastructure should align with what the district hopes students attain from participating in community service.

College/University Perspective

From what the CAC has been told, the introduction of a service graduation requirement at WHS was due to the implementation of the International Baccalaureate Program and the belief that colleges wanted to see students participating in such programs. Since this was the impetus for this requirement, the CAC contacted admissions departments at various Ohio public and private universities to determine how they factor service-learning and community service into their college application admission decisions.

The universities contacted were:

- Ashland University
- CWRU
- Cleveland State University (CSU)
- Miami University
- OSU
- Ohio University (OU)
- University of Dayton (UD)
- University of Toledo

Summary:

When reviewing applications for admission, **Ashland, CSU, Miami, and Toledo** primarily focus on academics and/or test scores, and don't consider service. However, Miami indicated that once a student is admitted, they may be considered eligible for leadership roles or other university programs, such as the Honors program, based on their service involvement.

The other universities (**CWRU, OSU, OU and UD**) all indicated that they take a holistic or "selective holistic" approach to reviewing college applications. Specifically, **OU** does not look at service separately as a "positive", but such participation may influence the holistic review.

CWRU, OSU and UD consider service as an indicator of some or all of the following: commitment and engagement in the community; global awareness; how free time is used, whether in work, service,

extra-curriculars; or, as in UD's case, what was learned from the service experience and how the applicant will fit in with the university's core values of "learn, lead and service."

Ashland University:

Involvement in a service learning program and/or community service does not specifically influence admission decisions, rather such involvement is considered as part of the student's total application. However, a student's community service involvement may be shared with other areas/departments/organizations on campus. For example, if a student is declared an undecided major, they may receive information about majors to consider based on their work and volunteer experience.

CWRU:

Extra consideration for formal service learning programs or community service graduation requirements is not given. In fact, these programs might work against the student when applying for admission. Admissions considers how the student is involved when it's of their own initiative and not mandated; level of involvement in the community; and pattern of activity with commitment, such as hours per week at the same service activity or just a few locations/events. Many random volunteer/service activities (such as one hour sessions at various organizations/events) don't add up to a significant commitment and really don't add anything to a student's application. Admissions also considers a student's recommendations, which may provide an indication as to what the student is involved in and their level of commitment.

Overall, Admissions' goal is to understand the student, what they do with their free time, and how involved/engaged they are in the community, with the idea that this represents how involved the student will be if they attend CWRU. Such involvement may include work, extra-curricular activities, and community service.

Cleveland State University:

Service-learning/community service is not considered for undergraduate admissions. At the graduate level, a personal statement including current volunteer or community involvement may be applicable to certain programs, such as social work.

Miami University:

Academics is the main consideration in the application review process. It is the "first filter". If an application is "wanting" in this area, that's the end of the application. Specifically, the following are reviewed: (1) Scores –ACT, SAT; (2) Class standing; (3) high school's academic rigor.

After a student is accepted for admission, service-learning/volunteering experiences may be considered when determining a student's potential eligibility or participation in some of the university programs, such as the Honors program, or leadership roles. Or, for the student who might be on the "threshold " of being accepted, service is one intangible that might be considered. Ultimately, "academics" settles most of their admissions decisions.

OSU:

Each application is reviewed individually in a holistic manner, balancing academics, leadership and commitment. There is no service requirement for OSU, however, it is a component in the application review process that might demonstrate global awareness, dedication and commitment.

During the review, there is virtually no distinction between a formal service-learning program and community service/ volunteer experience. Although, if this involvement were a featured part of the student's essay, the admission's officer would consider it part of the "holistic" picture of the candidate.

Probably more significant than "service" is "commitment and engagement." The student who demonstrates four years in the Band is more "valued" than someone who completed four different activities.

Ohio University:

Admissions conducts a "selective holistic review" and will look at whatever information the student provides. However, while service-learning and/or community service hours are nice to see, they are not required. Also, students are not required to do an application essay for OU, but community service experiences often show up in those essays when a student opts to submit one. This will give a better, fuller picture of the applicant.

Independent/voluntary (not mandatory) service hours and service learning programs specifically could carry more weight, depending on the program for which a student is applying. For example, if the applicant is applying to the Honors program, it would definitely be of benefit, however, it may depend on the team of reviewers as to how relevant it is in the end.

