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## Service-Learning Reflections: Update of Service-Learning in Pennsylvania

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## ABSTRACT

Since its creation in 1988, the sole mission of the agency PennSERVE has been to make community service the common expectation of all Pennsylvania's citizens. Using state funds, PennSERVE initiated a school service learning (SL) grant program and funded a total of 35 school and community-based SL programs between 1989 and 1991 in grades K-12, the Pennsylvania Service Corps, Pennsylvania Literacy Corps, Pennsylvania Conservation Corps, Library Corps, and Summer Youth Corps. In December 1993, focus groups consisting of 4-7 programs at 11 different grant sites across Pennsylvania were held to provide feedback and learning about PennSERVE-funded SL activities. According to the focus group participants, PennSERVE programs have had demonstrable positive impacts on students, SL coordinators, and the community. It was recommended that local programs teaching communities to solve local problems be encouraged, an SL support system be developed, and curriculum infusion be promoted. (The focus group schedule is appended.) (MN)

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# PennSERVE: The Governor's Office of Citizen Service

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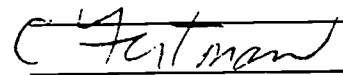
## Service-Learning Reflections: Update of Service-Learning in Pennsylvania

March 1994

Prepared by:

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The Pennsylvania Service-Learning  
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University of Pittsburgh

## **The Pennsylvania Service-Learning Resource and Evaluation Network**

The Pennsylvania Service-Learning Resource and Evaluation Network based at the University of Pittsburgh supports service-learning programs. The network provides information, support, resources, and guidance. Its philosophy is to work with people by offering systematic data of a wide variety of types that help inform them about what they care about. The primary goal of the network is to help schools and community-based organizations to evaluate their service-learning programs.

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March 15, 1994

Greetings:

In 1988, Governor Casey proved the value and merit of community service. He created a single state agency whose sole focus was to make community service the "common expectation of all Pennsylvania citizens." We have done much since that time to advance this important idea. We have much of which to be proud.

PennSERVE: The Governor's Office of Citizen Service has grown into an effective, active conduit for community service projects that have direct and measurable results in the neighborhoods of our Commonwealth. Real results. Positive results.

This time, however, is no time to be resting on our successes. We need to broaden the impact of citizen service in Pennsylvania and throughout the nation. We need to work together to make a good thing even better.

I am confident that you will find this report exciting and encouraging. If you should need any further information, please give us a call.

I know you will find it useful. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

John W. Cosgrove  
Executive Director  
PennSERVE: The Governor's Office of Citizen Service

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## Voices from the Community

- *"You have to write papers for school all the time. The one I liked the best was writing about how I helped build the walking path in Green Park. I'm really proud of what I did."* A 7th grade student's reflection paper written as part of an English class.
- *"People die there, of course. Everyone dies, so what makes one human greater than another? We are all the same. Old people at Oak Terrace are the same as me, I am no better than them. Maybe that's the whole meaning for me going there. I just wish I could explain to others what I mean, make them understand. If they only knew."* A 12th grade student's reflection as part of a Psychology course.
- *"This private hospital in inner-city Philadelphia had never had young people from the community working for them. There were fears based on age and race. Now that the kids have performed service at the hospital, the people there cannot wait to see them and to schedule more of them."* A coordinator from a community-based organization talking about how service-learning has changed the community.
- *"I've always volunteered, but now I'm a very entrenched zealot. I've taken a leadership role in organizing groups in and out of the school. I'm much more confident in my abilities to carry large, involved projects through."* A coordinator talking about the impact that service-learning has had on her life.
- *"It's not fixing all the problems in the community. We can't fix everything. It is learning about people and working with them to solve problems. We learn together."* A 10th grade student's reflections shared in History class.
- *"I get tired of the books. It's nice to do something else. It's fun."* A fifth grader's reflection on service-learning.
- *"Using service to teach gets my students closer to what it is all about. Initially there were a lot of hassels, and there are still some. But I don't do it all the time. When I do, it's remarkable."* A middle school health educator talking about service-learning.

## Acknowledgements

This report reflects the time, energy and commitment of all the teachers, Volunteer Center staff, administrators and others who took time out of their busy schedules in December, 1993 to share their thoughts, experiences, and future plans for service-learning. This is their report. They are David Aboud, Sally Allison, Elaine Amos, Nancy Beener, Cynthia Belliveau, Bev Bonkoski, Jim Bostic, Jennifer Bowen-Frantz, Marilyn Brown, Linda Braymer, Mary Bush, Florence Chapman, Rosslyn Chivis, Carol Clegg, Jerry Darlington, Dale Davis, Pam Delaney, Karen DeSandis, Louise Elkins, Linda Epstein, Anne Fogel, Joyce Fosdick, Kathy Frey, Diane Galaton, Jack Giran, Vickie Goffredo, Debbi Guess, Linda Harker, Audrey F. Harvey, Irene Hatzistavrakis, Patty Herr, Brent Johnson, Pauline Jones, Mara Kaplan, Chris Keener, Russ Kenyon, Benita Kolmen-Solomon, Michelle Laderman, John Lafferty, Patti Lansinger, Melisse Latini, Marvin Lenetsky, Debbie Liadis, Carol Lucas, Bill Lupini, Mary Mackie, Tom Marcinko, Cynthia J. Martin, Bob McConaghy, Jim McCrea, Jennifer McNellie, Joleen Montoro, Susan Newman, Myra Olshansky, Alan Ozer, Ted Pappas, Mary Lou Ray, Vince Rizzo, Don Roberts, Gary D. Robinson, Mary Ellen Romeo, Monica Ruano-Wenrich, Stephen Shaud, Jeff Singleton, John Skief, Kay Smith, Hal Smolinsky, Tom Starmack, Bobby Stewart, Maryrita Stuckart, Marilyn Talboys, Jannice Turner, Margaret Valinsky, Phyllis Walsh, Helen Weinheimer, Carol Weiss, Annette Williams, Sam Williams, Carolyn Wimbush and George P. Ziegler. Thank you all.

