

## Chapter 2

### A Profile of Service-Learning Participation and Activities in California (1997–2000)

#### Summary

Responding to the National and Community Service Act of 1990, the California Department of Education developed the CalServe Initiative to support K–12 service-learning partnerships that would enhance student academic achievement and civic responsibility, increase teachers' effectiveness and satisfaction in their teaching, heighten school district awareness of service-learning, and provide authentic service to the community. During the years 1997–2000, a total of 38 different local school-based service-learning partnerships (34 each year) were funded to implement K–12 service-learning activities. These partnerships were expected to begin to develop their activities district-wide, anchoring the state's effort to reach the goal in the year 2000 of having 25% of California's school districts offer students at least one community service or service-learning opportunity at each grade span (K–5, 6–8, 9–12) during their K–12 education.

CalServe asked partnerships to conduct yearly evaluations to promote local self-reflection and program improvement, to supply information for the construction of a picture of service-learning in the state, and to establish accountability. The overall question addressed in the statewide evaluation profile of these partnerships was, "How is service-learning impacting students, teachers, schools and communities?"

A preliminary step in summarizing the impact of these service-learning partnerships involved the collection of descriptive information pertinent to two questions:

1. *Whom did these local service-learning partnerships involve in these programs (i.e., which students, teachers, schools, and service recipients)?*
2. *What did they set out to do—What were their goals and objectives?*

The purpose of this chapter is to provide data relevant to these two questions about the participants and goals in the 1997–2000 local CalServe partnerships. It contains:

- A general description of the audiences served by these partnerships—students, teachers, schools, and service beneficiaries

- A summary of selected features of the context of the various programs—demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the communities and program participants
- A profile of the nature and level of student involvement (for example, services provided, the number of students involved compared to the district and school enrollments, and so on)
- An overview of the service-learning goals and objectives of the partnerships and a sample of classrooms from 29 of the partnerships
- A set of overall conclusions and recommendations for advancing service-learning in California by clarifying the focus and participant trends of K–12 partnerships.

Although individual partnerships varied widely in the number and types of students engaged in service-learning, across all the partnerships it can be said that the service-learning teaching approach was well-implemented, with:

- more than 86,000 students at all three grade-spans (which averages to 1/4 of the total number of students in the districts),
- students representing all of California’s major ethnic groups,
- students just beginning to learn English as well as those fluent in the language,
- students from low income and low achieving schools as well as those from more middle class and advantaged backgrounds.

From an analysis of the background of a subsample of teachers participating in these CalServe partnerships, it appears that most were fairly new to service-learning, having tried this teaching methodology in their classrooms for two or fewer years. Topics that teachers chose for service-learning projects were variable but most often centered on core subject matter areas. The actual time students spent providing service tended to involve 10 or fewer hours and efforts most frequently involved educational, environmental, or human service projects at public school sites or locations near school sites.

As will be described in this chapter, overall goals articulated by partnerships were:

- stated generally, rather than specifically, making it difficult to use them to map partnerships’ progress or to plan technical assistance,
- focused principally on the immediate tasks of obtaining the participation of the primary stakeholders in the partnership and on having a successful impact on students,
- less concerned with long-term efforts such as sustainability, coordination with other school initiatives or reforms, or with influencing district policies,
- connected in interesting ways with the developmental status of the partnership,

- not predictive of teachers' particular student outcome objectives.

Since individual partnerships varied widely in the numbers and types of students, teachers, and schools that were engaged in service learning, more information is needed about the challenges involved in implementing and sustaining effective service-learning programs. Succeeding chapters in this volume will present pertinent insights and hypotheses abstracted from the local evaluation reports as well as from site visits conducted by SLRDC during 1999–2000.

## **Background and Data**

The profile of current service-learning activity in California contained in this chapter has been generated from descriptions provided during the years 1997 to 2000 by 34 of the 38 partnerships funded by CalServe. Each of these service-learning partnerships was asked to provide yearly information specified in a set of evaluation guidelines. Partnerships had the option of submitting their partnership description data using a “report form” template provided by the Service-Learning Research and Development Center (see Appendix 2-A).

