

2004

## Growing to Greatness: The State of Service-Learning Project 2004 Executive Summary

National Youth Leadership

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### Recommended Citation

National Youth Leadership, "Growing to Greatness: The State of Service-Learning Project 2004 Executive Summary" (2004). *Project Summaries*. 39.

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*“[E]verybody can be great because everybody can serve.”*

~ Dr. Martin Luther King’s February 4, 1968 sermon at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. In Washington, James M., ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 265-66.

## **Growing to Greatness: The State of Service-Learning Project 2004**

### **Executive Summary**

This report is the first of a series of annual Growing to Greatness (G2G) reports by the National Youth Leadership Council. Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s words and life, G2G documents the capacity of all youths to be great – to serve, learn, and change the world. Growing evidence, shared by several disciplines and collected across a diverse range of settings, documents young people actively learning and making real differences in communities.

G2G 2004 presents tangible evidence of an emergent way of thinking about and engaging young people taking hold across the nation and beyond. A primary catalyst for this dramatic shift in our understanding of youths is service-learning, a strategy for engaging students in meaningful service linked to learning objectives. Service-learning is a distinctive *philosophy, way of teaching, and community development strategy*.

Timed to be released each spring at the National Service-Learning Conference, G2G will serve as a reflection piece on the present state of service-learning for those already knowledgeable about service-learning and a useful orientation to those new to service-learning.

Focused primarily on grades K-12 and funded by the State Farm Companies Foundation as part of its commitment to youths, G2G 2004 has four main parts:

- A national survey;
- Profiles of service-learning activity for selected states (by Year Three, all states will have been profiled);
- Profiles of community-based organizations engaged in service-learning; and
- Articles of current interest.

Highlights of G2G 2004 follow.

#### **Preliminary Findings Community Service and Service-Learning in Public Schools**

*James C. Kielsmeier, Ph.D., NYLC; Peter C. Scales, Ph.D., Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Search Institute; and Marybeth Neal, Ph.D., NYLC*

In January 2004, 2,002 high school, middle school, and elementary school principals were polled by Westat, a research corporation based in Rockville, Maryland. The national survey indicates service-learning is holding its own, despite school systems’ financial pressures and pressures to focus on core

subjects. This nationally representative study of principals and other administrators in K-12 public schools in the United States found the following:

- 69 percent of K-12 public schools engage students in community service, reaching an estimated 15 million students.
- 30 percent of K-12 public schools engage students in service-learning, reaching an estimated 4.5 million students.
- 9 out of 10 principals in schools that offer service-learning say that it has a positive impact on students' civic engagement, personal and social development, and school-community partnerships.
- Principals in schools with service-learning in low-income communities are more likely than principals in other schools with service-learning to say that it positively affects students' academic achievement and school engagement.
- 8 out of 10 principals in schools that offer service-learning say that it has a positive impact on academic achievement, teacher satisfaction, school climate, school engagement, and community's view of youth as resources.

A remarkable 91percent response rate, and similar sample size and questions make it possible to compare this survey to the 1999 NCES survey of K-12 principals. One difference in design is that the 2004 survey provided an opportunity for principals whose schools do not have service-learning to explain, in an open-ended question, why they do not. Analysis of these responses will come later. We expect this survey to be a valuable source of data for years to come.

### **Heads, Hearts, and Hands: The Research on K-12 Service-Learning**

*Shelley Billig, Ph.D., RMC Research Corporation*

In "Heads, Hearts, and Hands: The Research on K-12 Service-Learning," Shelley Billig summarizes research on impacts in three domains: cognitive, affective, and behavioral, or "heads," "hearts," and "hands." By way of helping the reader properly interpret the research findings, Billig begins with an examination of the different ways service-learning has been defined in research studies. Billig emphasizes the importance of examining not just the presence or absence of service-learning, but also the nature and degree of what is considered "quality" service-learning. Identification of the presence or absence of attributes of "quality" is important to understand and maximize positive outcomes. Billig finds that, while more research is needed, service-learning has been demonstrated to have positive impacts on students' academic learning, social/personal development, and citizenship:

- Academically, service-learning helps students engage cognitively in school and score higher in certain content areas on state tests.
- Service-learning also positively impacts youth pro-social behaviors – including acceptance of diversity, dropout prevention, connection to cultural heritage, development of ethics, the strengthening of protective factors related to resilience, and exploration of career and post-secondary options and acquisition of the skills necessary to pursue these options.
- Service-learning has positive impacts on civic skills and attitudes.