University of Dayton:

Admissions reviews everything the student submits, and encourages applicants to submit everything they've done. This gives Admissions the best overall picture of each applicant as a person. Community service and service-learning are positives when looking at applicants, especially when it comes to writing the required essay and for scholarships. The review is more about the overall picture of the applicant and what they learned from a service experience. Whether it was mandatory or not is not of great importance. UD's core values are 'learn, lead and service', and as a Catholic institution the service aspect is particularly important to them. They want to know that students will fit in and that they will have the best chance of being successful when they leave UD.

University of Toledo:

Admissions decisions are made solely based on GPA and ACT/SAT test scores.

Peer High Schools Perspective

The CAC researched and/or contacted a number of northeast Ohio high schools, both public and private, to determine what type of service programs are being offered and their requirements, and how they are administered.

The high schools researched were:

- Avon Lake
- Magnificat
- North Olmsted
- Rocky River
- St. Edward's
- St. Ignatius
- Solon
- Strongsville

Summary:

The **private high schools (St. Edward's, St. Ignatius, Magnificat)** each have very structured and well-defined service-learning programs built into the curriculum as a graduation requirement. Each has faculty within their Theology/Religion Department devoted to the related course instruction and the administration/oversight of students' service activities/projects. Some even provide transportation to service locations during the school day. St. Ignatius' program, Sophomore Service, is essentially completed during a student's sophomore year, while St. Edward's program, Community Service Program, is part of the freshmen and sophomore religion curriculum, but culminates in a service project during junior and senior years.

The **public high schools** contacted either didn't have a structured service program or offered varied forms of such programs. Avon Lake and Rocky River have two very different offerings. Avon Lake has a Community Service Organization where student participation is voluntary. In fact, within their Program of Studies it specifically defines the Avon Lake High School's Mission regarding Community Service and states that "civic responsibility should also reflect the desire of an individual to want to make their community better; therefore, this will remain a voluntary organization." While voluntary, the school recognizes those students who participate in a minimum of 30 hours of service with an Honors cord at graduation.

Rocky River offers a semester-long elective Service Learning course within the Family and Consumer Sciences department. The focus is on civic responsibility and community involvement, while exploring local and global issues, and culminates in the implementation of a service-learning project.

St. Edwards, St. Ignatius, Magnificat:

- Formal service-learning program
- Graduation requirement
- Incorporated into required religion class or service-learning class
- 30 + hours
- Pre-approved community agencies
- Juniors define service project (Ed's)
- Transportation provided during day
- Administered by dedicated staff member (Religion/Theology department)
- Journal, reflection paper, presentation

Rocky River:

- Elective class (.5 credit)
- Administered within Family and Consumer Sciences department
- 15 hours service per quarter
- Pre-approval required
- Explore local and global issues
- Service-learning project
- Per Rocky River High School Course Catalog 2019/2020:

Service Learning course

Service Learning is a semester-long course designed for students to explore what service learning is and to develop a mindset about civic responsibility through active community involvement. Students will explore local and global issues and develop ways that some of these issues can be addressed. As a capstone, students will implement a service learning project that benefits their community and the world.

Avon Lake:

- Per Avon Lake High School Student Handbook 2019/2020:

Community Service Organization

The Avon Lake High School Community Service Organization is open to all ALHS students who have a desire to help their community by volunteering service hours for worthwhile projects. Students who volunteer a minimum of thirty community service hours will receive an honor cord at graduation. Students participating in the organization are responsible for selecting the service, contacting the supervisor of each activity, transportation to and from the service site, performing work, documenting the service performed, and returning all necessary forms to the community service office.

Senior Cords:

- Summa Cum Laude Cord 4.5 and up – Maroon, Gold, and White Twisted
- Magna Cum Laude Cord 4.0-4.49 – Maroon and Gold Tied
- Cum Laude 3.5-3.9 – Gold Cord
- National Honor Society – Blue Cord
- Military Cord – Red, White, and Blue Twisted
- **Community Service- White Cord**

- Senior Project – Black Cord
- Per Avon Lake High School Program of Studies 2019/2020:

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Our Mission:

- To foster a spirit of civic duty and motivation within the students of Avon Lake High School to help others within this community.
- To assist those students seeking out opportunities to make a difference by offering them the chance to do so.
- To recognize students for the work they do that improves our community.

