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## Service Learning in Maryland: Making Academics More Relevant

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most would not return the forms or would leave major portions blank. The form used is a compromise that achieved an 85 percent return rate.

For all these reasons, key data are presented in terms of trends—percentages of subgrantees responding within each element—instead of being combined. To determine what kind of impact one project had at a certain school on individual students, the data must be examined school by school.

## Conclusions

The clear trend from 1995–96 Florida Learn & Serve subgrant final reports is that there are quantifiable positive impacts on K–12 students engaged in service learning. By heavy majorities (62–82 percent), participating students showed improvements in attendance, conduct, and academic performance. Moreover, the 1995–96 outcomes are very similar to and validate results obtained from 1994–95 projects, suggesting these outcomes may be replicated elsewhere.

The large statistical sample over two years—50,000 students, 197 projects involving student service, multi-grade levels, a wide variety of projects, different project durations, degrees of curricular integration, etc.—lends weight to the trends observed but also highlights caveats and raises interesting questions:

- Are there particular elements of these subgrants that brought positive results, or are the trends the result of a constellation of factors associated with the service learning efforts?
- Did at-risk students show greater improvements merely because they had farther to rise, or did participation have a greater impact on them?
- Would effects be greater with greater curricular integration? (Data from 1994–95 found no such correlation, but there was also no scale for assessing the level of curricular integration.)
  - What impact did activities have on service recipients?
  - How far can the data be trusted when they were not collected under rigorous conditions?
  - Was students' academic performance actually better, or is it easier to get a good grade in a "service learning" class?
  - What if most of the subgrantees who did not submit data were the less successful ones? Does that mean the remainder skew the overall trends?

This study cannot answer such questions; more long-term research is needed. In the absence of hard data, service learning has leaned uncomfortably on qualitative measures. Because of its combination of service with education, the truest measure of the value of service learning will need to be a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures over time. ~B

# Service Learning in Maryland: Making Academics More Relevant

By Marion Rouse Finney

**Maryland is the first state in the nation to require every student to perform service as a condition of receiving a high school diploma. During the last 15 years, a strong support system for service learning has emerged in Maryland. The diversity of opportunities for service are broad, challenging, and inviting.**

Service learning as defined by the Maryland Student Service Alliance (MSSA) implies that the percentage of students who demonstrate the ability to reason, solve problems, apply knowledge, and communicate effectively will increase substantially; that all students will be involved in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship and community service/service learning; and that the students will be knowledgeable about the diverse cultural heritages of the nation and the world.

Maryland's service learning requirement reads: "Students shall complete one of the following: (1) 75 hours of student service that includes preparation, action, and reflection components, and that, at the discretion of the local school system, may begin during middle grades; and (2) a locally designed program in student service that has been approved by the state superintendent of schools."

## Maryland's New Requirement

MSSA defines service learning as making a difference through actions of caring for others through personal contacts, indirect service, or civic action, whether in school or in the community, with preparation and reflection. The service learning program is administered through the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction.

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There are 24 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in Maryland; each district designs its own comprehensive service learning plan. Districts have the option of offering a variety of strategies and opportunities for students to meet the graduation requirement as long as the program supports the definition of service learning. All plans of MSSA's LEAs have some common characteristics.

The primary support to service learning is the "sponsorship" of MSSA. This organization has been the backbone for the formal structure that exists in Maryland and provides the framework from which each LEA can build a successful program. As a graduation requirement, service learning needs the same professional/academic support, content validity and reliability, and legitimacy as core curriculum courses. MSSA brings this to Maryland.

Each region has a MSSA staff member who serves as the regional coordinator. The coordinators facilitate individual LEA and regional meetings. Assistance is provided based on requests and districts' assessed needs. This collaborative effort has propelled the sustained growth of service in Maryland.

In addition to the MSSA staff, the Fellows Program is designed to enhance service learning in Maryland and the nation. These educators are recognized as excellent service learning practitioners committed to sharing their expertise, studying in-depth service issues, implementing the curricula to meet the graduation requirement, and providing leadership to other educators in their school district, state, and nation. The training program that participants complete further enhances their skills and knowledge base.

The Fellows meet bi-annually in retreat and special interest study circles meet quarterly. Each study circle investigates some issue/trend/research for its value in promoting, supporting, and providing service learning education. The Fellows' work is collaborative and frames the program in their district.

The Maryland service learning program also involves youth representatives in major support roles. A program of MSSA Youth Representatives Involved in Service Learning Education (Youth RISE)—formed by MSAA in 1993—is a student advocacy and educational program that engages middle level and high school students in service learning leadership.

