

# Engaged *for* Success

## Service-Learning as a Tool for High School Dropout Prevention



CIVIC ENTERPRISES, LLC

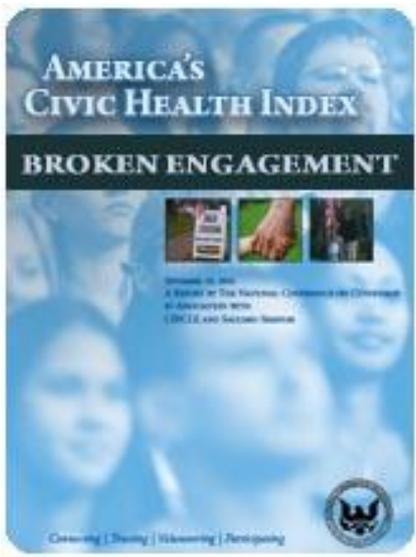
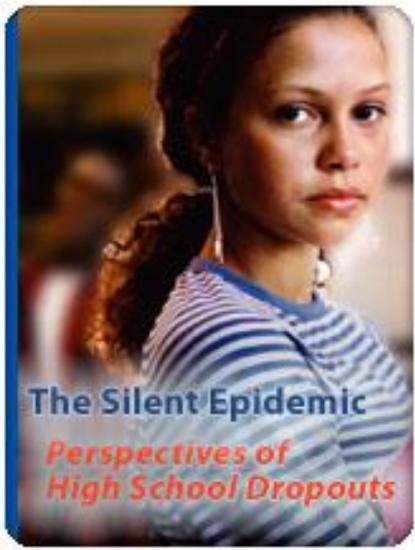


BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*



# Two Reports Suggested the Potential for Service-Learning to Address issues of Dropout and Civic Engagement

- *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*
- *America's Civic Health Index: Broken Engagement*



# THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT EPIDEMIC

Today's Educational Crisis

## The Cost of our Dropout Epidemic

- Nearly one third of students fail to graduate with their class, nearly half of minorities
- Dropouts:
  - earn about \$1 million less over their lifetimes
  - are twice more likely to slip into poverty
  - are 8 times more likely to be in jail
  - are half as likely to vote and a fourth as likely to volunteer as college grads
  - enormous economic costs

## Service-Learning Tops the List of Ways Schools Can Improve, According to Dropouts

**81% - Opportunities for real-world learning (service-learning, internships) to make classroom more relevant**

81% - Better teachers who keep classes interesting

75% - Smaller classes with more individual instruction

71% - Better communication between parents & school, get parents more involved

71% - Parents make sure their kids go to school every day

70% - Increase supervision at school: ensure students attend classes

## **Recommended Policies to Address Dropout**

- Improve teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance the connections between school and work
- Improve instruction and access to supports for struggling students
- Build a school climate that fosters academics
- Ensure strong adult-student relationships within the school

**SERVICE-LEARNING CAN ADDRESS EACH OF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS**

## ***America's Civic Health Index: Broken Engagement***

- Measured 40 indicators of civic health over last 30 years
- Only 3% of Americans who attend club meetings and work on community projects are dropouts
- Compared to college graduates, dropouts are:
  - 1/2 as likely to vote
  - 1/4 as likely to volunteer
  - 1/3 as likely to attend club meetings
  - 1/2 as likely to engage in public work in communities

# SERVICE-LEARNING IN OUR SCHOOLS

Effective When Well-Implemented; Still  
Too Rare

## Research

- Nationally representative survey of 807 high-school students
- Focus groups of service-learning teachers
- Interviews with students from service-learning programs
- National literature review of both service-learning and dropout

