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A Guide to Service Learning

Richard D. Pertzborn

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A Guide to Service Learning

Richard D. Pertzborn, Principal
River Bluff Middle School
March 1, 1999

"What we do for ourselves, dies with us. What we do for our community, lives long after we are gone."
Theodore Roosevelt
River Bluff Middle School
A Guide to Service Learning

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1. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

I would like to acknowledge the sources of information used in the development of this guide. These sources were instrumental in providing me with valuable information and ideas for this guide. I thank the authors for their leadership and innovation in the field of service learning.


• **Learn and Serve America:** Guidelines for Youth Service Learning and Adult Volunteer Partnerships. Wisconsin Service Learning/Local School-Based Programs. Student Survey - Secondary Schools (PI-Q98-1, Rev. 7/98). Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

• **River Bluff Site Update.** Stoughton Area Schools. March 24, 1998.

• Dr. Timothy K. Stanton, "To Strengthen Service Learning Policy and Practice: Stories from the Field". May 1996


• State of Wisconsin, Department of Public Instruction, 125 S. Webster Street, P.O. Box 7841, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7841. www.dpi.state.wi.us.
GLOSSARY

Service Learning: "The term 'Service Learning' means a method:

A. under which students learn and develop through active participation;

B. that is integrated into the students' academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the service activity;

C. that provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and

D. that enhances what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring for others."

National and Community Service Act of 1990

In other words, Service Learning is not the same as:

• Volunteerism: Volunteers engage in service for a variety of personal reasons. They do not necessarily link their service to academic studies, nor do they receive academic credit for their efforts.

• Community Service: People engaging in community service do so for a variety of reasons. This is a broad term that can encompass court-ordered, stipend, or volunteer service. It does not necessarily link to academic studies.

• Word Study Internship: Student interns frequently work at non-profit businesses. The students' goal is not necessarily aimed at improving their communities.
3. Mission Statement

The mission of River Bluff Middle School, a learning community, committed to excellence and dedicated to meeting the unique needs of adolescents, to ensure exceptional learning performance to achieve success in high school and promote the common good.

River Bluff Site Update 3/24/98

"But for fate, we... the fortunate and the unfortunate... might have been each other"...
President Bill Clinton, 1993 Inaugural Address
4. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to facilitate successful and meaningful service learning activities for middle school students at River Bluff Middle School. Middle school students involved in service learning activities are positively impacted and provide a service to the community.

This guide provides a description of procedures and examples to be followed. The information included in the guide is intended for use by middle school staff to assist in developing and implementing service learning activities. Students learn and develop through active participation in organized service learning experiences that meet community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with school staff and community leaders.

Additionally, this guide will provide instruction to staff which will enhance the curriculum by extending student learning beyond the classroom experience and into the community, which fosters the development of a sense of caring for others.

River Bluff's goal is to enhance student academic achievement while preparing students for active citizenship in our community. The purpose of service learning initiatives is to engage young people in our community and to develop in them the ethics of care and service, and a commitment to promote the common good.

---

Not to know is bad.  
Not to want to know is worse.  
Not to hope is unthinkable.  
Not to care if unforgivable.  
Johnetta Cole, President of Spellman College
5. THE IDEA

In 1995, a small group of service learning practitioners (total = 26) met at the Wingsread Center in Racine, Wisconsin, to analyze data relative to service learning. The goal of the conference was to share, discuss, and analyze service learning practices. Conference members hoped to formulate ideas to strengthen the practice of service learning which would promote future initiatives.

One of the major themes articulated by the conference members was the fact that service learning focuses on student development. It personalizes education by helping students relate to what they are learning. The service learning activity also helps students connect with the community. Many teachers engaging in this practice agree. **This should also be the focus of our building.**

Although there is not much quantitative data available on service learning, this conference endorsed the following ideas:

- Efforts should be made to make the service learning "community" more inclusive and representative of society as a whole.
- Most effectively, service learning combines experience, critical reflection, and subject matter knowledge in a way that increases the learner's skill development, has a positive impact on communities, and promotes a democratic commitment to social justice.
- There is a need to clarify and debate the varied purposes and definitions that exist in service learning.
• The focus on service learning practices needs to be shared with community partners.

• Understand and except the fact that there are always varied outcomes through the practices contained in service learning.

