



Service-Learning

Education Commission of the States

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State Policies on Service-Learning

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A 2014 scan updates ECS' 2011 database

The National Center for Learning and Civic Engagement (NCLCE) at the Education Commission of the States (ECS) recently updated its 2011 state policy scan on service-learning. The policy scan was conducted to determine the degree to which service-learning has been institutionalized in the states.

Although only Maryland and the District of Columbia have requirements that compel high school students to complete a specified number of hours in a service-learning or community-service activity to graduate, every state has legislation or state board of education policy on the books that touches on service-learning or community service.

Since the 2011 policy scan, states have been dealing with the loss of federal funding for service-learning programs, and perhaps as a result of the funding loss, there has been little movement on state service-learning legislation or policy.

Visit the Service-Learning Policy database:

http://www.ecs.org/html/education/Issues/ServiceLearning/SLDB_intro_SF.asp

2014 Policy Scan

Key Takeaways

33 states include service-learning in their state academic standards or frameworks.

24 states identify participation in service-learning/community service as a means of preparing students for the workplace.

Only Maryland and the District of Columbia require high school students to complete a specified number of hours in a service-learning or community-service activity to graduate.

23 states allow or require school districts to award credit toward graduation for service-learning.

17 states identify service-learning/community service as an instructional strategy that increases student achievement.

What is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is an educational model supported by a growing body of research. Defined as the combination of meaningful service to the community, academically-rigorous classroom education, and deliberate, structured reflection, it allows students to connect what they are learning to the service they have performed. Service-learning involves learning and intellectual skills, performing needed service, and producing real results. It provides students with the skills and virtues that enable them to participate fully in a civil society and contribute to the sustainability of our democracy.

High-quality service-learning requires:

- Meaningful service
- Intentional links to curriculum
- Reflection
- Diversity among participants
- Youth and parental engagement and decision-making
- Mutually beneficial partnerships
- Ongoing progress monitoring
- Appropriate duration and intensity to meet community needs and outcomes.

Why is Service-Learning Important and How Does it Connect to Common Core?

Research shows that students engaged in high-quality service-learning learn to collaborate, think critically and problem solve.¹ These same deeper learning skills are necessary for students to master the Common Core standards and meet the expectations of Common Core authors and advocates. The connection between the standards and service-learning is increasingly important as Common Core implementation continues across the states because “summative assessments and students’ proficiency classifications based on the assessments will represent many goals for deeper learning, particularly those related to mastering and being able to apply core academic content and cognitive strategic related to complex thinking, communication, and problem solving.”²

Some states are starting to recognize service-learning’s potential in helping students meet the goals of the Common Core. For example, in adopting new state standards to align with the Common Core, Kentucky designed its model curriculum framework to identify expanded/extended learning opportunities as a strategy to engage students. The framework recognizes service-learning as a promising direction in achieving these opportunities.³ In New Jersey, individualized student-learning opportunities such as service-learning activities are based on specific instructional objectives that meet or exceed the Common Core standards at the high-school level. Service-learning experiences that are integrated into a school district’s academic curriculum are identified as a method that allows students to learn and develop through activities that meet the needs of a community and help foster civic responsibility.⁴

What is Congress Doing (or Not Doing) to Support Service-Learning?

Congress demonstrated its support of service-learning in the early 1990s with the passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act, which created the Corporation for National and Community Service (corporation). However, since 2012, that support has not included the funding that states and school districts need to implement high-quality service-learning programs. Learn and Serve America, the grant-making arm of the corporation, was last funded in 2011. Prior to its defunding, it invested approximately \$40 million in service-learning programs each year. Although modest, this appropriation provided steady funding to state Learn and Service America offices. NCLCE’s 2000 and 2011 policy scans

included information about which states were receiving these federal dollars, but given the defunding of Learn and Serve America, that data point has been removed from the database. The absence of this funding stream is a threat to the continued existence of the state-level infrastructure that supports state service-learning programs.

What are States' Policies on Service-Learning?

As noted in the introduction, although only Maryland and the District of Columbia have requirements compelling high school students to complete a specified number of hours in a service-learning or community-service activity to graduate, every state has legislation or state board of education policy touching on service-learning or community service. Specifically, the 2014 update of the policy scan found that:

- 33 states include service-learning in their state academic standards or frameworks.
- 24 states identify participation in service-learning/community service as a means of preparing students for the workplace.
- 23 states allow or require school districts to award credit toward graduation for service-learning or community service, up from just seven in 2000.
- 17 states identify service-learning/community service as an instructional strategy that increases student achievement.

Due at least in part to the loss of Learn and Serve funding for states' service-learning efforts, the 2014 policy scan found few notable changes in state service-learning policies. Policy highlights from the 2011 scan can be accessed at <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/01/55/10155.pdf>.

For more information on state service-learning policies, visit NCLCE's [service-learning/community service online database](#).

For more information, contact Paul Baumann, 303.299.3608 or pbaumann@ecs.org.

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¹ Shelly H. Billig, "Lessons from Research on Teaching and Learning: Service-Learning as Effective Instruction," *Growing to Greatness* (National Youth Leadership Council, 2006), 30, <http://www.nylc.org/sites/nylc.org/files/files/301G2G2006.pdf>, (accessed Jan. 13, 2014).

² National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, & Student Testing, CRESST Report 823, *On the Road to Assessing Deeper Learning: The Status of Smarter Balanced and PARCC Assessment Consortia*, January 2013, <http://www.cse.ucla.edu/products/reports/R823.pdf>, (accessed Jan. 13, 2014).

³ *Model Curriculum Framework 2011*. Kentucky Department of Education, July 2011. <http://education.ky.gov/curriculum/docs/Documents/Kentucky%20Model%20Curriculum%20Framework%202011%20revised%20July%202011.pdf>, (accessed Dec. 16, 2013).

⁴ See N.J. Admin. Code 6A:8-1.3.