Civic Duty and Responsibility:

- ALHS firmly believes in the benefits of service education and will provide its students with the chance to become involved in making their community a better place to live.
- Civic responsibility **should also reflect the desire of an individual** to want to make their community better; therefore, **this will remain a voluntary organization.**

ODE Community Service Seal

The Ohio Department of Education recently introduced new graduation requirements for the class of 2023 and beyond, including a locally defined community service seal. The initial focus of the CAC’s research was on best practices for service-learning programs, but the new community service seal graduation option required the CAC to adjust the research focus to provide information relevant for how to structure the requirements for earning the community service seal.

In general, the new ODE **Assessment & Graduation Requirements - Class of 2023 and Beyond** specify the following graduation requirements.

1. Course Completion - State minimum - 20 units
2. Competency Demonstration - English language arts and mathematics OR alternatives (testing)
3. Readiness Demonstration - Earn at least two diploma “seals”, one must be state defined. Three (3) locally defined seals, one of which is the:
 - a. **Community Service Seal** - “Complete a community service project aligned with the guidelines adopted by the student’s local board of education or school governing authority.”

Peer Schools - Proposed Seal Requirements

Kathi Maxwell, Associate Superintendent of Instruction (7-12) provided the CAC with the information in the chart below. It was gathered from various northeast Ohio high schools in response to an impromptu email survey attempting to assess how many hours high schools are planning to require to earn the community service seal. In some cases the school has an existing service program, but most do not.

School District	Current Community Service Hours	Proposed Community Service “Seal” Hours
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Avon & Avon Lake	--	30
Bay Village	--	40
Beachwood	50	50
Brunswick	--	110+
Cleveland Hts/ University Hts	--	40-50
Cuyahoga Hts	60	60
Garfield Heights	--	50-60
Norton	10 (as seniors)	10 (as seniors)
Olmsted Falls	--	10-20
Solon	--	50-60
Strongsville	--	90-100
Wadsworth	10	10
Westlake	60	TBD

Most schools have not defined the criteria for earning a community service seal, but a few have some general **proposed** guidelines.

Bay Village:

Students who want to earn a seal will present their project proposal to the Bay High School Graduation Pathway Committee for approval. The project will involve 40 hours of service activities. Once the project is completed, the student will get verification from an adult leader of the community service organization.

Avon Lake:

Student will get pre-approval of a service project, to include 30 hours of service. Upon completion, student will get verification from a designee of the administration.

Norton:

Service requirement/project of 10 hours will only be required for senior year.

Define Objective of Community Service Seal

Before the criteria for earning the community service seal can be defined, the Westlake BOE and WSCD must define the objective of earning a WHS community service seal. The CAC has identified 3 potential objectives of earning the seal and a general approach for defining the number of hours and related service project to earn the seal in each case.

1. **Easier pathway to graduation?** If the district wants to provide an opportunity for students to earn this seal by meeting minimal requirements, then consider requiring fewer hours and a minor service project.
2. **Recognize students who are passionate about service?** If the district wants to provide a way to recognize those students who are truly passionate about service, then consider requiring a greater number of hours and a major service project.
3. **Inculcate a service-focused attitude in students by requiring every student graduate with community service hours?** If the district wants to ensure that every WHS graduate has community service experience, then consider requiring a consistent number of hours each year, with a minimum number of the total hours to be applied towards a service project.
4. **Enhance college applications?** If the district wants to provide a structured opportunity for students to perform community service to be reflected on college applications, then any of the previous three options would suffice. However, colleges have indicated that voluntary community service is just as good, or even better, than structured or mandated service.

Define Requirements of Community Service Seal

Once the Westlake BOE and WSCD define the objective of earning the community service seal, then the requirements must be defined and should address the following.

