



BERNARDS HIGH SCHOOL

August 23, 2022

Dear BHS Students & Families,

Bernards High School recognizes the need to develop, in all students, a sense of social responsibility, in addition to a commitment to their academic and co-curricular endeavors. By providing students with numerous opportunities for service to local and global communities, we believe that we will help students to achieve their full potential as active and productive members of society.

Our service learning graduation requirement is based on this mission statement, and has resulted in many hours of community service by Bernards High School students over the past few decades. Our service learning requirement sets us apart from most public schools, and helps our students develop as well-rounded, compassionate individuals.

We are constantly assessing and reevaluating our procedures and programs to ensure that they are meeting their intended goals. Over the past two years, our students' abilities to volunteer in the community have been greatly impacted by the Covid pandemic. We have spent this time assessing the efficacy of our service learning requirement and reimagining how it could better serve our students; district and school administration conducted meetings with students, parents, staff, and the Board of Education to gather feedback about the current service learning requirement and how it could be improved. There was overwhelming consensus that the service learning requirement was an important part of a student's experience at BHS, but that it could be enhanced through some focused changes. During this process, we discovered that while there was significant community service occurring, there was also a great deal of "box-checking" in order to fulfill the requirement through convenient or easy activities, especially as students become upperclassmen. The organizations or activities that some students chose to fulfill their hours of service may not have led to much actual learning or reflection. It was clear that much of the focus for students was on the quantity of service hours, rather than the quality of the service learning experience.

To ensure that our service learning requirement emphasizes a commitment to community and the learning process, the following changes will be implemented moving forward:

- Rather than requiring ten hours per year, there will be a 20-hour community service requirement that will need to be completed by the end of a student's sophomore year. (See exceptions for current students below) Beginning with the class of 2026, the community service requirement will be fulfilled after their sophomore year, and no hours will be required as upperclassmen.
- Students will complete a service learning presentation as part of their 10th grade curriculum. This project will go into effect in the 2023-2024 school year for our rising freshmen, the Class of 2026.
- Service learning hours should focus on a specific theme that will drive students' presentations (ie. hunger, homelessness, people with special needs, the environment, children, elderly, veterans, etc.). This theme will be approved by our service learning coordinator.
- An assembly will be explored for upperclassmen to present to their peers on exemplary service learning experiences. Upperclassmen who choose to participate may have the opportunity to be selected by a committee of staff for "Excellence in Service" Awards.

- The possibility of reinstating a day of service, or something similar, in the future will continue to be explored. We have not yet fully worked out the budgetary and logistical challenges of moving forward with this idea, but we are committed to exploring these possibilities.

Inevitably, your question at this point is surely how this impacts your student currently. Here is how the rollout will impact the students in these grades for the **2022-2023 school year**:

Rising 9th Grader(Class of 2026): Complete 20 hours and deliver a culminating service learning presentation at the end of sophomore year. Service learning themes must be pre-approved by the service learning coordinator.

Rising 10th Grader(Class of 2025): Complete 20 hours by June of 2023 (i.e. Only 10 hours in 2022-2023 school year if they completed 10 last year, partial hours will count toward total). The Class of 2025 will not need to complete a service learning presentation and do not need hours to be pre-approved.

Rising 11th Grader(Class of 2024): Complete 20 hours by June of 2023 (i.e. Only 10 hours in 2022-2023 school year if they completed 10 last year, partial hours will count toward total). The Class of 2024 will not need to complete a service learning presentation and do not need hours to be pre-approved.

Rising 12th Grader (Class of 2023): Complete 20 hours by June of 2023 (i.e. Only 10 hours in 2022-2023 school year if they completed 10 last year, partial hours will count toward total). The Class of 2023 will not need to complete a service learning presentation and do not need hours to be pre-approved.

Should you have specific questions about what activities might be approved under the revised requirement, please reach out to our service learning coordinator, Anna Sosely at asosely@shsd.org. As with any change in procedure, we may need to reach out with ongoing communication and clarification, as we will continue to include student, parent, and staff feedback in modifying the requirements. We appreciate your patience as we work through this process of meaningful change. We are excited to see how this positively impacts our students and their growth through service learning.

Have a wonderful remainder of the summer.

Regards,



Scott A. Neigel, Ed. D
Principal