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THE OBLIGATIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

By Alonzo A. Crim

THE Atlanta school system is committed to three goals for students: (1) preparation for lifelong learning; (2) preparation for gainful employment; and (3) education for citizenship.

Our students have made tremendous gains in basic skills achievement. The Atlanta Partnership of Business and Education, our vocational education programs, and other initiatives have resulted in meaningful job opportunities for students, both before and after graduation. And citizenship education has been woven into the fabric of instruction across several disciplines.

In an effort to enhance students' understanding of the obligations of a good citizen, the Atlanta Board of Education approved a course, "Duties to the Community," as a requisite for graduation beginning with the class of 1988. Incoming ninth grade students will be expected to contribute 75 hours of unpaid volunteer service in approved agencies under the supervision of school staff. These hours may be accumulated in grades 9, 10, or 11. Additionally, an acceptable essay or journal must be written and accepted by the Language Arts Department. Once the 75 hours have been completed and the essay or journal accepted, the student receives one semester of credit for the Duties to the Community course.

Our community service requirement emphasizes what a student can do to help others. It provides students with opportunities for responsible, productive, supervised volunteer service. Ser-

vice agencies such as character-building organizations, hospitals, churches, child care centers, and schools are potential learning laboratories. Under the direction of school staff, students and parents are thoroughly informed of the requirements. Students bring to this assignment their concern, motivation, and enormous energy. Our challenge is to channel these assets into well-organized volunteer programs that are mutually beneficial to students and the community.

In addition to academic credit, students gain first-hand experience in seeing their actions count. They have the opportunity to get to know and relate to the needs of people of various ages and backgrounds. Volunteer service also gives them a first-hand look at how their community works. They learn how problems arise, what steps can realistically be taken toward their solution, and their own roles in solving them. Volunteering gives them opportunities to test and extend their interests, skills, and talents. Their education becomes more relevant, their contributions validated, and their sense of citizenship enhanced.

Some students combine volunteer service with exploration of career interests. One young man, interested in working in a youth service organization, served as a counselor in a Boys Club. Students who are interested in education have served as tutors in church-sponsored enrichment programs or assisted in media centers in their own schools.

Students learn skills and attitudes that stand them in good stead when they accept paid employment.

Asa Hilliard, Callaway Professor of Urban Education at Georgia State University, says of high school community service: "Schools that have the most meaning are those that realize they are unable to function without being in touch with their communities."

Alonzo A. Crim has been superintendent of Atlanta Public Schools since 1973. Long active in community affairs, he has endeavored to create a "Community of Believers" among the children in the Atlanta schools.



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