

# Youth Helping America Study:

## Service-Learning Related Activities and Civic Engagement

Between January and March 2005, The Corporation for National and Community Service, in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau and the nonprofit coalition Independent Sector, conducted the Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey, the first major national study of volunteering by teenagers in more than a decade.<sup>i</sup> The survey gathered information from 3,178 American youth between the ages of 12 and 18 on their volunteering habits and experiences with school-based service projects. In addition, the survey gathered information related to positive youth development, such as youth empowerment and connections to the community. The following fact sheet details the early findings around youth engagement in school-based service and service-learning related activities, and the connections between these experiences and other forms of civic engagement. A fuller analysis will be forthcoming.

### KEY FINDINGS

#### Engagement in School-Based Service

- ❖ 38%, or an estimated 10.6 million students nationwide, reported that they have participated in community service as part of a school activity or requirement.
- ❖ When asked whether their most recent school-based service experience included service-learning related activities, 65% of those who had engaged in this service reported that they helped to plan the project and/or reflected on their experience in class.<sup>ii</sup>
  - 36%, or an estimated 3.8 million students, helped to plan the service project.
  - 53%, or estimated 5.4 million students, wrote about or reflected on their service experience.
- ❖ In addition, 36% of those who participated in school-based service reported that their service activities lasted for at least one semester.
- ❖ The majority of students, or 52%, reported that their experience with school-based service was “very positive,” while an additional 41% said that the experience was “somewhat positive.”

#### The Frequency of School-Based Service

- ❖ Of those students who have participated in school-based service, 64% have taken one class that included community service, while 22% have had two classes, and 15% have taken three or more classes that included community service.
- ❖ For those students who have participated in school based service, the majority, 74%, have

have participated in school-based service within the past year.

- ❖ The largest number of students reported that they participated in school-based service in either an “Elective” course, 16%, or a course they classified as “Other,” 34%. Other top ranking courses include:
  - Social Studies, 12%
  - Science, 10%
  - English or Language Arts, 7%

#### A Quality Index for School-Based Service

The survey gathered information on whether students’ school-based service experience included the following three quality elements of service-learning: (1) *planning the service activity*; (2) *writing or reflecting on the service experience*; and (3) *participating in service activities for at least one semester*. Based these quality elements, we constructed a Quality Index for School-Based Service.

- ❖ 76% of youth who were involved in school-based service also participated in at least one of the quality elements of service-learning.
- ❖ Among the students who have participated in school-based service, 10% have been engaged in school-based service with all three of the quality elements, 26% with two of the elements, and 40% with one of the elements. Only 23 percent of these students participated in school-based service that had none of the elements of quality service-learning.

**School Experience Is Related to Engagement in School-Based Service**

- ❖ Students who reported that they had a GPA of B+ or higher are more likely to have engaged in school-based service than those who reported a GPA of B or lower, 43% to 35% respectively.
- ❖ Students who do less well in school, reporting a GPA of B- or lower, are the least likely to engage in school-based service, and when they do, the service activities are less likely to have one or more quality elements of service-learning.
- ❖ Students in private schools are more than 50% more likely to engage in school-based service than students in public schools, and students in private religious schools are the most likely to engage in service that includes in the quality elements of service-learning.
- ❖ High school students (grades 9-12) are more likely to engage in school-based service than students in middle school (grades 6-8), 41% to 30% respectively, and are also more likely to have the opportunity to experience the quality elements of service-learning.
- ❖ When compared to students who participated in school-based service with none of the three quality elements, students who participated in service that included all three of the quality elements of service-learning are more than twice as likely to report that their experience was very positive, 78% to 36% respectively.

**A Positive Relationship between School-Based Service and Civic Engagement**

- ❖ Past participation in school-based service is related to future volunteering.
  - Students who participated in school-based service more than a year ago are more likely to have volunteered through an organization within the past year (59%) than students who have never participated in school-based service (48%).
- ❖ The more quality elements of service-learning that are included in service projects, the greater the likelihood that students will report an enhanced sense of empowerment.
  - Students who have participated in service projects that involved all three of the quality elements of service-learning are nearly three times more likely than those

who engaged in service with none of the elements to say that they believe that they can personally make a great deal of difference in solving problems in their community, 22% to 8% respectively.

- ❖ The greater the number of quality elements of service-learning that students experience in school-based service, the greater the likelihood that they will take a good deal of interest in world events.
  - While 52% of youth who have engaged in school-based service with all three quality elements say that they take a good deal of interest in world events, only 32% of those who have never engaged in school-based service report the same level of interest.

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<sup>i</sup> Initial findings from the survey have been released by the Corporation for National and Community Service in the first report of the Youth Helping America Series. The report, *Building Active Citizens: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering*, can be found on our website: [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

<sup>ii</sup> Due to the fact that the study relied on respondents' perceptions of their class activities, we are unable to ascertain whether they have engaged in service-learning as defined by Learn and Serve America's statute. Those activities that are considered quality elements of service-learning (planning the service activity, reflecting the service experience, and engaging in activities for at least a semester) were used to determine whether the respondents had engaged in activities that resemble service-learning projects. We use the term school-based service to define those community service activities which students attributed to a school activity. Learn and Serve's definition of service-learning can be found at [www.learnandserve.gov](http://www.learnandserve.gov).