The outcomes of this conference will, hopefully, strengthen the field and its current status, and will promote future initiatives.
6. WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

Service learning is a teaching tool by which students apply classroom skills to solve real-life problems in their communities. A form of experiential learning, service learning enhances student learning by placing it in the context of real-life situations.

Service learning is, however, more than discrete acts of community service. Community service becomes service learning when it is connected to classroom learning and contains opportunities for students to reflect upon their experience.

From the Rural Clearinghouse Digest on Service Learning
July 1995, Volume 2, No. 2

"As powerful and as exciting as any education innovation and practice ... service learning is still very much an amorphous concept which continues to resist rigid definitions and universal understanding."

Robert Shumer
8. WHY SERVICE LEARNING? THE BENEFITS

Service learning means different things to different people. One point is clear, the benefits are enormous. Service learning initiatives will provide a range of benefits for the variety of individuals involved.

For 7th-8th Grade Students, service learning will ...

- enhance citizenship, character, civic pride, and leadership skills
- increase academic and vocational achievement
- increase an understanding of what is required to succeed in our society
- enhance personal growth and self-esteem
- develop a sense of connection to their community
- provide access to caring adults as role models and mentors.

For 7th-8th Grade Staff, service learning will ...

- facilitate a relationship among service learning staff
- highlight classroom and community accomplishments
- provide service and service learning resources, including best practices, research data, and strategies to promote and initiate community projects
- contribute to professional growth of staff
- develop a greater sense of purpose among staff
- encourage communication among staff to discuss ways for integrating service learning into other curricular areas.
For communities, service learning will...

- provide a safer and healthier community as a result of student, school, and community efforts
- reduce the number of disconnected youth
- increase a positive perception of youth (i.e., youth are a resource rather than a liability)
- create relationships and models of collaboration between school and community
- continue to cultivate community partnerships.

Additional benefits of service learning include...

- an increase in the relevancy of the curriculum to students
- personalizing the students' education
- encouraging students to become members of their community
- teaching job skills to students
- encouraging staff to be innovative and creative in their teaching
- empowering students as learners and teachers
- increasing retention through hands-on activities.
8. SERVICE LEARNING PRINCIPLES

- Students initiate and provide a needed service to individuals or non-profit organizations in the community.
- The service activity must relate to the subject matter of the course objectives.
- Classroom activities provide methods for students to think about and discuss what they have learned through the service learning experience.
- The classroom activities offer a way to assess the learning derived from the service activity. Credit is given for the learning, not for the service alone.
- Service project partners in the community understand the needs of the involved students and offer them the opportunity to evaluate the service learning activity.
- The service learning opportunities are aimed at the development of civic and community pride, even though they focus on course objectives.
- The classroom offers opportunities for class members to learn from one another, as well as from the instructor.
- Students should not be forced into participating in any kind of service activities.
- Service learning programs should be open for all students.
- Students should take an active part in the development of the service project and be responsible for affecting the direction of the activity.

"Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."
President John F. Kennedy
9. STARTING AND INITIATING A SERVICE LEARNING ACTIVITY; FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When starting a service learning activity, staff need to address the following questions. Although it may seem like an overwhelming process, the questions will help staff clarify their intentions and will provide meaningful direction. An Initiation Matrix will be found in Appendix A.

• What type of service compliments your course objectives?
• What community and professional organizations exist to address your needs?
• Is there a community need that your students can address and work on? What will they be doing? Reminder: the activity needs to be a meaningful learning experience.
• Does your class timeline fit with the magnitude of the project and the other organization’s schedule? Does it need to be a quarter-, semester-, or year-long activity?
• Assuming credit or a grade will be given for the activity performed, how many hours of service will you and the outside organization expect from each student?
• How will you help students relate the service experience to the course objective?
• How will you monitor your students in the community when the service activity is going on? Will you use evaluation forms, phone contacts, memos, etc.?
• What are your specific goals for the service learning project?
• How will you get your students to understand that one goal of a service learning activity is to help them grow and be better citizens in their community?
• How and when will you have students reflect on their experiences?

• Does the activity or your curriculum contain sensitive and/or potentially controversial material? How will you deal with it?
10. The "Test": Is Your Project a Service Learning Activity?

The following questions will help you define if the project you have selected for your students is truly a service learning activity.