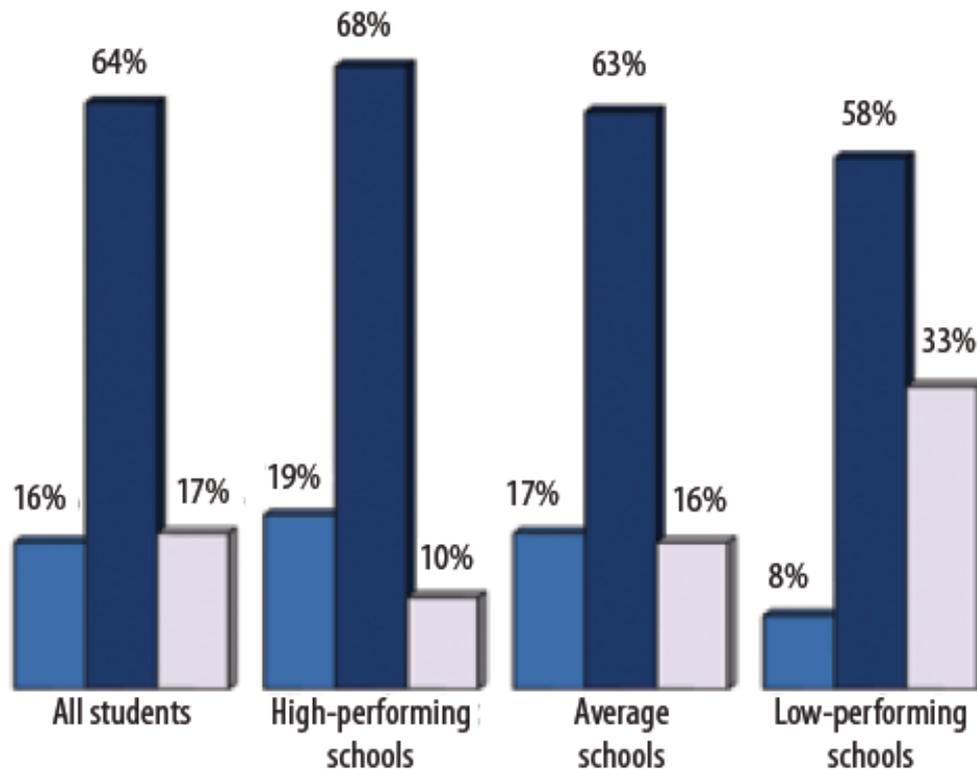
## **Need for Increased Access and Awareness**

- 65% of all students (70% of African Americans) find the idea of service-learning appealing
- 30% of schools have service learning, according to principals, but only 16% of students are aware of it
- At low-performing schools, only 8% of students are aware of service-learning
- 83% of all students (and 90% of African Americans and 83% of Hispanics) say they'd enroll in service-learning if their school offered it

### Service-Learning – Community Service Gap

- My school has a program in which students participate in community service activities directly connected to what they learn in class
- My school has a community service program and encourages community service but does not directly tie it to classes
- My school does not have any type of community service programs or requirements

\* 72% of all students have participated in community service outside school; only 58% of at-risk students have done so.



# Aspects of Highly Effective Service-Learning

## Principles for Effective Practice for K-12 Service-Learning (Weah, 2007)

1. Curricular Integration
2. Meaningful Service
3. Cognitively Challenging Reflection
4. Progress Monitoring
5. Youth Voice
6. Duration & Intensity
7. Diversity
8. Reciprocal Relationships

# PREVENTING DROPOUT WITH SERVICE-LEARNING

A Potentially Strong Tool

## Connection to School Environment

- Poor attendance is the best predictor of dropping out
- 82% of service-learning students (and 79% of all students, and 80% of at-risk students) would feel more positive about school if they had more service-learning
- Service-learning teachers said that service-learning led to stronger relationships with students
- Teachers said that service-learning improved attendance
- Other research shows connection between service-learning and higher attendance (Laird and Black, 2002; Shumer, 1994; Rolzinski, 1990)

## Connection to School Environment

*“I would absolutely think that it impacts attendance, because it goes back to if they’re doing something that they enjoy.”*

