

# AFTERSCHOOL ALERT

## ISSUE BRIEF



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## Afterschool and Service-Learning

Service-learning is a form of instruction in which students design projects to address community needs as part of their academic studies. Many afterschool programs use service-learning to help improve youths' academic achievement, develop their leadership skills and strengthen ties to their community. With such proven benefits, service-learning is quite popular with schools and the public:

- 48 states are administering service learning programs through their state education agencies.<sup>1</sup>
- 28 percent of all schools currently engage students in service-learning, including 31 percent of middle schools and 44 percent of high schools.<sup>2</sup>
- In a recent survey, 90 percent of parents and adults said they would support service-learning (after the concept behind the strategy was explained to them).<sup>3</sup>

### Inspiring Youth to Learn and Connect to School-Day Academics

Studies have shown that youth who volunteer are less likely to abuse drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, or engage in destructive behavior and are more likely to do well in school, graduate, vote and be philanthropic. Service-learning has been shown to increase youths' engagement in learning and can help increase skills that lead to improved academic achievement. Given the hands-on nature of service-learning projects, many afterschool programs using service-learning report that youth often do not notice that their projects have reinforced academics until project staff point it out.

- To teach students about local government, the Constitutional Rights Foundation created CityWorks, an interactive curriculum that requires students to create and complete a service project to address a real community issue. Past projects include students working with their principal to improve their school's decrepit, graffiti-covered bathrooms, and working with the city council and neighborhood residents to close down a dangerous alley. In all their projects, CityWorks students "take learning out of the classroom, get deeply involved in a local community problem and follow a process to resolve it."

*Students learned that age does not matter in making a difference if they collaborate, plan, and generate a solution... It is amazing how service learning brought Civics alive for my students.*

*--Cathy Lee, CityWorks teacher at Diamond Bar High School in Los Angeles County<sup>4</sup>*

- Volunteer work is the linchpin of the Teen Outreach Program's curriculum, which is geared toward students ages 12-17 and aims to "prevent problem behaviors," especially teen pregnancy. The program, now serving more than 13,000 young people in more than 176 sites, emphasizes hands-on learning and adolescent development activities and provides structured, supervised volunteer service supported by group discussions on the service itself and a wide variety of other topics, ranging from managing conflict to human development. A recent random-assignment study showed that students enrolled in Teen Outreach had less than half the risk of pregnancy, course failure and suspension from school, and students who had already had a pregnancy were one-fifth as likely to have another one as those not in the program.<sup>5</sup>

- Middle school youth at the Hiawatha Branch of the YMCA of Metropolitan Minneapolis shop and deliver groceries to homebound seniors twice a month through a program called the Grover Connection. In addition to building relationships with seniors in their community, youth examine the economics of food production, cultural diets, organic farming and nutrition issues during the afterschool program as well as during the school-day curriculum in participating schools.<sup>6</sup>
- Project YES in Oakland, California, offers in-class, after school, weekend and summer service-learning activities, led by teachers and AmeriCorps members, to 1,300 youth in the Oakland Unified School District annually. Many of the program's activities are environmentally focused, such as maintaining school gardens and school recycling programs, although other projects include community mapping, painting murals and meeting other community needs. Project YES, a program of the East Bay Conservation Corps, also trains teachers in service-learning and enables staff to earn teaching credentials through a partnership with a local state university.<sup>7</sup>

### Strengthening Communities

In addition to providing learning opportunities, afterschool service-learning activities foster youths' civic responsibility and help them realize how they can positively contribute to their communities. Service-learning's emphasis on reciprocal involvement encourages programs to successfully utilize volunteers and bolster community involvement.

- Hands On Atlanta places AmeriCorps members in elementary, middle and high schools in Atlanta to lead and support afterschool programs with a service-learning emphasis. AmeriCorps members lead youth through service-learning curriculum and projects such as cross-age tutoring and helping teachers plan school beautification projects, with the intent of instilling civic responsibility and connection to their community.

*My attitude towards life, towards people has changed. As I walked into my school Monday morning I felt like a new student...I learned how to work together to get things done...I can do tons of things to improve not only myself, but my community, and anything else that needs improvement.*

-Marshall Middle School student, eighth-grade Hands on Atlanta participant<sup>8</sup>

- The National School and Community Corps incorporates service-learning into its efforts to revitalize more than 55 inner-city schools in four states. The Corps places more than 300 AmeriCorps members in schools to lead youth during and after school in learning and enrichment activities, while also involving parents, residents and organizations in improving their communities. Each year, the Corps engages an average of 2,000 youth, 300 families and 200 community residents in service-learning and community service activities. Service-learning brings community partners to the program, as demonstrated by one park clean-up activity in Philadelphia that grew into an ongoing program that teaches youth botany while they help park staff remove and replace invasive plant species.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> American Youth Policy Forum, <http://www.aypf.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Community Service and Service-Learning in U.S. Public Schools, 2004: Findings from a National Survey*, Search Institute, Minneapolis, Minnesota, <http://www.search-institute.org/whatsnew/2004G2GCompleteSurvey.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Roper Starch Worldwide survey, September 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Youth Service California, Real Stories, <http://www.yscal.org/realstories/civic.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Philliber, Susan, "The Teen Outreach Program and Its Youth Development Approach," PowerPoint, August 2004; and <http://www.cornerstone.to/top/top.html>.

<sup>6</sup> YMCA of the USA, *The YMCA Service-Learning Guide: A Tool for Enriching the Member, the Participant, the YMCA, and the Community*, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> East Bay Conservation Corps, *Project YES*, 3 June 2002, <http://www.eastbaycorps.org/pyes.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> National Institute on Out-of-School Time for the Corporation for National Service, *Making an Impact*, June 2000.

<sup>9</sup> National School and Community Corps, 3 June 2002, <http://198.139.224.157/index.htm>.