- Are the students involved in planning the project? Are community groups, agencies, and organizations partners in the project? How?
- Is the service learning project meeting a real and meaningful community need? How was the need determined and identified? Who is the beneficiary of the service?
- Is the service activity connected with classroom learning and curriculum? What about after-school projects?
- Is there an opportunity for students to reflect on the experience? Do the students talk or write about what happened? How are the students involved in the planning and evaluation of the next project?
11. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR STAFF MONITORING STUDENT SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

Some student projects may be somewhat controversial. Therefore, staff will want to ensure that students are formulating their own ideas, and implementing service learning projects that are not influenced by the opinions of teachers, school administrators, or community leaders. The following guidelines will help with sensitive projects.

- Allow students the opportunity to select the problem or issue they will study.
- Instruct students to examine a variety of sources concerning the problem or issue.
- Present a variety of opinions relating to the course of such problems and possible solutions.
- Allow students to choose their position on the problem. Students may work individually or in small groups to take a position.
- Require students to explain and defend their position.
- Establish classroom rule to handle discussions which may, at times, become controversial (e.g., treating others with respect and dignity).
12. **SAMPLE LIST OF SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS**

**English**

1. Write and publish a newsletter for a building or street.
2. Write and publish a personal history of the neighborhood.
3. Become a penpal. Obvious choices are the homebound, residents of senior citizens homes, students at other schools, and long-term hospitalized patients.
4. Tutor other students who have difficulty with their academic classes. Such a program could run internally or externally.
5. Set up a reading or story-telling time for children that are hospitalized.
6. Lobby congress. Write letters to political leaders on issues of concern. Attend and speak at town meetings.
7. Write letters to the editors of newspapers.
8. Help recent immigrants to learn to read.
9. Write letters of protest to companies that harm the environment.
10. Adopt a class in a local elementary school. Develop joint projects.
11. Develop an after-school reading program for latch-key children.
12. Get local senior citizen residents to write about their children. Discussion groups could be formed to discuss change that have occurred over time.
13. Record favorite children stories on tape and donate them to local daycare centers, hospitals, libraries, or schools.
14. Read for the blind.
15. Organize a letter-writing campaign on an important issue.
16. Have each student in the class write about a local hero and put the writings together in a book.
17. Develop a directory of local agencies that agree to involve students in meaningful service projects.
18. Get books and audio tapes for homebound people.
19. Write a regular column for the local paper.
20. Publish a newsletter for the local food bank or soup kitchen.
21. Record classroom texts and reading materials for students with disabilities.

**Social Studies**

1. Research local history of the Revolutionary War. Develop maps and tours for other classes.
2. Interview local senior citizens in regard to experiences in the areas of civil rights or American Wars.
3. Interview different ethnic groups in regard to religion, holiday celebrations, family responsibilities, and customs.
4. Organize a block association.
5. Meet with local officials and discuss issues of concern.
Social Studies (cont.)

6. Interview recent immigrants to America. Discuss difficulties encountered in coming to America. Talk about cultural differences.
7. Study and restore local historic sites.
8. Reenact historic events at local schools.
9. Develop a walking tour of local areas.
10. Become penpals with students of another country.
11. Develop a booklet for younger students on local places of interest and various activities they can participate in.
12. Research the needs of people in oppressed areas. Collect items to send them, such as clothing, personal items, and medical supplies.
13. Run a social commitment week where every student of the school is asked to sign up for at least 1 project.
14. Work for a political candidate.
15. Sponsor a debate between people with opposing views.
16. Interview people who utilize soup kitchens.
17. Help prepare new immigrants for the citizenship exam.
18. Register voters.
19. Study world hunger. Develop a fund raiser to support a program in a specific country.
20. Set up programs within the school which allow students to share the culture of their country's origin.

Science

1. Adopt trees which surround the school.
2. Make compost.
3. Learn how to test soil and water.
4. Offer the community a testing service.
5. Study the common causes of fire in the home and how to escape a fire. Teach these skills to younger children. The Red Cross can provide the training.
6. Set up a school-wide recycling program.
7. Beautify a block.
8. Organize an animal rights club.
9. Start a bird watching club.
10. Volunteer at local parks.
11. Work with a local humane society.
13. Find sources of pollution of local creeks and lobby to stop the cause of the pollution.
15. Volunteer at a local botanical garden or zoological garden.
Science (cont.)

16. Offer to tutor younger students in science.
17. Transform an empty lot into a garden.
18. Develop a video on proper care of pets.
19. Adopt a daycare center and take them on field trips to museums, nature centers, parks, and zoos.

