Civic Engagement through Service Learning

Helen Price Johnson South Whidbey
Roger Myers Stanwood Camano
Patty Wood Kelso
“In the first place God made idiots. This was for practice. Then He made School Boards.”

1897-Mark Twain
The foundation of every state is the education of its youth.

Diogenes Laertius - Library of Congress
The foundation of every state

Civic Engagement is a critical component of our nation’s ability to function as a democracy.

AND

The education of it’s youth.

Service Learning is a proven tool that public education may use to combine this trait of civic engagement with our first goal of education.
“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts off from its youth severs its lifeline.”

Kofi Annan
What you can expect

• Interactive presentation that educates you on the benefits of CESL.

• Discover your role as a board member in introducing CESL to your community.

• Power point tool that you can take with you and adapt to your district for an easy presentation.
What is service learning?

• Clearly identified learning objectives.

• Integration of service with academic curriculum.

• Connection with an academic class

• Student reflection.

• Student involvement in designing the project.
What is service learning not?

It is not community service.

• Activities may be similar, differences lie in the intentionality of the project.

• Clear and specific teacher and academic goals.

• Connection with content specific areas.

• Goal of learning critical thinking skills.
Studying, investigating, and recording endophyte abundance in the Wind River Forest Canopy.
Who is CESL?

Civic Engagement through Service Learning
Purpose of Public Education

• Education of all students
• Fosters a Community Identity
• Civic competence
• Economic engine
Thomas Jefferson believed that public education’s function is to educate students to fulfill their personal and civic responsibilities.
Horace Mann
Nation’s first state school superintendent

• Health and physical education and a commitment to promote public health and sanitation.

• Academic subjects.

• Political education and preparation for good citizenship.
Goals of Public Education

Currently a shifting of resources and focus away from this original purpose to the goals for which schools are held accountable.

“As civic learning has been pushed aside, society has neglected a fundamental purpose of American education, putting the health of our democracy at risk”

Sandra Day O’Connor, Retired Supreme Court Justice
Civic Mission of Schools

HB 1209 ‘Education Reform Bill’

“The goal of the Basic Education Act for the schools of the state of Washington set forth in this chapter shall be to provide students with the opportunity to become responsible citizens, to contribute to their own economic well-being and to that of their families and communities, and to enjoy productive and satisfying lives.”
Service Based Learning

Benefits

• Short term
• Long term
• For the country
• For the community
• For the student
Service Based Learning Examples

- High School
- Middle School
- Elementary School
- In the schools
Service Based Learning

• Purpose is not to REPLICATE, but spur you to thinking how you can serve your community
• “Give where you live.”
Why Service Based Learning?

Because it is what educators, legislators and the public are asking for.
How much relative importance should be assigned to each following educational goals?

- Basic academic skills in core subjects (22%)
- Critical thinking and problem solving (18%)
- Social skills and work ethic (12%)
- Skilled employment preparation (11%)
- Citizenship (11%)
- Physical health (9%)
- The Arts and Literature (9%)
- Emotional health (8%)

Why Service Based Learning?

Because it is what educators, legislators and the public are asking for.

Because it is a proven educational tool.
Evidence of positive effects in four areas

- Academic or cognitive domains
- Civic domains
- Personal & Social domains
- Career exploration Skills
Academic or cognitive domains

• Limited number of studies at present
• Improvement in Language arts, social studies and writing
• Some positive trends in standardized testing
• Students more cognitively engaged

• “At risk” students showed the largest increase in student engagement.

• Teachers saw lower student absenteeism (36%)
• Teachers viewed improvement in students grades (47%)
• Higher scores on measured attitude toward school
Academic or cognitive domains

Survey Results:

• More surveys need to be done.

• Initial results of improvement in standardized testing while spotty do show a positive trend.

• Academic gains seen in Language Arts, writing and social studies.

• “At Risk” students showed the most promise in increased engagement in school.

• The quality of the service learning project is critical.
Civic domains

• Students are currently more disengaged than previous generations.

• Lower voter rates and registration in our youngest voters today.

• In conjunction with little knowledge of civic and political affairs, our youth of today are more distrusting of the political system.

• General lack of a connection to political life, we are not adequately generating future leaders.

• Oddly enough, there is a current increase in volunteerism by young people.

• While students may be cynical, they are not hopeless.
Civic domains

Survey Results:

• Service based learning develops a connection between students and community and their schools.

• Service learning hones efficacy characteristics

• Students felt they made a difference and that they could have an impact on their world.

• Increased sense of personal and social responsibility

• The quality of the service learning project is critical.
Personal & Social domains

• Earlier studies documented increased self-efficacy, self-confidence, collaborative skills, social awareness, relationship skills and avoidance of risk behaviors.

• More current studies re-affirm positive impacts on: Resilience, Ethics, Respect for diversity

• Returns the ownership of education to the student
Career Exploration Skills

• Stronger aspirations for job and career related skills

• Increased desire for post-secondary education

• Increased desire for job interview skills

• Significant impact on desire to find a personally satisfying career and/or a career beneficial to others.
Conclusions: Quality Matters!

• Low quality projects had no impact or negative impact.

• Pre-packaged service learning projects are not desirable.

• Some indicators of a quality project are:
  
  Linkage to standards
  Intentional design
  Clarity of educational goals
  Direct contact with community
  Student reflection
  Communication
  Trained, quality instructors
  Project met a genuine need
  Challenging project
Conclusions - Findings

• Students intended to vote more than peers.

• Students enjoyed school more and were more motivated to learn.

• Students acquired more civic knowledge.

• Students became more engaged with their school.

• Lower rates of substance abuse by participants.

• Academic gains in Language Arts, writing and social studies.

• "At Risk" students showed most dramatic increase in school engagement.
Concerns

• Low quality projects or ‘community service’ projects potentially may have negative effects on student engagement and academics.

• Training of teachers and teacher overload.

• Buy-in

• More is not better

• Limited and preliminary data on academic gains
Conclusions of accepted traits of service based learning where pulled from the studies of Dr. Shelly H. Billeg of RMC Research Corporation.

In addition to studies of her own, she has compiled data from several other studies and researchers.

For summaries of recent research please visit

www.servicelearning.org

(page 12, Heads, Hands and Heart article)

For information on service-learning quality

http://servicelearningtool.com
What is the school board’s role?

You can make a difference!
Board Role

- Vision and Leadership
- Partnership and Community
- Continuous Improvement
- Resources
Why Service Learning?
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