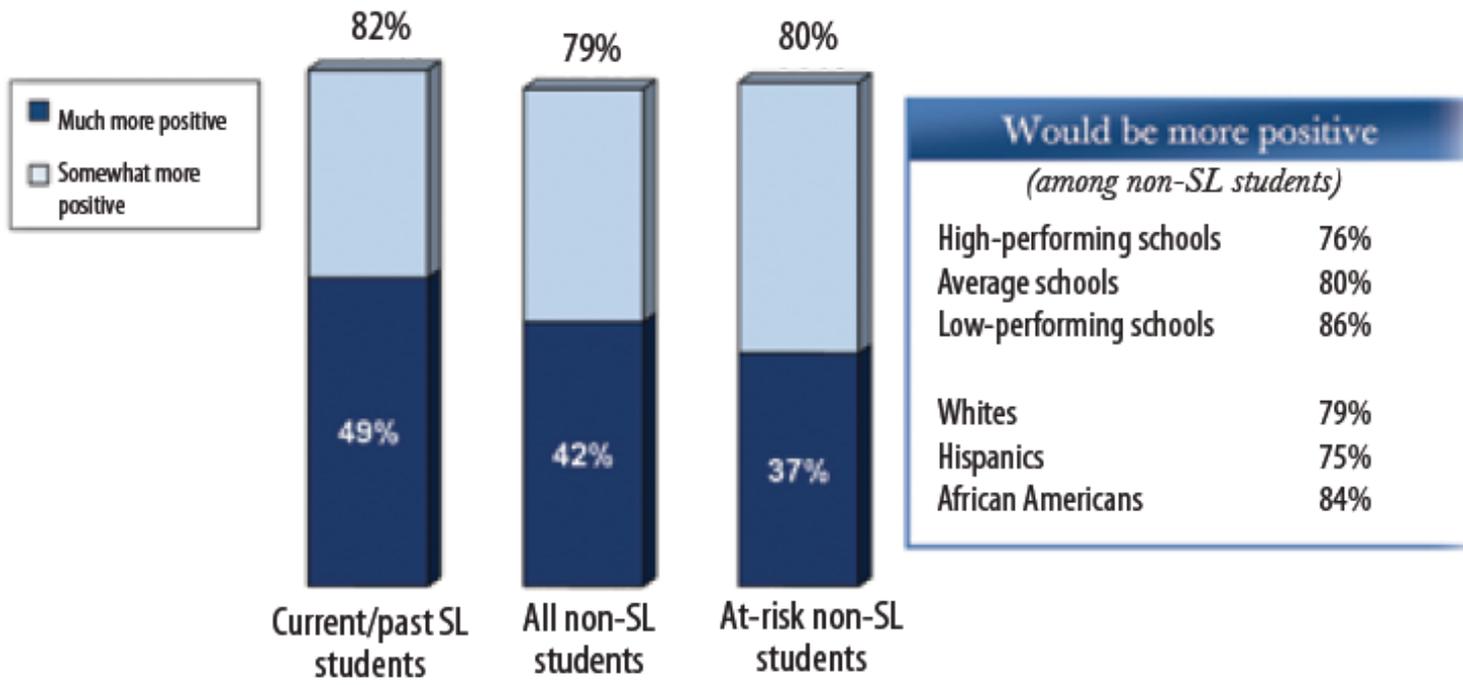
**Service-learning  
teacher from Kansas  
City**

**Service-learning  
student**

*“Service-learning makes me want to come to school, because it's not the same thing all the time.”*

### Figure 4: Service-Learning Has Potential To Improve Attendance

*How have/would your feelings about going to school change if your school had classes directly tied to service learning?*



## Connection to School Environment

*“I have a small group of kids that I work with in a service-learning class, and some of those kids are definitely improved because it’s one on one. I know them. They know me. They get to know their teacher in a different way, and I think that they know I’m looking out for them, and if they screw up, I’m going to know. So I think that helps them.”*

**Service-learning  
teacher from Chicago**

## Classroom Engagement

- Boring classes and a lack of a challenging curriculum often lead to disengagement and dropout
- 45% of service-learning students said their service-learning classes were more worthwhile than other classes; only 3% said they are less worthwhile
- Other research confirms that service-learning has a significant effect on school engagement (Melchior, 1999)

## Engaging Students and Opening Minds

*“There are so many stereotypes that I think service-learning helps to break down.”*

**Service-learning teacher from New York**

**Service-learning student**

*“It’s a better experience because you’re not in a class sitting down writing on the board. You’re outside doing hands-on activities learning about what’s around you.”*

## Motivation

- 69% of dropouts are not motivated to work hard in school and 66% would have worked harder if more had been demanded of them
- 77% of service-learning students say service-learning classes have a very or a fairly big effect on motivating them to work hard
- Other research shows that service-learning improves self-confidence, sense of empowerment (Switzer, Simmons, Dew, Regalski and Wang, 1995)

## Motivation

### Service-learning student

*“Service-learning motivates me to keep on going and to not be afraid to try new things.”*