Foreign Language

1. Run a school-wide food fair in which students cook favorite dishes of their country of origin.
2. Help prepare immigrants for their GED exam.
3. Run English classes for adults.
4. Have students make 3' x 5' flags of their birth countries and hang them.
5. Set up discussion groups during lunch periods.
6. Teach residents at local senior citizen residences Spanish.
7. Develop a program that welcomes new immigrant students into the school. Offer maps, introductions to students who speak the same language and a list of rules and regulations in native language.
8. Tutor students in foreign languages.
9. Provide translators to the community for shopping, trips to the doctor, banks, immigration offices, etc.
10. Make sure important school notices are produced in several languages.
11. Become telephone pals to non-English speaking adults.
12. Assist non-English speakers with tax and other forms.
13. Organize an ethnic dance program.
14. Invite other students to share religious observance.
15. Pair off students and let them find at least ten things that they have in common.
16. Have them write and talk about their similarities and differences.

Math

1. Set up a tutoring program for younger students.
2. Help adults prepare for the math portion of the GED.
3. Develop a monthly budget for a family of four living on welfare.
4. Develop a profile and statistical analysis of people who eat at a local soup kitchen.
5. Do the same for families living in a local shelter.
6. Live for a week on the same food budget of a welfare family.
7. Help design a garden for a local garden group.
8. Study the rate of HIV infection in various areas of the city.
9. Discuss the implications of rising birth rates among teenagers.
Math (cont.)

10. Interview local businessmen about the ways they use math.
11. Put a book together to illustrate sample applications.
12. Do animal and tree inventories for the national parks.
13. Make a graph of the structure of local government.
15. Run computer classes for adults.
16. Develop a school website.
17. Develop review sheets for each math level.

Art and Music

1. Decorate school walls with murals on harmony and non-violence.
2. Paint murals on walls of local shelters, daycare centers, and soup kitchens.
4. Organize a mural squad which offers its services to community organizations and local merchants.
5. Display artwork at hospitals and senior citizen residences.
6. Draw portraits at a local senior citizen residence.
7. Establish an anti-graffiti squad.
8. Play concerts at local hospitals, shelters, etc.
9. Teach children to play instruments at local daycare centers.
10. Design T-shirts, bumper stickers, and notepads.
11. Sell above items to raise money for school projects.
12. Create a sculpture garden.
14. Decorate pumpkins for HIV-positive children right after they get their annual flu shots.
15. Run a team and banner contest for the school.
16. Hang the banners in the school gym.
17. Run photography classes for the community.
18. Create a photograph journal of the neighborhood.
20. Photograph children from poor or homeless families. Make picture albums to give to their parents.
21. Decorate school for the various annual holiday. Do the same at hospitals and community center.
22. Teach songs to younger children.
23. Sing with a group of senior citizens.
24. Raise funds to purchase musical instruments and lessons for poor children.
25. Form a community orchestra or band.
26. Make a patchwork quilt based on a school concern.
Physical Education

1. Assist coaching elementary-school teams.
2. Organize intramural competitions.
3. Collect used sports equipment and donate to local shelters and daycare centers.
5. Run a senior citizen Olympics on the local high school football field.
6. Teach first-aid to younger children.
7. Run classes on how to stop smoking.
8. Serve as a coach for a team at the local boys/girls clubs.
9. Train animals to be used in pet therapy programs.
10. Volunteer in the Special Olympics program.
11. Sensitize the community to the needs of the disabled.
12. Run an exercise program for seniors.
13. Assist accident victims with their recovery.
14. Volunteer at the physical therapy center in the local hospital.
15. Set up a sports clinic.
16. Invite residents of shelters to participate in a gymnastics, swimming, dancing, or sports activity.
17. Run a blood drive.
18. Provide a health screening program in the school and community.
19. Participate in walk-a-thons for charities.
20. Develop a school-wide fitness program.

Industrial Arts/Technology Education

1. Collect and repair old bikes.
2. Repair or build homes for the homeless.
3. Provide the neighborhood with flower boxes for planting.
4. Offer repair services to seniors who live in the area.

