What is service learning?
Service learning is a teaching and learning methodology that connects classroom curriculum with identified community issues and needs. Service Learning engages students in projects that serve the community and build their social and academic capacities.

Why integrate service learning into your classroom?
Service learning is an educational strategy designed to accomplish the following:

- Enhance student learning by joining theory with experience and thought with action
- Fill unmet needs in the community through direct and indirect service that is meaningful and necessary
- Enable students to help others, give of themselves, and enter into caring relationships with others
- Assist students to see the relevance of the academic subject to the real world
- Enhance the self-esteem and self-confidence of your students
- Develop an environment of collegial participation among students, faculty, and the community
- Increase the civic and citizenship skills of students
- Assist agencies to better serve their clients and benefit from the infusion of enthusiastic volunteers
- Expose students to societal inadequacies and injustice and empower students to remedy them
- Develop a richer context for students learning
- Provide cross-cultural experiences for students
- Better prepare students for their careers/continuing education
- Foster a re-affirmation of students' career choices
- Keep students motivated and interested class and serve as a tool for reflection
- Give students more responsibility for their learning
- Help students learn how to get things done
- Impact local issues and local needs
What are the steps in service learning?
Service learning projects have three components: Preparation, Action, and Reflection.

**Preparation:** Students prepare for their service by learning about the issue of concern and developing an action plan for service.

**Service:** Students engage in meaningful service by working on a project that will make a difference in their community and is tied to their course of studies.

**Reflection:** Teachers enable students to analyze and make sense of their experience through discussion, journaling, and presentation opportunities.

What are the characteristics of high caliber service learning projects?
**Integrated Learning:** Classroom learning is directly connected to the service project.

**High Quality Service:** Service is of value in the community and fulfills a genuine need.

**Student Voice:** Students have a say in the selection, development and execution of the service learning project.

**Responsibility:** Students take responsibility for their learning and service.

**Collaboration:** Service learning project is a joint effort of the students, teachers and an outside agency.

**Evaluation:** Teacher evaluates service learning project in terms of its impact on students and the community.

**Reflection:** Students are given time and direction to reflect on their service learning experience.

For more great info and suggestions on service learning visit:
http://serviceteaching.cps.k12.il.us/.  It is great stuff for CPS teachers and non-CPS teachers alike.

What are some examples of Chicago River based service projects?

**Hazardous waste disposal**
- Research when and where school and homes can dispose of hazardous waste. Develop campaign to go home to encourage parents to dispose of hazardous waste properly.
- Develop survey to look into the use of hazardous products in students’ homes or school: what hazardous materials do they use, how is it disposed, are there alternative non-toxic alternatives? Make recommendations and try to change what products are used and how they are disposed of.

**Road and sidewalk salt**
- In winter, test for chloride in river. If chloride levels are found to be high, develop a campaign to target salt users (homes, businesses, schools, street and sanitation departments) in order to reduce or eliminate their use of salt in winter to de-ice roads and sidewalks.
Infiltration

- Increase infiltration by starting or expanding a native plant garden at school or working on a community garden.
- In certain parks and forest preserve districts, volunteers and staff are working to increase the native diversity. It may be possible to set you up with one of these groups.

Car oil

- In your neighborhood or around school, find out if people are changing their own car oil and where they are disposing their used car oil. If people are not disposing of their car oil properly, come up with a campaign to change behaviors.

Storm drain stenciling

- Stencil on storm drains to inform people that their storm drains drain to the Chicago River. Not: due to spray paint restrictions and Chicago’s focus on its anti-graffiti campaign, stenciling is not allowed in the city of Chicago.

Lawn care

- Find out how your family or your school takes care of its lawn. Or find out if there is a large manicured open area (fields, golf course, cemetery) near the river. Are pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers used? Could application techniques be improved so only what is required is applied? Are lawns watered? How is the amount of watering determined? Could improved techniques be used to reduce the amount of water applied? Work to improve application techniques.

Stormwater off of roofs

*Downspout disconnect program:* Connected downspouts send the water collecting in gutters and flowing down downspouts into underground stormwater pipes (which eventually empty into the Chicago River). When disconnected this water would flow into the yard and infiltrate into the soil.

- Conduct a survey to find out if people are disconnecting their downspouts (students could look at their school, their own home, or around their neighborhood).
- If appropriate, develop a campaign to increase downspout disconnections.

Rain barrels: Rain barrels can capture rainwater and the water flowing out of downspouts. This water can be later used to water plants or to clean cars, sidewalks etc.

- Investigate rain barrels. Decide if you think they would work at the school or in your home. Develop a campaign to get them adopted.

Improving habitat

- Begin a native plant garden at the school or in the neighborhood. Native plants not only improve habitat for native wildlife, like butterflies, but their deep root systems help more water infiltrate the ground.
- Create brochures or write articles for your neighborhood paper about the advantages of native plant gardens and how to go about starting one.
• If you would like to improve native habitats along the banks of the Chicago River, ask Friends of the Chicago River and they may be able to find a site along the river that needs some volunteers.
• Build and put up bird and bat houses.

Clean up trash on the river
• Participate in Friends of the Chicago River’s annual river clean-up. Traditionally, River Rescue Day is on the second Saturday in May. Or include trash pick-up as part of your field trip.
• When collecting trash, tabulate what kind of trash you are collecting. Can you determine where it might be coming from? Or why it is ending up along the river. Come up with and implement a strategy for reducing the amount of trash ending up near the river.

Erosion
• Monitor erosion at specific sites along the Chicago River. We can help you find appropriate sites. Develop possible remediation ideas. Share your ideas with Friends of the Chicago River and approach the landowner with your ideas and suggestions.

Advocacy and political action
• While you are monitoring if you see a problem that needs addressing, let public officials know about the problem and what you think should be done about it. You could write a letter, go to a town meeting or present in front of the landowner.
• Currently the Chicago River is undergoing a Use Attainability Analysis to study whether or not the water quality regulations for the Chicago River could be changed so that the water quality is improved. Share your opinions and data with the EPA by attending one of their public meetings. For more information on the process, visit www.chicagoareawaterways.org.

Knowing the river and its watershed
• Teach the community (parents, other classrooms) about the river and its watershed. School plays, neighborhood or school newspaper articles, posters in the school, neighborhood walks, a presentation at the annual Chicago River Student Congress are all possibilities. Topics could include: Did something historically significant happen in your neighborhood that is related to the river? What plants and animals used to live in your neighborhood? Where is the river, how can you get there, what might you see when you are there, what is the connection between the neighborhood and the river? Why is the Chicago River important to your city or town?

Getting to the River
• If the river flows through your neighborhood, find out where it goes and where some good sites are to view the river. Make a guide to your local portion of the river, including access points, interesting this to see along the river, places to visit near the river. Identify places (such as your school or local libraries) that might distribute your brochure. You could also offer mini-walking tours to parents or older students could act as guides for younger students on their field trips.
• If there is not good access to the river, develop ideas and propose them to the landowners, the community and the city.