



Service-Learning

Schools of Success Evaluation Update #2

Education Commission of the States

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Educators' Perceptions of How Schools Can Foster Successful Service-Learning

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INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) established the Schools of Success, a national network of 19 schools that use service-learning as an instructional strategy.¹ Thanks to funding from the State Farm Companies Foundation and Learn and Serve America, the schools were part of a three-year project to examine how the elements of service-learning might enhance key student outcomes, such as academic performance and civic engagement. Through this project, the NCLC also has gathered information on school administrators' and teachers' perceptions of the facilitators and barriers to successful service-learning.

Key Findings:

- In general, teachers and administrators indicate that six factors are important to service-learning success. These factors include:
 - Availability of technical support
 - Professional development opportunities
 - Financial support
 - Community support
 - Opportunities to collaborate and network with others
 - Good fit between service-learning goals and school's mission and vision.
- Of these six factors, teachers identified a good fit between service-learning goals and a school's mission and vision as being most important for service-learning success. Administrators' responses did not clearly favor any single factor.
- Teachers and administrators did not perceive barriers to successful service-learning as strongly as they did facilitators of success. In general, teachers and administrators identified lack of time as the most critical barrier to service-learning success.



National Center for Learning and Citizenship

BACKGROUND

The NCLC selected participating schools for the Schools of Success network based on their support of five elements critical to the successful, school-based integration of service-learning. Research suggests that student achievement and success through service-learning result from these elements:

- 1) Vision and leadership
- 2) Curriculum and assessment
- 3) Professional development
- 4) Community-school partnerships
- 5) Continuous improvement.²

Each school received funding over three years (\$5,000 per year), on- and off-site professional development opportunities, and ongoing technical assistance to expand and deepen existing service-learning initiatives and build greater capacity within their school and district. In return, the NCLC asked schools to test and learn from leadership strategies that integrate and sustain quality service-learning for all students to succeed in school and in their communities.

The Schools of Success network was funded by the State Farm Companies Foundation and the Corporation for National and Community Service/Learn and Serve America. Because both funders required its own evaluation, each year the NCLC completed two separate evaluations of the participating schools in the program (see Exhibit 1). State Farm-funded schools included 10 schools that ranged from preschool to high school. The schools could implement service-learning in any subject area. Learn and Serve-funded schools included nine middle schools, all of which were designated as Title I schools (high poverty) during the time of this program. In addition, service-learning projects in the Learn and Serve-funded schools required a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) focus.³

Exhibit 1: Schools of Success Network Participating Schools, by Funder

State Farm Funded (Service-learning in any subject area)			Learn and Serve Funded (STEM-focused service-learning)		
duPont Manual High School	Louisville, KY	9-12 Magnet High School	Christian County Middle School	Hopkinsville, KY	6-8 Middle School
Grant's Lick Elementary School	Alexandria, KY	K-5 Elementary School	Detroit Edison Public School Academy	Detroit, MI	P-10 Public Charter School (only grades 6-8 participated)
Greendale Middle School	Greendale, WI	6-8 Middle School	Hopkinsville Middle School	Hopkinsville, KY	6-8 Middle School
Liberty High School	Louisville, KY	9-12 Alternative High School	MS 442	Brooklyn, NY	6-8 Middle School
Malcolm Shabazz City High School	Madison, WI	9-12 Alternative High School	New Foundations Charter School	Philadelphia, PA	P-10 Public Charter School (only grades 6-8 participated)
Montpelier High School	Montpelier, VT	9-12 High School	North Drive Middle School	Hopkinsville, KY	6-8 Middle School
Park Forest Elementary School	State College, PA	K-5 Elementary School	School for Global Leaders	New York, NY	6-8 Middle School
Patriot Academy	Madison, AL	9-12 Alternative High School	Sutter Middle School	Fowler, CA	6-8 Middle School
Raymond School District	Franksville, WI	K-8 School	Tupelo Middle School	Tupelo, MS	6-8 Middle School
Waterford High School	Waterford, CT	9-12 High School			

RESEARCH METHODS

The NCLC contracted with RMC Research Denver⁴ to examine the Schools of Success program’s effects on schools, community conditions, and students’ academic and civic engagement. While the evaluation was wide ranging, this issue brief presents a subset of data gathered through surveys completed by school administrators and teachers whose students took part in service-learning activities. The results reported below are based on data gathered from posttest surveys administered during the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years.⁵

Using the previously mentioned five elements critical to successful school-based integration of service-learning as a starting point, the research team identified a set of possible facilitators and barriers to service-learning success. The survey asked teachers and administrators to use a four-point scale to identify the extent to which they disagreed or agreed that a specific factor was indeed a facilitator of or a barrier to service-learning success. Through this approach, the research team hoped to identify the relative importance of these previously identified factors.