Adapted from Service Learning Kit: Section IV. Sample List of Service Learning Projects
13. ASSESSMENT STANDARDS OF QUALITY SERVICE LEARNING

Service learning is only one part of what takes place during a school day. Without carefully designed evaluations, incorporating the appropriate documentation, service learning will be viewed by teachers, parents and administrators as disconnected curriculum, which does not relate to the school's mission statement. Included in the appendices are two suggested evaluation materials you may find helpful in providing support for your project. Appendix B is a project evaluation matrix prepared by Mintz and Hesser. To evaluate student growth, DPI has developed a student assessment tool (Appendix C).
Appendix A: Initiating a Service Learning Project

Service Learning Activity: ________________________________

Date: ____________  Project Coordinator: ________________

- What type of service compliments your course objectives?
  
  □ Community-Based
  □ School-Based
  □ Other: ________________________________

- What community and professional organizations exist to address your needs?

- What community need will your students address and work on? What will they be doing? Reminder: the activity needs to be a meaningful learning experience.

- Does your class timeline fit with the magnitude of the project and the other organization’s schedule? □ Yes  □ No

  How long does the project need?
  
  □ quarter-long  □ semester-long  □ year-long

- Assuming credit or a grade will be given for the activity performed, how many hours of service will you and the outside organization expect from each student?

  □ 1-5 hours  □ 5-10 hours  □ 10-15 hours  □ More than 15 hours
• How will you help students relate the service experience to the course objective?
  □ lecture □ report back to class □ group discussion
  □ cooperative activity □ other ____________________________

• How will you monitor your students in the community when the service activity is going on? Will you use evaluation forms, phone contacts, memos, etc.?
  □ evaluation forms □ phone contacts □ memos □ site visitation
  □ other ____________________________

• What are your specific goals for the service learning project?

• How will you get your students to understand that one goal of a service learning activity is to help them grow and be better citizens in their community?

• How and when will you have students reflect on their experiences?

• Does the activity or your curriculum contain sensitive and/or potentially controversial material? How will you deal with it?
## Appendix B: Project Evaluation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Question</th>
<th>Documentation Needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| □ Have people been engaged in responsible and challenging actions for the common goal? | List of initial participants  
Job descriptions, list of volunteers, and assignments  
Examples of reflections by teachers, community members, and students.  
Analysis of reflection according to identified themes of interest. |
| □ Are teachers, community members, and students involved in the critical reflections? | List of dates and descriptions of opportunities for shared reflection.  
List of new understandings gained or outcomes of shared reflections. |
| □ Are there opportunities for shared reflection among partners?                    | List of service and learning goals.                                                                                                                                 |
| □ Are there clear service and learning goals for everyone involved?                | Analysis or written rationale of how the learning and service goals encourage the enhancement of the capacities of all involved.  
Examples of increased capacities from each group of partners. |
| □ Do the learning and service goals encourage the enhancement of the capacities of all involved? | Copies of documents that summarize the needs identified by each group of partners. |
| □ Do all partners have the opportunity to define their needs?                      | Job descriptions, list of volunteers and assignments, copies of agreements.                                                                                     |
| □ Does the program clarify the responsibilities of each person and organization involved? | Description of the system of checks and balances that is in place.  
Examples of how the system has worked for every group. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the partners giving each other access to the appropriate resources</td>
<td>List of resources that have been shared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that augment their capacities to learn and serve one another well into</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the future?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and</td>
<td>Copies of training materials.</td>
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<tr>
<td>evaluation designed to accommodate diverse backgrounds, orientations,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and styles?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the program encourage participation in events for individuals</td>
<td>Log of dates and times of scheduled events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a variety of schedules?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the program extend to persons of various ages, socioeconomic</td>
<td>Description of strategies implemented to extend the program to person of each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>levels, sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities, as well as</td>
<td>identified characteristic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>race and gender?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is participants’ involvement in various components of the program</td>
<td>Survey results of participant perception regarding limitations to full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limited by which domain they represent or by the viewpoints they</td>
<td>participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>express?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix C: Student Learning Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Learning Activities</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>develop personal qualities in me such as confidence and self-reliance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>help me to acquire new skills, interest and knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>give me an opportunity to be creative and see my ideas put to work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>broaden my understanding of places and people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>help me to see how what I study in school is connected to my life in my community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>acquaint me with career possibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>will help me get a job.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>makes learning more interesting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>prefer this happen in all my classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>teach me how to work as a team member.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>help me better understand what I study in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>help me better understand my community and how it works.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>made me want to continue to do community service and volunteer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>improved school spirit in my school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>help me improve my grades.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>help improve attendance.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>help me to get in less trouble at school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>reflect more on my learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>help me with problem solving.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>made me enjoy my other classes more.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>