

Opportunities for Service-Learning in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
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The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was enacted by Congress last December and signed into law by President Bush in January 2002. This Act, known as NCLB, reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and provides federal funding for many educational programs such as programs for economically disadvantaged youth and families, migrant students, English language learners, and other targeted populations. NCLB is also widely known for its strong accountability provisions and its emphasis on helping all students meet state proficiency standards for mastery of reading/language arts and math. Starting in 2005, there are also strong provisions for schools to become accountable for students' mastery of science. NCLB provides guidance and provision of funds for professional development, safe and drug free schools and communities, support services for students, recognition programs, and a myriad of other programs.

Many of the provisions within the law either encourage or allow service-learning to be implemented as a strategy for helping young people. In this article, the opportunities for service-learning within NCLB are highlighted and ideas for how NCLB funds can be procured are discussed.

Specific Legislative Language Encouraging/Allowing Service-Learning

The No Child Left Behind Act encourages or allows service-learning to be funded and implemented in specific ways in Titles I, III, IV, V, and VII.

Title I is the largest federal educational program. It authorizes and provides funding for schools serving economically disadvantaged children. Part H of Title I addresses School Dropout Prevention, and specifically allows counseling and mentoring for at-risk students (Subpart 2, Section 1822, (b) (1) (H)). Clearly schools can implement service-learning programs that include tutoring, peer counseling, cooperative learning, and other similar approaches to provide the counseling and mentoring that the law permits.

Title III addresses language instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. One section, Part B, Subpart 1, Section 3212, (a) (2) (B) (viii), states that eligible entities may receive funds for "implementing applied learning activities such as service-learning to enhance and support comprehensive elementary and secondary language instruction programs." Part B, Subpart 4, Section 3247 (a) (3) also allows funds for states to pay for enhanced instructional opportunities for immigrant children and youth which may include tutorials, mentoring, and academic or career counseling.

Title IV provides funding for 21st Century Schools programs that promote safe and drug free schools and communities. Two sections under Part A (Subpart 1, Section 4115 (b) (2) (E) (xix) and Subpart 2, Section 4121 (a) (2) (B) specifically allow local educational agencies (school districts) to use funds for community service and service-learning. The latter section specifies that funds are to be used to "rebuild safe and healthy neighborhoods and increase students' sense of individual responsibility." In a later section in Title IV, NCLB also allows funds for mentoring programs for children with the greatest need, including programs that "encourage participation in community service and community

activities.” (Part A, Subpart 2, Section 4130, (b) (1) (B) (v).)

Title V authorizes funds for promoting informed parental choice and innovative programs. Part A, Subpart 3, Section 5131 (a) (10) and (a) (I24) provides funds to school districts for innovative assistance programs that may include “community service programs that use qualified school personnel to train and mobilize young people to measurably strengthen their communities through nonviolence, responsibility, compassion, respect, and moral courage” and “service-learning activities”. Part D, Subpart 6, Section 5464, (b) (3) and (b) (4) allows funds to “establish and operate model projects and exemplary programs for serving gifted and talented programs (such as summer programs, mentoring programs, service learning programs, and cooperative programs involving business, industry, and education)” and “implementing innovative strategies, such as cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and service-learning.”

Title VII provides funds for Indian, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native Education. While service-learning is not specifically mentioned, funds can be used for mentoring, training, and apprenticeship programs that include service-learning as an instructional strategy.

Other Opportunities

Service-learning, while not specifically mentioned, can be used as program strategies for implementing nearly every part of the law. For example, as long as data are provided as evidence of effectiveness, service-learning strategies can be used for Title I programs as instructional approaches for meeting reading/language arts, math, and science standards; for 21st Century after school programs; for migrant, bilingual, and Indian Education programs; for gifted and talented programs; and for meeting the objectives of safe and drug free schools and communities programs. Other opportunities inherent in NCLB include using service-learning strategies in character education programs, for energizing parent and community involvement, for linking K-12 education to higher education, and for providing services such as family literacy and migrant support.

The key to being accepted as a viable program strategy is that service-learning must be shown as a “promising” or “best” practice to produce the outcomes that the Title program specifies. For example, if Title I funds are desired, service-learning must be shown to yield higher scores on achievement tests. If Title IV funds are desired, service-learning must be shown to reduce risk behaviors such as decreased use of drugs and alcohol, and reduction of violence. The U.S. Department of Education will soon issue guidance on what constitutes “promising” and “best.” NCLB specifies that, at some point, the criteria used to determine promising or best practices will become very stringent, and will require “scientifically-based evidence.” This means that any practice will have to have data from rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental studies to show that the practice produces specific results. It is not clear when this provision will be enforced.

Beyond funds for programs, NCLB authorizes significant expenditures for professional development. If programs adopt service-learning as a strategy, various Title funds, most notably Title I and Title II, can be used to pay for training. There are also possibilities for funding service-learning coordinators to facilitate the programs mentioned previously. Finally, materials needed for transportation, mentoring, tutoring, and community partnerships may also be funded through NCLB as long as the materials are used to meet the goals of the Title program.

Challenges

The emphasis in NCLB is accountability. Many school, district, and state personnel may interpret the use of NCLB funding as being only allowable for activities directly related to student achievement. If these individuals take a very narrow interpretation of the possibilities, it may be difficult to convince them that funding service-learning will help them accomplish their purposes, that is, help to increase test scores. Service-learning practitioners should be prepared for these challenges and arm themselves both with data to show the efficacy of service-learning and with arguments that show that service-learning engages students in learning content, and thus helps the students to become more motivated to learn and to retain their learning. It is also more important than ever that service-learning programs be designed with the utmost quality, ensuring that the programs feature the components and strategies necessary for outcomes to be maximized.

NCLB provides many opportunities for funding for service-learning, and raises the ante for practitioners to produce the results, such as academic achievement, civic engagement, reduction of risk behaviors, caring and character traits, and acquisition of career knowledge. These challenges can be met with well-planned and executed high quality service-learning programs that are directly tied with valued goals.