*“Just the direct contact with other people is what makes it so meaningful. They like giving away what they’ve learned in school, and now they’re giving it away to help a younger child. I think what also really appeals to them, and I don’t know that they always express this, is that they know when they walk into the room they’re as big as any pro athlete or famous singer.”*

### Service-learning teacher

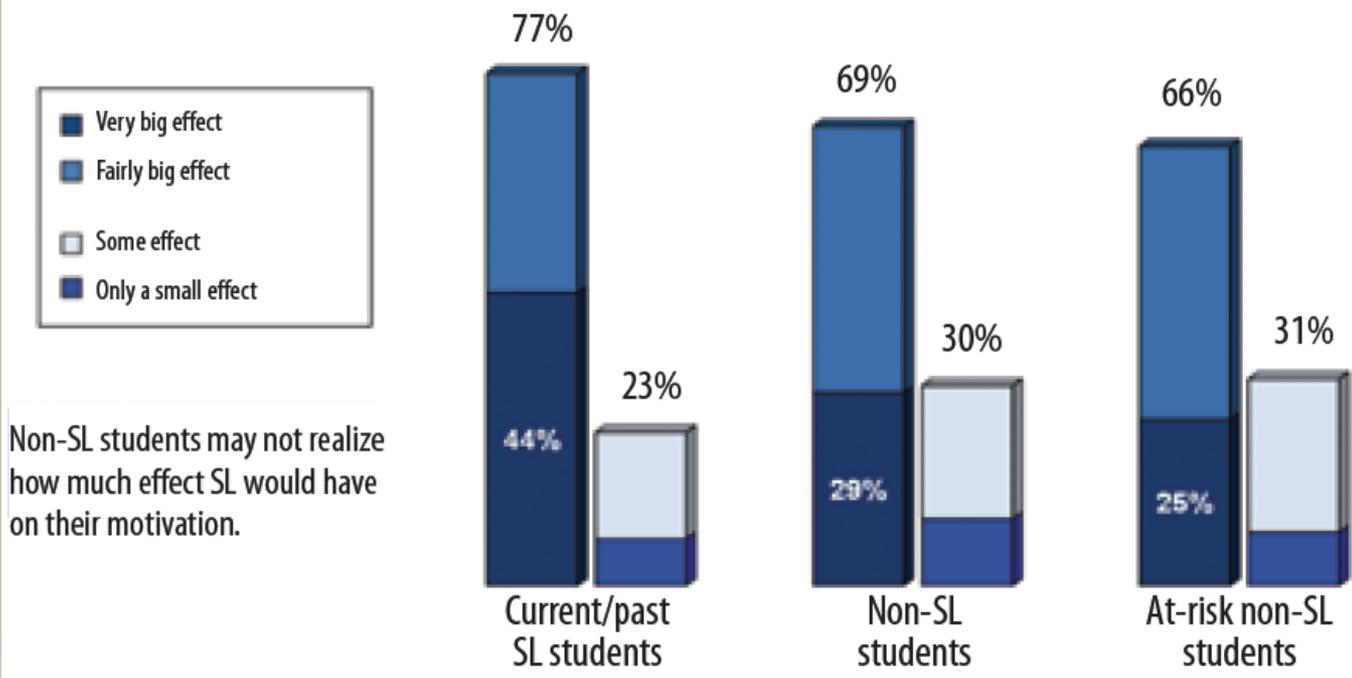
## Motivation

*“As far as this young man goes, he wasn’t doing anything in his classes and was probably on a good line for dropping out and not finishing high school.” With the motivation of the service-learning, however, he graduated from high school.*

**Service-learning  
teacher from  
Arizona**

### Figure 6: Service-Learning Motivates Students To Work Hard/Do Best

*Effect of taking classes in which what you learn is tied to community service on your motivation to work hard/do best in school*



## Academic Performance

- 35% of dropouts say they were failing in school
- 57% had difficulty passing from one grade to the next
- Service-learning has been shown to improve grades, test scores, homework completion, and reduce the achievement gap (Akujobi and Simmons, 1997; Billig and Klute, 2003; Klute, 2002; Melchior and Bailis, 2002; Scales and Roehlkepartain, 2005; Shumer, 1994; Schmidt, Shumow, and Kackar, 2007; Rolzinski, 1990)