For the 1997–98 school year, 13 of the 34 funded partnerships submitted partnership descriptions using the Partnership Description Report Form (PDRF). Another 16 partnerships submitted at least some information about goals and/or service-learning participation within a narrative type of final report (see Exhibit 2.1). In 1998–99, 18 partnerships used the report form format to submit information about their partnership and 6 more provided some narrative description of their goals. In the final year of the grant cycle, 28 partnerships submitted at least partial information using the PDRF and one more provided information about partnership goals in the text of its report. Four of the 38 funded projects failed to provide descriptive information about their partnerships at least once during this three-year funding cycle.

**Exhibit 2.1**  
**Number and Type of Reports**  
**Containing Descriptive Information About Local Partnerships**

<b>School Year</b>	<b>PDRF Submitted</b>	<b>Narrative Report</b>
1997–1998 (34 funded)	13	16
1998–1999 (34 funded)	18	6
1999–2000 (34 funded)	28	1

**General Description of the 1997–2000 Partnerships**

**Developmental Status of Partnership.** As mentioned earlier, 38 partnerships distributed throughout all parts and regions of the state were funded during the 1997–2000 funding cycle—30 for all three years, 4 for two years (1998–2000), and 4 for one year (only 1997–98). Since this was not the first funding cycle for service-learning in California, some partnerships had been under development for a varying number of years.

Exhibit 2.2 contains a classification of the 34 partnerships under funding from 1998–2000 (Years 2 and 3) according to this “partnership development” variable. This exhibit also contains a description of this grouping of partnerships<sup>1</sup> according to the nature of their community contexts, the number of school districts they included (single or multiple-district model)<sup>2</sup>, and their size (number of schools and students involved).<sup>3</sup> As this exhibit reveals, longer-established partnerships showed greater development in terms of involving more schools and students. However, the correlation of size with

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<sup>1</sup> Note that only 33 of these 34 partnerships submitted partnership information at least once during the 3-year cycle. The partnership with missing data could not be classified in terms of its size or the nature of its communities.

<sup>2</sup> Single district models were partnerships consisting of a single school district. Multiple district models consisted of two or more school districts.

<sup>3</sup> “Large” partnerships had at least 3,000 students (20% of district/s) and 12 schools involved in service learning and district enrollments of at least 15,000. “Medium” partnerships had at least 1000 students in 5 schools involved.

longevity of the partnership may partially be due to the fact that a good number of rural partnerships (which tend to be smaller in size) were funded during the last three years. Appendix 2–B contains more detail about the number of districts, schools, classrooms, and students involved in each partnership during the 1999–2000 school year.

**Exhibit 2.2  
Classification of CalServe Partnerships Funded During 1997–2000**

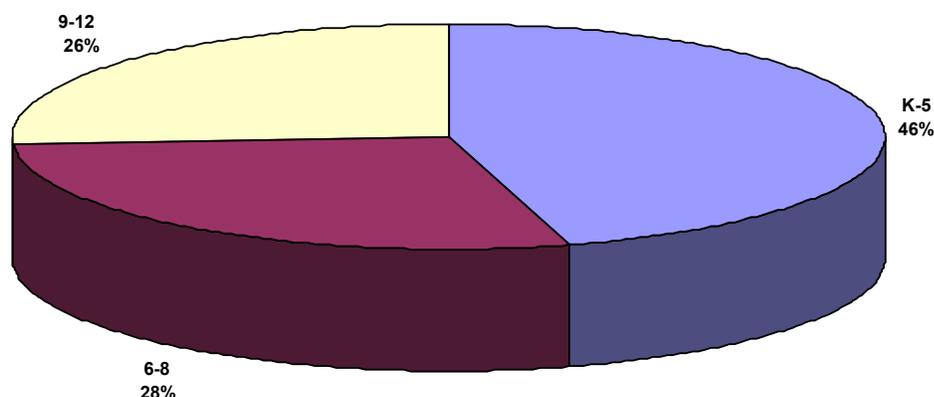
Type of Partnership	Type of Community Context					District Model <sup>2</sup>		Size of Partnership <sup>3</sup>		
	Rural	Suburb	Urban	Mixed	No Report	Single	Mltpl	Small	Med	Lrg
Sustainable 1997 (n=13)	3	2	3	3	2	7	6	5	2	5
Sustainable 1998 (n=9)	2	2	4	1	-	8	1	1	6	2
Developmental (New in 1997) (n=12)	7	2	1	2	-	11	1	8	4	-
TOTALS	12	6	8	6	2	26	8	14	12	7