- Total number of service hours
 - Fewer hours if the goal is to make this easier for students
 - More hours if the goal is to recognize students who are passionate about service
- Number of service hours that must be devoted to the service project (This may be the total number of hours, or a portion of the total.)
- Pre-approval of service project
 - Who will approve?
 - When can projects be approved? (e.g. certain times during the school year?)
 - How will the approval process work?
 - What format must students use for project proposal? What must be included?
- Administration and oversight of seal requirements
- Guidelines of service project and/or service hours:
 - Must be completed individually or may be completed by a small group (Define size of small group)

- Accept service hours from other clubs or organizations (e.g. NHS, Boy Scouts)?
- Accept service hours for in-school work (e.g. open house, conferences, working in office)?
- Accept service hours for neighborhood work (e.g. cutting grass, raking leaves, babysitting)?
- Should the different service hours be weighted? (e.g. 50% for in-school service; 100% for community service organization)
- What organizations qualify for community service?
- How is project completion verified?

Beyond the Seal - Additional Service Program Options

The CAC's original focus was to research best practices for high school service-learning programs. While the new community service seal will offer an option for students to participate in community service to fulfill a graduation requirement, it may not meet the school district's objectives for what is offered to WHS students.

In addition to the community service seal, the WCSD may want to consider whether an additional service "program" opportunity should be provided to WHS students. The CAC has identified three (3) options.

1. Voluntary community service only - If the district wants to provide an opportunity for students to participate in community service that may be reflected on their college applications, then consider allowing students to participate in service voluntarily, based on their own initiative, without any WCSD oversight, requirements, or involvement. The implications of this option:

- This is not an official WHS program
- There is no cost to the district
- No administration is needed since the school doesn't track or provide oversight
- This is an acceptable approach for colleges
- Consider communicating benefits of volunteering to students to encourage voluntary service

2. Community Service graduation requirement - If the district wants to inculcate a service-focused attitude in students and ensure that every WHS graduate has community service experience, then consider requiring a consistent number of service hours each year. The current WHS community service graduation requirement meets this objective, however, the requirements and administration of the program need to be revisited. Specifically:

- Improve guidelines
- Improve administration:
 - Tracking
 - Centralized/dedicated oversight
 - Communication
 - Reflection, verify completion

3. True Service-Learning Program - If the district wants to offer WHS students the opportunity to participate in a true service-learning program, integrated with curriculum, the CAC has identified two (2) options.

- A. Implement an optional/elective service-learning course, similar to Rocky River's course.
 - a. Offered to students who enroll in this elective course
 - b. Requires dedicated staffing for instruction, which includes administration
 - c. Requires clear objectives and requirements (planning)
 - d. Ties to specific subject/curriculum, integrated within coursework

- B. Implement a service-learning program.
 - a. Open to all students as an available, optional program
 - b. Requires dedicated staffing to administer
 - c. Requires clear objectives and requirements (planning)
 - d. Ties to specific subjects/curriculum
 - e. Could require multi-department involvement depending on how program can be integrated with curriculum

Beyond the Seal - Define Requirements of Additional Service Program

Once the Westlake BOE and WCSD determine if an additional community service or service-learning program will be offered at WHS, then the requirements must be defined and should address the following. (These are the same items to be considered when defining the community seal requirements.)

- Total number of service hours
 - Fewer hours if the goal is to make this easier for students
 - More hours if the goal is to recognize students who are passionate about service
- Number of service hours that must be devoted to the service project (This may be the total number of hours, or a portion of the total.)
- Pre-approval of service project
 - Who will approve?
 - When can projects be approved? (e.g. certain times during the school year?)
 - How will the approval process work?
 - What format must students use for project proposal? What must be included?
- Administration and oversight of seal requirements
- Guidelines of service project and/or service hours:
 - Must be completed individually or may be completed by a small group (Define size of small group)
 - Accept service hours from other clubs or organizations (e.g. NHS, Boy Scouts)?
 - Accept service hours for in-school work (e.g. open house, conferences, working in office)?

- Accept service hours for neighborhood work (e.g. cutting grass, raking leaves, babysitting)?
- Should the different service hours be weighted? (e.g. 50% for in-school service; 100% for community service organization)
- What organizations qualify for community service?
- How is project completion verified?

Additional Resources

- **Ideas for Consideration** - A complete list of ideas resulting from the CAC research can be found at [Service Learning Ideas for Consideration](#).
- New Ohio Department of Education graduation requirements can be found at [ODE Assessment & Graduation Requirements Classes of 2021 and Beyond](#).
- The CAC Report Phase 2, addressing the community service graduation requirement from the perspective of community organizations, will be presented in April 2020.