The activities of Youth RISE members are varied. They train students, teachers, and adults; build bridges among teens; promote leadership; and plan programs. The future plans for these student leaders include

**...Youth RISE members...train students, teachers, and adults; build bridges among teens; promote leadership; and plan programs.**

expanding from a state organization into regional school-based councils throughout Maryland. The Youth RISE members, like the Fellows, are selected through a competitive application process. The level of skill mastery in many areas such as effective communication, decision making, collaborative work, and critical thinking have been taught and honed in these young people through service learning activities.

The formal instruction for service learning education must contain certain well-defined components: preparation, action, reflection, and celebration. Teachers are provided with professional development to plan effective service learning activities/project/programs that master their course outcomes. Maryland service learning goals and/or skills for success have a variety of settings and formats. Individual LEAs identify the most expedient

**TABLE 1**

**The Maryland School-Based Service Learning Best Practices**

*1. Meet a Recognized Need in the Community*

- Provide short-term assistance addressing a community need
- Provide ongoing assistance addressing a community need
- Work toward a lasting solution to a community problem

*2. Achieve Curriculum Objectives Through Service Learning*

- Incorporate service learning into a unit
- Use service learning to unify the teaching of content and skills throughout the year
- Teach content and/or skills in different disciplines using service learning throughout the year

*3. Reflect Throughout Service Learning Experience*

- At the end of the experience, students contemplate their service learning experience and receive responses
- Throughout the process, students contemplate their service learning experience and receive responses

*4. Develop Student Responsibility*

- Establish choices for students in how they implement the teacher-planned service learning
- Share responsibility with students for service learning development and implementation
- Facilitate student definition, coordination, and implementation of service learning

*5. Establish Community Partnerships*

- Teachers consult with community partners for information and resources
- Students interact with community partners
- Students, teachers, and community partners collaborate as an action team

*6. Plan Ahead for Service Learning*

- Plan service learning independently
- Collaborate with colleagues, students, and others to plan service learning

*7. Equip Students with Knowledge and Skills Needed for Service*

- Equip students with knowledge and skills at the beginning of the experience
- Equip students with knowledge and skills as needs arise or as the project changes

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strategy for their districts. Service learning education must be taken seriously and the first step to recognizing the seriousness of the task is to include expectations for its delivery in school program plans.

MSSA has also provided curricula and other supplemental materials and supplies. Curriculum guides for elementary, middle level, high school, and special education are available to districts for classroom use. Fellows are given *The Training Toolbox: A Grid to Service Learning Training* and *Maryland's Best Practices: An Improvement Guide for School Based Service Learning*. Videos and exemplars (contributed by individual classroom teachers and districts), incentives in the form of buttons, banner, pens, flashlights, etc. are all provided by MSSA. Some additional resources are available upon request depending on availability. These are the teaching aids and materials and commitment teachers need to support the development of a "new requirement." The Maryland School-Based Service Learning Best Practices are included in Table 1.

## Baltimore Schools and the "New Requirements"

The Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) system is one of the 24 LEAs in the Maryland State Department of Education. There are 56 middle level and 22 high schools in the BCPS system. Many of the schools readily accepted the 1985 by-law and established small exemplary programs that involved few students. The quality and quantity of service learning activities continued to grow during the next 10 years. Many educators participated in the summer training programs sponsored by MSSA. Eight teachers became Fellows (currently there are 10) and students became members of the Youth RISE.

With the increased awareness of service learning and preparation to teach the associated strategies and techniques, service learning activities were on the rise, but the number of students who participated in the ongoing programs did not increase substantially. Service learning was treated as an elective.

Students who were interested did outstanding work in various situations. These young people grew in social, academic, and interpersonal relationships and decision-making skills, and demonstrated mastery of many other desired competencies. The schools' service programs participated in the MSSA annual conferences and exhibitions, joined many health agency fundraisers and educational awareness efforts, and were generally good informed, productive citizens.

Nevertheless, the overall number of student service learning hours earned citywide was not impressive. Walbrook High School, a charter member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, required students enrolled in the

"School Within a School" to complete 150 hours of community service over the four-year high school period 1986-90. The students looked forward to providing service to their community. A sense of responsibility to and for community ran through this small school. It was easy to transfer the school community concept to the neighborhood community.

Six members of the class of 1990 discussed their high school years at a recent gathering. Four of the six are teachers, two in Baltimore City, one in Baltimore County, and one in North Carolina. The fifth is a Baltimore City police officer, and the sixth is an entrepreneur with a local barber shop.

The group saw community service as a "rite of passage." They worked on many independent projects and in school activities in grades 9-11 and in the twelfth grade were able to leave campus to provide service to the community. The young adults spoke of the benefits to the community but dwelled on the personal benefits they derived. The "on-site" placements that were part of the community service course allowed them to spend time in areas of interest and provided opportunities for career exploration. The teachers in the group—two secondary and two elementary—said they were already infusing service learning into their curricula and using independent projects.