**Grade Level of Participating Students.** Of the 34 partnerships, 31 submitted reports for 1999–2000 that provided at least some breakdown of student participation by grade level. Exhibit 2.3 charts the relative proportion of students engaged in service-learning in grades K–5, 6–8, and 9–12. As this diagram indicates, across these 31 partnerships a little more than one quarter of the participating students were in the middle school grades (28%) and about the same proportion were in the high school grades (26%). A little less than half of the participating students (46%) were in the elementary grades. The actual percentage of students at these three grade spans differed considerably from partnership to partnership, as one would expect given the fact that some were centered in elementary school districts and some in high school districts.<sup>4</sup> As an example of this variability, eight partnerships had over 50% of their

<sup>4</sup> Appendix 2–C lists percentages of students at the three grade spans for each partnership individually.

participating students in the elementary grades, five partnerships had over 50% of their participating students in the middle school grades, and nine partnerships had 50% or more of their participants at the high school level.

**Exhibit 2.3**  
**Grade Span Distribution of CalServe Partnerships During 1999–2000**



**Ethnic Classification of Participating Students.** In 1999–2000, 32 of 34 partnerships provided information about the ethnicity of students taking part in service-learning. Calculating the percentages of students in the seven ethnic categories across these 32 partnerships yields a profile of students involved in service-learning during the final year of the grant cycle. This 1999–2000 ethnicity profile of participating students looks different from the current enrollment averages for California. It also differs in some ways from the sample of 12 service-learning partnerships that reported ethnicity data in 1997–98. As Exhibit 2.4 shows, in 1999–00 there were fewer Hispanic and White, but more Asian, Black, and Filipino students engaged in service-learning in this sample of 32 partnerships than in the California schools as a whole. There were also substantially more Asian and fewer White students in the 99/00 than in the 97/98 service learning samples. These differences are due in large part to the nature and location of the partnerships contributing data to these tallies in the different years.

**Exhibit 2.4**  
**Race/Ethnicity of Students Engaged in Service-Learning (1999–2000)**

	Percentages of Participating Students by Race/Ethnicity						
	American Indian	Asian	Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic	Black	White
Ave. S-L % 1999–2000 (32 partnrshps.)	1.2	23.5	1.3	5.7	27.6	14.0	25.7
% Range (1999–2000)	0 – 11.5	0 – 42.1	0 – 6	0 – 29	6 – 98.7	1 – 49.5	1 – 83.9
California Ave. %	0.9	8.0	0.6	2.4	42.2	8.6	36.9
Ave. S-L % 1997–98 (12 prtnrshps.)	1.3	7.2	1.6	5.7	30.6	15.8	36.4

In 1999–2000, the largest numbers of students engaged in service-learning were participants of urban partnerships in Northern California where there are greater proportions of Asian and Black students and fewer Hispanic and White students. Although indicating considerable ethnic diversity among students engaged in service-learning as a whole, the average figures, thus, do not fully capture the variation that existed across and within the different partnerships. The second line of Exhibit 2.4 (and Appendix 2–D) shows the *range* of ethnic percentages across the 32 partnerships. The distributional data reinforce the point that students of varied ethnicities took part in the service-learning conducted throughout California during this three-year period.

**Students with Limited English Language Skills.** Thirty-one partnerships supplied information from which the number of students engaged in service-learning classified as “English Learners” (formerly called Limited English Proficiency) could be estimated. The average percentage of such students across this group of partnerships was 14.6%, which is more than 10% lower than the state average of 24.9%, again because of the lower participation rate of students from the urban partnerships in