

Applying a global mindset to local problems in San Antonio with Students of Service



Classrooms are not the only places that kids learn, and academic learning is only part of the whole child development needed to help youth discover the interests and talents that lead to success in the classroom, career, and beyond. More than 80% of Texas students' time is spent learning outside of school. High-quality out of school time (OST), which includes afterschool, summer, and enrichment programs, provides hands-on learning opportunities that help kids develop critical life skills as well as nurturing mentor and peer relationships that accelerate academic learning and prepare youth for their futures.

OST is a critical component of the functioning ecosystem of support necessary for whole child development and whole communities. Community-based providers are essential, offering in-person care and learning, while also connecting families to critical services and resources, such as food, technology, and healthcare. Strong partnerships between schools and these community-based organizations are vital to our state's successful recovery and future.

[Students of Service](#) (SOS) engages San Antonio area students in grades 6–12 in meaningful community service opportunities and international experiences to develop leadership skills and a passion for learning.

Service is the core of SOS, and they have partnered with more than 100 local agencies to provide a wide range of volunteer experiences. Students explore and register for service opportunities that interest them and track hours completed in a portal SOS designed specifically to support youth in their service journeys. The portal maintains records of time, location, type, and even economic impact of all service activities and can generate a volunteer resume to document and demonstrate impact for school, clubs, and college applications. In 2022, SOS helped 645 students provide 1,600 hours of service to the community!

Since 2014, SOS has reached more than 2,500 students through service programs that promote empathy, citizenship, diversity, inclusion, and equity. Founder and Executive Director Amir Samandi envisioned a program that would help young people grow into better citizens, “teaching them to be culturally literate, equity-minded, and compassionate, uniting people around the idea of service and our common humanity and values.”



Learning Highlight: Culinary Traditions

Students of Service's Director of Operations, Marisa Calder recently teamed up with the San Antonio Council for International Visitors (SACIV) and Kitchen Campus to teach students about food and culinary traditions from around the world. “We have a virtual discussion with someone actually from the country we are studying, discuss the kinds of foods they eat, fruits they have, and local traditions, and then we cook. We've done pasta, empanadas, even ceviche!”

But these young people don't complete service solely for service's sake—a good intention in its own right. Rather, SOS employs a service learning approach to their work with youth, generating a learner-centric cycle of inquiry and exploration in which students can apply critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills in real-life scenarios. By letting youth steer toward service that interests them, they are inherently responding to community needs they are passionate about, looking around their communities to identify problems and generate innovative solutions to address them.

This intersection of service and learning is magnified further by the life-changing benefits of global travel. While not all students participate in the travel opportunities SOS offers, those who have completed at least 15 hours of service qualify for trips, which SOS has led to 13 countries on six continents. Travel "helps broaden their vision, and it is critically important in an increasingly globalized world," insists Samandi.

Travel gives students, many of whom never thought they would see the world, the opportunity to experience other cultures, explore global art, landmarks, and cuisine while developing core competencies vital for success in adulthood and learning more about themselves and their interests.

SOS also engages guest speakers from partner organizations to help provide a wide range of learning opportunities on topics such as citizenship, financial literacy, and college and career readiness. Students visit museums, parks, and cultural events and SOS offers educational programs centered around upcoming destinations and travel basics and safety.

Students of Service is developing informed, compassionate, young leaders and fostering a world where all youth know and believe in their power to make a positive difference in the community. SOS not only gives young people the opportunity to give back to the community, learn about cultural differences and similarities, and explore the world, but ultimately it also facilitates students learning about themselves and discovering who they are. Samandi knows, "It's not the number of hours served and the number of trips we have. It's the number of lives changed in a meaningful way that creates a ripple effect within the community."



Youth Served

In 2022, Students of Service reached:

- 645 Students
 - 95 Schools
 - 16 School Districts
 - 71 Zip Codes
 - 7 Countries
- By gender:
- 61.3% Female
 - 33.8% Male
 - 4.9% Decline to State
- By Ethnicity
- 40.4% Hispanic or Latino
 - 22.8% White
 - 10.5% Multiple Races
 - 9.6% Asian
 - 9.6% Black or African American
 - 5.3% Decline to State



By traveling the world and learning about all these different cultures, I was able to broaden my horizons on what I want to do in college. So, follow your dreams and try new things.

—SOS Alumna



The Texas Partnership for Out of School Time (TXPOST) is a statewide intermediary whose mission is to convene, educate, and advocate to improve the quality and increase the availability of out of school time (OST) opportunities, like those offered by Students of Service, for Texas youth. TXPOST works in partnership with vital local and regional organizations, which invest deeply in their own communities to offer professional development opportunities, engage in system-building work, advocate for the OST field, and support local programs.



Learn. Serve. Explore.

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