

## The Case for Service-Learning

### **Executive Summary**

Service-learning is an effective teaching strategy that engages students.

### **Need for Student Engagement and Meet Needs of Gifted Students**

Most teachers schedule and allocate the appropriate amount of time for learning, but few teachers actually ensure that their students are engaged or actively responding during the allocated time<sup>1</sup>. In some classes, students spend less than 50% of the allocated time engaged or actively responding. Two major factors that contribute to such low rates of engagement are (1) instructional design, and (2) classroom management<sup>2</sup>. In addition, gifted students have emotional, social and leadership needs based on their advanced understanding, creative analytical thinking, curiosity and sensitivity to others.

### **Service-Learning Engages Students and Meets Needs**

Service-learning is an instructional design that engages students by making their education relevant. Through the application of academic, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, students creatively design and implement projects that address their natural curiosity about real events and sensitivity to others. Service-learning gives students opportunities to find a task that interests them in this project-based learning environment that applies high level analytical skills. When students are engaged in activities that peak their interests and when students know they are making a difference, then classroom management is about project assignments more than discipline methods. The potential for service-learning to address lack of student engagement and needs rests in the focus on real-world application of learned skills, opportunities to develop leadership and explore career pathways.<sup>3</sup> Teachers engaging students in service-learning set high expectations for students' ability to impact the community by empowering students to plan and implement service projects.

For youth, service-learning benefits include:

- having a voice and a choice in their assignments
- making a difference and having an impact
- building their resume
- meeting a service requirement
- building new friendships and connections
- following a passion or interest
- finding a career path, and
- connecting learning to real life.

A wealth of research demonstrates service-learning's success as a youth engagement tool.

- It enhances students' sense of self-efficacy, improves self-esteem,<sup>4</sup> and decreases their likelihood to engage in at-risk behavior.<sup>5</sup>
- Many gifted children think deeply about, and are troubled by, problems and issues of our times. Service-learning helps them build the self-confidence to address their concerns by giving them problem-solving tools, strategies and experience they actually use to make a difference in their worlds.
- Service-learning has the potential to improve attendance. Eighty-six percent of students at low-performing schools said their feelings would be more positive if they were engaged in service-learning at school.<sup>6</sup>
- The 2007 Growing to Greatness<sup>7</sup> study found that over 85% percent of principals from U.S. schools with service-learning programs reported a positive impact on students' civic and school engagement, school climate, the larger community's view of youths as a valuable resource, and teacher satisfaction.

Service-learning is an instructional method proven to address the challenges of student engagement both in class and out-of-school.

<sup>1</sup> Mastropieri, M., & Scruggs, T. (2000). *The inclusive classroom: Strategies for effective instruction*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Polloway, E.A., & Patton, J.R. (1997). *Strategies for teaching learners with special needs* (6th ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.

<sup>2</sup> Mastropieri, M., & Scruggs, T. (2000). *The inclusive classroom: Strategies for effective instruction*. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

Polloway, E.A., & Patton, J.R. (1997). *Strategies for teaching learners with special needs* (6th ed.). Columbus, OH: Merrill.

<sup>3</sup> *Effective Practices for Engaging At-Risk Youth in Service*, Youth Service America

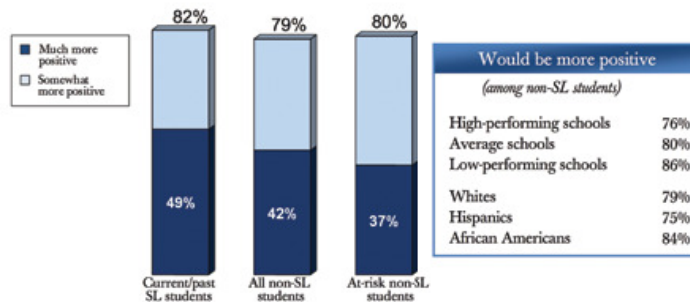
<sup>4</sup> Evaluation of CASSL Phase II/Year One Goals and Objectives: California After School Service-Learning Initiative (February 2005) *In 2004, the SAVY Leaders, Volunteer San Diego's afterschool service-learning club, were evaluated using the California Healthy Kids Survey. The California Healthy Kids Survey was used with the assumption that high-quality service-learning afterschool programs provide strong external assets for participants, leading to increased internal assets and civic development. Youth that participated in SAVY Leaders scored 30% higher in school environment external assets than average high school students across California. Specifically regarding external assets, SAVY Leaders scored 28% higher with caring relationships and 20% higher with high expectations. Regarding internal assets, youth participating in SAVY scored 33% higher in self-efficacy.*

<sup>5</sup> Violence prevention and young adolescents' participation in community youth service (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9890362?dopt=Abstract>)

<sup>6</sup> Engaged for Success: Service-Learning as a Tool for High School Dropout Prevention – Figure 4 (April 2008)

**Figure 4: Service Learning Has Potential To Improve Attendance**

*How have/would your feelings about going to school change if your school had classes directly tied to service learning?*



<sup>7</sup> Growing to Greatness 2007 – The State of Service Learning (2007)