

***By Jan Schultz, The Imperial Republican News Editor***

School board members made a good move at their meeting last week when they unanimously adopted changes in the Chase County Schools' grade 7-12 handbook, one of which includes a new high school graduation requirement of community service.

Some students may not see it in a positive light right now. Their parents might question this additional requirement, saying they have enough to do already. One board member even said it's another burden on students who are already involved in sports and other activities that take up a lot of their time.

However, as I looked into the issue and read some of the studies on youth volunteerism, it seems to be a win-win situation when youths are involved in community service.

And the benefits are NOT what some may cynically say is the real bottom-line reason for the requirement—free student labor.

The benefits go far beyond the financial aspects that may come to a community such as Imperial from additional volunteers. And, those benefits are often in the student's favor.

Consider what research was found in a Civic Literacy Project study completed about 10 years ago. One of the results of volunteering, or service-learning, is motivation, which often overflows into the classroom.

Students also gain psychological and social benefits by volunteering.

They feel better about themselves because they gave of their personal time. Socially, by working on a volunteer project, students forge bonds with each other and other members of the community with whom they might not otherwise have the occasion to work.

Other pluses to youths who volunteer include: being 50 percent less likely to abuse alcohol, cigarettes and other destructive behavior; learning to be respectful and kind; learning to understand others who are different; and developing leadership skills.

Maybe the biggest positive of all—youths who volunteer are more likely to do well in school, graduate and vote.

The new CCS requirement is 40 hours of community service starting the summer after completing eighth grade. Those hours will be phased in over the next three years, with next year's seniors to compile 10 hours, the juniors 20 hours and sophomores, 30 hours, before they graduate.

Students will be able to find so many opportunities to tally volunteer hours in our community.

One quick way to pick up two to three hours is a night of volunteering at our community-owned theatre, which is always looking for help to take tickets and serve concessions. Students can work together in groups of three or four and take a night to volunteer at the theatre.

There are other chances to help clean up the community, assist at their church, mow someone's lawn who is unable to and so much more.

There's a reason they call it "service-learning" when talking about youths who volunteer. They will be learning important skills they can take with them into adulthood, and at the same time, be giving back valuable time to their community.

Principal Mike Sorensen and the school board should be congratulated on adding this graduation requirement. In the end, students are the ones who will gain skills and hopefully a

new, important view that being a volunteer makes for a better community overall.