Service-Learning Delivers What Americans Want from Schools (New poll shows a way to improve public education)

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SERVICE-LEARNING DELIVERS WHAT AMERICANS WANT FROM SCHOOLS
(New poll shows a way to improve public education)

It is not news that Americans are deeply concerned about the quality of public education, nor that almost half of them believe that improving schools should be our nation’s highest priority. What is news is that Americans believe that service-learning can deliver what they expect from schools.

A new poll asked more than 1000 Americans about their views of K-12 education and service-learning, a way of teaching that integrates service projects into core academic curriculum. The poll was conducted by Roper Starch Worldwide for the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of Americans expect schools to provide students with the academic skills they need for success in life. But Americans also believe that success requires more than mastering basic academic subjects. They agree that schools have a clear responsibility to link what children study in school to the skills they will need at work and in their communities.

This responsibility includes helping students develop a sense of excitement about learning, skills they will need for success in the workplace, habits of good citizenship, leadership qualities, and the ability to work with people different from themselves. In addition, the public believes that schools should teach in a variety of ways to reach different kinds of students.

Service-learning helps schools make this vision a reality. Although many people are not familiar with the term “service-learning,” they support this teaching method when they learn more about it and the many positive effects it potentially can have on students. For example, Americans recognize immediate and concrete benefits from specific service-learning projects like designing a neighborhood playground or helping a community test and analyze its water supply. They are more likely to support service-learning in their local public schools if it can strengthen students’ interest in school and improve their grasp of academic subjects such as math and science.

Americans understand that service-learning projects also support students’ long-term social and civic development. They agree that service-learning helps build the skills that students need to be successful later in life. They want service-learning in schools if it promotes self-confidence and active citizenship. And finally, they value the role of service-learning in fostering partnerships between schools and communities.

Through service-learning experiences, students develop the kind of values and skills that meet Americans’ high expectation of public education.

94% of poll respondents say that people not having the education or skills they need to succeed is a serious problem.

89% say that improving public education is a very high priority (compared to 81% for healthcare and 70% for social security) and 49% believe it should be the highest priority (compared to 22% for healthcare and 7% for social security).

Including 537 parents of children under 18

78% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students the academic skills they need.

94% agree that a good education is much more than just learning to read, write and do math.

66% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students how to use what they learn in the classroom for real-world projects and problems.

70% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students in ways that will get them excited about learning.

68% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students the skills they need to succeed in the workplace.

54% say that schools have a definite responsibility to encourage good citizenship.

56% say that schools have a definite responsibility to help students develop their leadership skills.

55% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students how to work with people who are different from themselves.

89% agree that schools need to teach in different ways to reach different types of students.

37% say they know either a great deal or something about service-learning.

When they hear a definition of service-learning, 90% say they are likely to support it in their local public schools.

89% say they are likely to support service-learning in their local public schools if students engage in projects using their math and geometry skills to design and lay out a playground for a local neighborhood.

90% say they are likely to support service-learning in their local public schools if students engage in projects that improve their science skills by testing the water quality of a lake and reporting what they find to local officials.

62% are much more supportive of including service-learning in their local public schools upon learning that service-learning can make many students more interested in school and learning.

85% agree that service-learning improves students' grasp of academic basics.

90% agree that service-learning helps students build the skills they need to be successful later in life.

65% are much more supportive of including service-learning in their local public schools upon learning that service-learning can help students develop self-confidence.

89% agree that service-learning encourages active citizenship and community involvement.

90% support including service-learning in their local public schools if service-learning helps to create a partnership between schools and their communities.