RESULTS: FACILITATORS OF SUCCESS⁶

Exhibit 2 and Exhibit 3 display teacher and administrator perceptions of facilitators of service-learning success. With few exceptions, the average response from both teachers and administrators for all six of the facilitators listed was between 3.00 and 4.00. In general teachers and administrators “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that these factors are important to service-learning success.

In some instances teachers’ mean scores for “availability of technical support” and “administrator support” fell below 3.00. The mean scores, however, were never less than 2.50 and frequently were greater than 2.90. While these scores were not as high as scores for other factors, they nonetheless signal that many teachers and administrators agree that these two factors are important for service-learning success.

In general, teachers agreed more strongly that “good fit between service-learning goals and schools’ mission and vision” is important for service-learning success than they did for other factors. While administrators also strongly agreed that this factor is important for service-learning success, their responses did not clearly favor any one factor over the others.

Exhibit 2: Teacher Perceptions of Facilitators of Service-Learning Success, by Funder and Year

	State Farm Funded 2010-11			Learn & Serve Funded 2010-11			State Farm Funded 2010-11			Learn & Serve Funded 2010-11		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Availability of technical support	15	3.33	.72	14	3.29	.61	30	2.77	1.07	6	3.50	.55
Administrator support	19	3.00	1.20	14	2.93	1.00	33	2.94	1.14	6	2.60	1.14
Financial support	19	3.47	.61	14	3.57	.51	32	3.16	.88	6	3.67	.52
Community support	20	3.60	.50	14	3.14	.77	32	3.19	.97	6	3.17	1.17
Opportunities to collaborate and network with others	19	3.74	.45	14	3.57	.51	32	3.38	.83	6	3.20	.84
Good fit between service-learning goals and school’s mission and vision	21	3.71	.56	14	3.64	.50	33	3.55	.67	6	3.50	.55

Note: Responses were rated on a 4-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Exhibit 3: Administrator Perceptions of Facilitators of Service-Learning Success, by Funder

	State Farm Funded 2010-11			Learn & Serve Funded 2010-11		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Availability of technical support	10	3.20	1.03	6	3.67	.51
Professional development opportunities	12	3.75	.45	6	3.67	.52
Financial support	12	3.83	.39	5	3.40	.55
Community support	12	3.67	.49	4	3.00	.82
Opportunities to collaborate and network with others	12	3.50	.67	6	3.17	.75
Good fit between service-learning goals and school's mission and vision	11	3.82	.41	6	3.50	1.23

Note: Responses were rated on a 4-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

RESULTS: BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

Exhibit 4 and Exhibit 5 display teacher and administrator perceptions of barriers to service-learning success. On average, teachers and administrators gave lower ratings to the seven barriers listed than they did to the facilitators of service-learning success. This response pattern indicates that teachers and administrators did not generally agree with the importance of previously identified barriers as strongly as they did for the previously identified facilitators. Administrators and teachers, however, agreed that “lack of time” was more of a barrier to service-learning than the other barriers. In most instances, administrators and teachers did not see these other barriers as significantly preventing service-learning implementation.

Exhibit 4: Teacher Perceptions of Barriers to Service-Learning Success, by Funder and Year

	State Farm Funded 2010-11			Learn & Serve Funded 2010-11			State Farm Funded 2011-12			Learn & Serve Funded 2011-12		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Lack of time	22	2.82	.91	14	3.00	.96	34	2.62	.99	6	3.50	.84
Availability of technical support	16	1.56	.89	14	2.21	.89	31	1.71	.97	6	1.50	.84
Limited financial support	21	1.86	.96	14	1.86	.86	33	1.88	1.05	6	2.00	.89
Extent of community support	18	1.67	.84	14	2.43	.85	30	1.67	.99	6	1.83	.98
Opportunities to collaborate or network with others	21	1.95	1.12	14	2.14	.95	33	2.00	.97	6	2.60	1.14
Student interest in service-learning activities	21	1.95	.92	14	2.43	1.09	34	2.06	1.13	6	2.33	.82
Integration of service-learning into school curriculum	21	2.10	.89	14	2.36	1.08	34	2.06	1.10	6	2.67	1.37

