

Linking Service with Learning

“It’s about helping their communities while reinforcing their own learning,” says Michelle Heaton of efforts being made to better integrate community service into the curriculum. Michelle, who teaches science and coordinates the community service program, is working on transitioning to a “service learning” program. This year’s theme was Hunger and Homelessness. For example, boys who helped out at Open Table Pantry or Gaining Ground Farm in Concord discussed why it’s healthier and more economical to eat locally sourced foods.

Michele has developed a list of teaching resources, accessible on the Fenn website, for each discipline. One idea for social studies classes is to study where our food comes from and to learn about the interdependency of our global food system. Boys in English classes could read online stories about people trying to survive in rural areas of developing countries, and they would decide who they want to “be” in the story and make decisions key to their survival.

Community service at Fenn has grown dramatically over the years. Faculty member Mike Potsaid, who retired in June, worked hard for several years to build up the program. “Now it’s time to move towards teaching the boys more about why we are doing these projects and what has caused the problems area organizations are working to address,” Michele explains. “We want to get creative.” To that end, Michele and Winnie Smith, Lower School coordinator for community service, are devising more ways to link service efforts with classroom studies and activities.

For example, Jon Byrd’s fifth grade class has discussed and written blog entries about volunteering at Open Table Pantry in Concord, pondering the question of why area people need help feeding their families and where the food comes from. Winnie Smith’s fifth grade class, having studied the Iditarod this winter, made fleece blankets for sled dogs this spring.

Service learning, Michele says, “is an important component of a boy’s education at Fenn. It strives to meaningfully complement and strengthen classroom learning with service opportunities that teach civic responsibility and benefit the broader community.” Michelle was selected to participate in the International Boys’ School Coalition 2015-2016 Action Project as one of a group of U.S. educators who will conduct research on the topic of boys as global citizens at their schools.