## Academic Performance

*“I know for a fact that for the first time, and I’ve been teaching English almost 30 years, those kids know that subject matter better than any other research paper they’ve done.”*

**Service-learning teacher who organizes a project where her students write a book and share it with younger students**

## Academic Performance

*“I think one of the benefits of service-learning, as far as at-risk learners, is that you’re providing a very different type of educational opportunity. So I think of my kinesthetic learners, my students who really can’t stay in their seats for a 40-minute period, but who flourish when you tell them, ‘you need to plant trees’. And they’re the ones who are at the forefront, planting just hundreds in a day, because this is something where they know they can be successful.”*

**Service-learning  
teacher**

**Service-learning  
student**

*“Service-learning makes us think outside the box. There is more to learning than a textbook and a bunch of tests.”*

## Behavior

- 62% of dropouts say more classroom discipline is necessary
- 57% say schools need to do more to prevent violence
- Other research shows that service-learning improves behavior (Switzer, Simmons, Dew, Regalski and Wang, 1995; Schmidt, Shumow, and Kackar, 2007)

## Overall Effect on Graduation

- **Percent of students who say that service-learning would have a very big or a fairly big effect on keeping dropouts in school:**
  - **64% of all students**
  - **70% of Hispanic students**
  - **74% of African American students**

### Overall Effect on Graduation

*“I think you would end up with a higher graduation rate,” one teacher explained, “because if they’re more engaged in their classes, they’re going to come to school. It’s active, authentic learning, and they’re getting more out of it.”*

**Service-learning  
teacher**

**Service-learning  
student**

*“I really feel like I am a different person because before service-learning I didn’t really look at my community the way I do now. Before I used to not really pay attention to anything. After all these classes I look at my community and see that there have to be some changes made.”*

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## Maximizing the Potential of Service-Learning

## Local Level

- Expanded Access
  - Capstone projects at transition points
  - Cesar Chavez School
- Students at risk for dropping out (low attendance, low motivation, etc.) should be encouraged to take service-learning classes
- Every school should have a teacher or volunteer in charge of coordinating service-learning
- Civic transcripts chronicling the service-learning experiences of each student should be included with each graduate's academic transcript

## State Level

- Leverage public funding by offering matching funds for philanthropic grants
- A Youth Innovation Fund could offer support for student-created projects
- Encourage Teachers to Implement Service-Learning
  - Enhanced Professional Development
  - Statewide clearinghouse of service-learning curricula
- Collect good data on service-learning and academic performance
- Build strong partnerships with universities, community groups, local governments, and schools

## Federal Level

- Longitudinal study on the ability of service-learning to raise graduation rates
- Learn and Serve America should have, as one of its clear goals, the use of service-learning for reducing high school dropout
- Channel federal resources to encourage service-learning
  - AmeriCorps – within and outside schools
  - Work-Study students help foster service-learning
  - USA Freedom Corps Coordinating Council
- Re-brand service-learning to capture its spirit and practice
- Foster a national dialogue on service-learning and dropout

# ONGOING EFFORTS

What Is Being Done

## National Summit

## Local Dropout Summits

- 100 local summits are being organized by America's Promise Alliance
- Will take place in every state and the cities with the worst dropout problems
- "These summits will increase awareness, encourage collaboration and facilitate action in those states and communities that want to improve their graduation rates."  
–America's Promise Alliance



## **Service-Learning Reaching Top of Agenda**

- National Action Forum on Service-Learning
  - The College of William and Mary
  - March 10, 2008 – Williamsburg, VA
- National Service-Learning Conference
  - April 9-12, 2008 – Minneapolis, MN
- National Conference on Volunteering and Service
  - June 1-3, 2008 – Atlanta, GA
- TIME ServiceNation Summit
  - September 17-19, 2008 – New York, NY

## TIME ServiceNation Summit

- Goals:
  - Engage presidential candidates
  - Release a declaration of citizenship
  - Release comprehensive service agenda
  - Gather powerful endorsements
  - Announce new legislation
  - Generate media coverage
  - Launch grassroots campaign



# CONCLUSION

- Service-Learning is not a silver bullet, and it will not solve the dropout crisis by itself
- Service-Learning is an essential tool that should be used as part of a comprehensive dropout prevention strategy
- Policy Dialogue