Note: Responses were rated on a 4-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

Exhibit 5: Administrator Perceptions of Barriers to Service-Learning Success, by Funder

	State Farm Funded 2010-11			Learn & Serve Funded 2010-11		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Lack of time	10	2.60	.84	6	2.50	1.05
Availability of technical support	11	1.73	1.10	6	2.00	1.26
Limited financial support	11	2.18	1.08	6	2.20	.84
Extent of community support	12	1.42	.67	6	1.83	.98
Opportunities to collaborate or network with others	11	1.64	.92	6	2.00	1.26
Student interest in service-learning activities	11	1.55	2.27	6	2.00	1.10
Integration of service-learning into school curriculum	11	2.27	1.10	6	1.67	.82

Note: Responses were rated on a 4-point scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4 = Strongly Agree.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The results of this study have several implications for future research, practice, and policy. In the realm of research, this study suggests that, while the field has clearly identified some facilitators for service-learning success, it has yet to do so for barriers as accurately. Teachers and administrators agreed or strongly agreed that all of the facilitators included in the survey were important for service-learning success. The survey, however, was not open-ended, so the list of facilitators may not be comprehensive. Other facilitators may need to be included in this list.

Two possible explanations may account for teachers' and administrators' relatively weak ratings of the barriers listed in the survey. First, the list provided in the survey may not include the correct barriers for service-learning in this set of schools. Again, because the survey was not open-ended, we cannot be sure that barriers other than those listed prevented teachers from implementing service-learning. Second, because each of these sites is already favorable to service-learning implementation, the teachers and administrators may not have encountered the most common implementation barriers. In their experience, these barriers may not be problematic. Regardless of the explanation, the results of this study point to few new findings that can help the field further its understanding of barriers to service-learning.

With regard to practice, the results of this study suggest that a complex blend of facilitators may be necessary for implementation of successful service-learning. Teachers and facilitators signaled their agreement or strong agreement that each facilitator listed on the survey is important for successful service-learning. This result indicates that a single "silver bullet" may not be enough to support service-learning implementation. Rather, a combination of facilitators and a comprehensive package of practices may be necessary to support successful service-learning.

The high scores given to "time as a barrier" to service-learning implementation confirm a finding from NCLC staff visits to schools: teachers and administrators struggle with service-learning implementation when they are "overloaded" with implementing multiple reforms simultaneously. This was particularly the case in the Learn and Serve-sponsored schools, which frequently were implementing multiple reforms as a result of their Title I and school restructuring statuses. Implementation of a complex, nuanced pedagogy such as service-learning was not easy in these environments.

With regard to policy, the findings of this study suggest the importance of local policy for implementation of successful service-learning. Specifically, teachers' and administrators' responses indicated that good fit between service-learning goals and schools' mission and vision is, in their view, the most important facilitator for successful service-learning. Schools' mission and vision statements are typically developed at the local level, often as a part of schools' and districts' strategic and/or improvement planning activities. From the perspective of the teachers and administrators who participated in this study, these local policy elements are crucial to the success of service-learning. While federal and state policy likely also help foster successful service-learning, they likely are not sufficient without the presence of "friendly" local policies as well.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Schools of Success network was part of a larger evaluation study conducted by RMC Research Denver that used a set of common measures across a cluster of Learn and Serve states (Arizona, Hawaii, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin) and national programs (e.g., Youth Service America's STEMester of Service).

² T. Pickeral, T. Lennon, and J. Piscatelli, *Service-Learning Policies and Practices: A Research-Based Advocacy Paper*. (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2008).

³ While we did assess the relationship between service-learning and student outcomes related to STEM coursework, we do not provide these data here. Additional reports that address our findings on STEM and service-learning will be forthcoming.

⁴ RMC also conducted evaluations of other states and national programs in our Learn and Serve cluster.

⁵ Because of low survey response rates, we are unable to report administrator responses for the 2011-2012 school year.

⁶ In an effort to keep this issue brief concise, we do not provide all evaluation results here. Please contact Paul Baumann, NCLC Director, at pbaumann@ecs.org if you wish to receive copies of the complete evaluations.

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State Farm
Companies
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