



Improving Outcomes for K-12 Service-Learning Participants

Source: RMC Research Corporation, May 2007

For additional resources on this and other service-learning topics visit Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse at <http://www.servicelearning.org>.

Several new studies have recently been completed that illuminate the characteristics of service-learning practice most closely associated with student outcomes. The studies are summarized below, and a link to the full study is provided.

The Impact of Participation in Service-Learning on High School Students' Academic and Civic Participation – S. Billig, S. Root & D. Jesse, RMC Research

This study compared more than 2,400 high school students who participated in service-learning programs with those who did not participate in schools matched for similar demographics and student achievement profiles.

Overall outcomes. Although service-learning students scored higher than comparison students on several outcomes—and were significantly more likely to say that they intended to vote, that they enjoyed school and/or specific subject matters, and that they acquired more civic knowledge related to government and community—most of the differences were not statistically significant. The study specifically suggests that service-learning is effective when it is implemented well, but it is no more effective than conventional social studies classes when the conditions are not optimal

Wide range in practice. Even though the sites were selected for quality, there was a wide range in the quality of the service-learning practice. According to students, most service-learning experiences “often” included having real responsibilities, however, only “sometimes” did students discuss their experiences with teachers.

Students' perceptions of skill acquisition. A large percentage (67%) of students reported that they gained job skills and work experience through their participation in service-learning.

Attributes associated with highest outcomes. There were additional significant and substantial differences in outcomes among the various service-learning programs in the study. Those with the highest student ratings on quality attributes also had the highest impacts across academic and civic measures. In particular, the following characteristics were significantly related to outcomes:

- Duration
- Teacher experience
- Type of service project
- Engagement in the service-learning activities
- Intentionality
- Teacher practice.
- Quality elements



Variation in quality. Areas of quality with the largest variation in schools were whether students had challenging tasks; made important decisions; had freedom to develop and use their own ideas; and had real responsibilities.

Content coverage. Service-learning teachers covered as much content as non service-learning teachers and students gained as much knowledge.

For more information, visit www.rmcdenver.com

Youth Helping America – K. Spring, Corp. for National and Community Service

This study tested the extent to which several components of service-learning quality were associated with student impacts. The number and type of quality experiences were correlated to outcomes in the areas of civic engagement.

Participation. High school students were more likely than middle school students to participate in school-based service-learning, and students in private schools were more likely than students in public schools to participate in service-learning.

Quality. Private school students were more likely to participate in service-learning experiences that featured reflection, planning and service that lasted more than a semester than public school students.

Impact. In general, the more quality elements in a service-learning experience, the higher the outcomes, no matter what the socioeconomic background or grade level of the participant.

For the full report, go to www.cnscs.org

Service-Learning and Transitioning to Adulthood – S. Martin, Harris Interactive

This study examines the extent to which service-learning helps to ease the “transition to adulthood”.

Impact.

- Focus group participants mentioned that they valued school more.
- Service-learning participants were more likely to report being very or extremely satisfied with life overall and other aspects of their lives.
- Service-learning participants who worked with community-based organizations were most likely of all respondents to say that they would continue to volunteer.
- Relative to their non-participating peers, service-learning participants were also more likely to report various forms of civic engagement.

For more information, visit www.nylc.org/g2g

For a more detailed discussion, including references and documentation, see the complete online fact sheet at http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/k-12_facts/improving_outcomes/expanded.php

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