Date: September 01, 2012
To: High School Principals
       Service-Learning Coaches
From: Jon Schmidt
Re: Service-Learning Guidelines

Chicago Public Schools has had a service graduation requirement in place since 1999. During that time, we have learned a lot about the best ways to complete the graduation requirement. We have heard a lot from students, teachers, coaches, and community partners over the years about the meaning, value, and practice of service-learning. All of our research and experience suggests that service-learning is best when it is directly connected with classroom learning (Billig et al). Many students say they enjoy the opportunity to participate in service-learning projects that are part of classroom learning. Many teachers indicate they see the academic, civic, and social/emotional growth among their students through service-learning. All of this points to the fact that we can no longer in good conscious hand students a time sheet and enter hours on the computer and call that good civic education.

With that in mind, the Department of Literacy: Service-Learning is releasing new guidelines for service-learning that will shape our practice beginning with the 2012-13 academic year. As we move from hours as the requirement to projects, it will require that schools develop a strategy to ensure that all students have access to high quality service-learning experiences rooted in excellent classroom instruction. The graduation requirement will shift from 40 hours to 3 projects. This year’s sophomores and freshmen are expected to complete three service-learning projects in order to graduate. Service-learning has proven to be a rigorous, engaging, relevant, and inquiry-driven instructional practice that research has shown to have positive effects on classroom performance, civic engagement skills, dropout prevention, and even reduced rates of pregnancy among young people.

If you have any questions regarding our new guidelines, please contact me at your earliest convenience at 773.553-6391 or jjschmidt@cps.edu.