Other schools have similar stories to share. Fairmount-Hartford High School is known for its dedication to the needs of senior citizens in their community. They sponsor a dance for senior citizens, the Senior Prom, and support many other activities supporting the population of nursing homes and seniors still living in the community.

There are schools whose students have spent endless hours at the Maryland Food Bank, shelters for the homeless, and soup kitchens, and have collected and distributed products and services for the needy.

In 1992, the electives became a requirement and this district, like all other LEAs, identified contact persons; and examined roles, rules, and regulations. Many, if not all, of these changed, especially the central office support staff. A new coordinator for service learning was appointed during the 1995-96 school year; a service learning program—the Baltimore Alliance for Student Service (BASS)—was established and a revised Comprehensive Service Learning Plan for July 1996-June 2000 was submitted to MSDE.

BASS' primary role is to provide technical assistance to the secondary schools. The composition of the BASS team is interdisciplinary, with representatives from each curriculum area. An advisory committee that includes members of the teachers' union, community-based organizations, Fellows, and replication site instructors support BASS.

The challenges for the newly assembled team were extensive. The existing programs served only a small percent of the student body. In 1992,

MSDE gave LEAs the chance to identify strategies for implementing the service requirement. To ensure that all teachers were trained and had access to materials, technical assistance, and community-based organizational support, several activities were begun. Service learning support was in demand and was the topic for one of the two professional development day activities during the meetings prior to the opening of school. Each discipline explored with teachers effective planning to include curriculum infusion of service learning outcomes.

The BASS team developed a calendar of activities for the school year. The activities included:

- Four quarterly workshops/meetings for each middle level and high school service learning coordinator
- Semester meetings for data collection, input, and analysis training
- Two community-based organizational fairs to introduce agencies that volunteered to provide service placement for students.

The BASS team and the Fellows worked in schools daily, visited schools, modeled instruction, replicated activities, held clinics, and ran summer school programs. Some members of the team became public relations experts. They visited radio talk shows, community meetings, PTO meetings, recreation centers—anywhere there was an audience. The question that always surfaced was quickly and easily answered: "Is this a Baltimore city add-on and why are you introducing it the same year it became effective?" After a brief discussion, complete with assurance that this has been a published graduation requirement for Maryland seniors since 1992, things moved to "How can my child complete the necessary hours to graduate in June 1997?"

The revised service learning plan required seniors to complete service hours by January 1997. When this was not accomplished monthly, tracking of hours was instituted. In May, the tracking became weekly, and in some cases, several times a week. Contacts were made with the service learning coordinators and principals of school with large numbers of seniors who had not completed the requirement. The focus of these interactions was always the same: "How can we help you and your students meet the requirement?" There were many students who completed many more hours than required and continued to serve for the joy of serving and there were those who resisted the change.

In the revised plan, Baltimore requested the number of hours be prorated for the class of 1997 to 55 hours, and for the class of 1998 to 65 hours. This request was based on students having four to five years to complete service as compared to seven years for future classes. Service learning hours are cumulative from grade 6 in the Maryland school system.

Baltimore recommends the following minimum schedule of hours be completed:

- Grade 6: 11 hours
- Grade 7: 12 hours
- Grade 8: 12 hours
- Grade 9: 10 hours
- Grade 10: 10 hours
- Grade 11: 10 hours
- Grade 12: 10 hours

Each LEA may have a different instruction plan for their students to meet the graduation requirement. The state issues broad guidelines, but individual districts decide the specific ways service learning programs are designed and implemented in their districts. The Sun Newspaper's May 29, 1997, article headlines noted: "97% of high school seniors finish service requirements. New state report reveals reversal in a year." The article read "With only a precious few days until graduation, at least 97 percent of the state's 43,135 high school seniors have completed the mandatory 75 hours of community service they need to get their diplomas, state education officials reported yesterday. The report showed a dramatic turnaround from the situation 10 months ago when 40 percent of seniors had yet to complete the controversial new graduation requirement, to the alarm of many local school officials. Baltimore city said 89 percent of the 3,733 seniors had completed the requirement by this week. 429 were less than 75 percent completed."

BASS is preparing to facilitate the assessment of MSSA's work this year. An instrument, Shared Learnings, that assesses 15 components essential for administering service learning programs, will be used. The findings will help to shape our continued planning for the 1997-99 period. A formal study of the impact of service learning education on academic achievement, postsecondary plans, attendance, and social growth is being discussed. From informal discussions and conversations with students, staff members, and families, however, we hope to replicate the findings of Brandeis University's Center for Human Resources and Abb Associates, Inc. In their interim report of a three-year national evaluation of the Learn and Serve program, they found service learning education positively affected students' academic and social development, volunteerism, and acceptance of cultural diversity.

The Baltimore City Public Schools system is confident that every possible opportunity has been given to every senior student and there will not be any student not graduating because of lack of service learning hours.

This was quite a challenge to build a culture of service in a com-