While the focus of the article is on student impacts, Billig also mentions investigations into various aspects of service-learning program implementation. Examples cited include the relationship of program success to the level of social trust among participants, the nature of teacher impact, strategies for program sustainability, institutionalization, and cost-benefit analysis.

## **Service to Others: A 'Gateway' Asset for School Success and Healthy Development**

*Peter C. Scales, Ph.D. and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Search Institute*

Gene Roehlkepartain and Peter Scales build on the concept of developmental assets and their connections to service-learning in their article "Service to Others: A 'Gateway' Asset for School Success and Healthy Development." Through previous research, Search has identified 40 assets that, if possessed by young people, contribute to their healthy development.

Search's article presents "service to others" as a "gateway asset" that leads to the acquisition of additional developmental assets. In a longitudinal study of 217,000 students (which included review of students' school records), students engaged in service at least one hour per week had significantly higher grades and better attendance than those who did not serve. Furthermore, students who have volunteered since Year One of the study were 3.6 more likely than non-volunteers to have high asset levels (31 to 40 assets) three years later.

The article also promotes the idea, supported by G2G, of the need to measure and document young people in terms of their assets rather than deficits because assets are both indicators and predictors of positive youth development. The authors conclude by proposing that "the likely result of instilling the service habit in children and youth will be significant long-term benefits to young people, their families, schools and communities."

## **Learn and Serve America: Reflecting on the Past, Focusing on the Future**

*Amy B. Cohen, Robert Bhaerman, Elson Nash, and Kimberly Spring, Corporation for National and Community Service*

"Learn and Serve America: Reflecting on the Past, Focusing on the Future," relates the history of Learn and Serve America, which is now in its 15<sup>th</sup> year. The article describes grants to schools, community-based organizations, higher education, Indian tribes, and U.S. territories. It also describes additional supports provided by CNCS, including the National K-12 Service-Learning Clearinghouse, and the Presidential awards and scholarships. Mention is also made of the support provided to state administrators of Learn and Serve funding through SEANet (the State Education Agency Network).

The article ends with a description of evaluation results of Learn and Serve America, which reveal:

1. Positive and statistically significant impacts on school engagement, engagement in the community as a volunteer, acceptance of cultural diversity, service leadership, and civic attitudes.
2. These positive impacts are shown to be even stronger among low income and minority students.
3. The evaluation research also shows that the more that service is connected to the academic curriculum, the greater the positive impact.

The article also mentions that the current funding cycle, which began in 2003, is by far its most competitive, indicating growing interest in service-learning.

## **Service-Learning Policy**

*Jennifer Piscatelli, Education Commission of the States*

"Service-Learning Policy" shows that policies are increasing at both the state and district levels and includes a map of the United States where each state is coded according to the types of state-level policies adopted by that state. One trend note is that, unlike previous sessions where the focus had been on mandating service-learning and community service, the 2003 legislative session had a greater number of

directives to establish rules, guidelines, or programs related to service-learning. Policies regarding service-learning in higher education and as an effective method to engage students in citizenship education are also cited.

### **State Profiles**

*SEANet; Rich Cairn, Cairn and Associates; and Marybeth Neal, Ph.D., NYLC*

The “State Profiles” describe the institutional history of service-learning for 18 states: how service-learning got started in each state, how it is linked to other initiatives, and the variety of ways service-learning is organized from central to decentralized models. Many states reflect a tendency, seen perhaps first with California in the mid-1990s, to switch from funding individual programs to funding district-wide efforts that include institutionalization strategies, such as forming advisory councils, teacher in-services, inclusion in policy and mission statements, and dedicated funding for program and service-learning coordinators. Each state profile concludes with a service-learning example, illustrating service-learning and its impacts.

### **Profiles of Community-Based Service-Learning in the United States**

*Lawrence Neil Bailis, Ph.D., Alan Melchior, Ph.D., and Tom Shields, Brandeis University*

The “Profiles of Community-Based Organizations” (CBOs) describe how 12 organizations support service-learning outside of school settings. The profiles illustrate how service-learning in CBOs at the local level can grow into national networks, and how national organizations work to promote service-learning on the local programmatic level.

### **Resources, Glossary, and Essential Elements**

To help promote the use of the annual report as a reference guide, the report concludes with lists of resources, definitions of key terms, a brief version of NYLC’s essential elements for effective service-learning, as well as the table of contents to the previous year’s publication. All G2G reports, including a more detailed analysis of the 2004 national survey results will be available online at [www.nylc.org](http://www.nylc.org).

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