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Assisting to put this report together were John Miller, Laura Bitner, Mark Evans, and Elizabeth Marinelli. Thank you for a job well-done.

Thanks to all the people who served as hosts for their gracious hospitality. They are: Jack Giran, Bill Lupini, Joyce Fosdick, David Aboud, Bob McConaghy, Jeff Singleton, Bev Bonkoski and Florence Chapman, John Lafferty, Myra Olshansky, Linda Epstein and Susan Newman, Linda Harker, and Vincent Rizzo.

Finally, we are grateful to the students and adult volunteers who are out in their communities performing service. There are thousands of them, and their contributions are many. They make our schools, communities, and families stronger through their service-learning experiences. Thank you for sharing.



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## Section 1--Service-Learning

Service-learning can be defined as an instructional methodology that facilitates the involvement of children and adolescents in real-life settings. They apply academic knowledge and previous experience to meet real community needs. The service-learning process involves preparation, service activity, reflection, and celebration. Although it is related to both community service and volunteerism, with which schools have long been involved, service-learning is unique in that it links community service and volunteerism with academic learning. It is not an add-on to existing programs within a school, but it is infused in the school's curriculum. Service is the learning activity. Service-learning is also a collaborative effort which brings together schools, community-based organizations, parents, and other community members in a common enterprise of individual and community growth.

Service-learning is not a new concept. It is based on a number of existing linkages between schools and communities and can be traced minimally to three sources--John Dewey, experiential education, and citizenship education. Dewey believed that young people need to encounter and gain control over their environment. In confronting that environment, they run into problems. In dealing with these social problems, Dewey said, young people bring forth their intelligence and past experience. The focus of experiential education is learning by doing. It encourages reflection on the process. Citizenship education promotes participation in democracy. Community service and volunteerism are essential components of citizenship education.

Service-learning does not just happen. It is a process. There are many avenues to service-learning. It can start in the community or school, with a club, special event or a single teacher using a service activity to teach one unit. It is not a fixed concept that can only be implemented in only one way. Rather, it is an evolving concept that has many possibilities. Often, it is focused on high school students. But service-learning can benefit all types of students at all age levels. Such comprehensive application has been recognized in recent years as service-learning programs have expanded and diversified.

There are a number of ways service-learning is established. But the assumption in starting service-learning is twofold: to create a local community which views the school as a potential resource to assess and address the needs and opportunities within the community and to shape a school's vision so that it perceives service as a way to educate the total student. When both views are in concert, there is no limit to the possibilities that might emerge from service-learning.

## **Section 2--Service-Learning in Pennsylvania**

Many schools and community-based organizations are currently involved in service-learning across Pennsylvania. The impetus and source of support for much of the service-learning in Pennsylvania is PennSERVE: The Governor's Office of Citizen Service. PennSERVE is located within the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. It was started in October 1988. The vision was to build a system of service. In the process the goal was to encourage children, adolescents, and adults to serve their communities by integrating service into their education, community, and work. Service would be a part of growing-up and being a community member. As PennSERVE developed, so did the idea of service as an opportunity to learn. Young people could learn about problems in their communities and work on solutions.

Using state funds, PennSERVE initiated a school service-learning grant program. A total of 35 school and community-based service-learning programs were funded between 1989 and 1991. Since 1988, PennSERVE has expanded to include service-learning K-16, Pennsylvania Service Corps, Literacy Corps, Pennsylvania Conservation Corps, Library Corps, and Summer Youth Service Corps among others.

On the federal level, the National and Community Service Act in 1990 created the Commission on National and Community Service to provide program funds, training, and technical assistance to states and communities to develop, expand, and evaluate opportunities for national and community service. PennSERVE was awarded a Commission grant to fund service-learning programs statewide and to develop a support and evaluation network for these programs. Forty-three school and community-based organization programs were funded by PennSERVE during the 1992-1993 school year. Also funded were ten Volunteer Centers to work on involving adults in service-learning and an infrastructure to support the programs. An additional 10 school and community-based organization programs were also funded during the 1993-1994 school year.

In 1993, The National and Community Service Trust Act built upon the 1990 Act to create the Corporation for National and Community Service by combining the Commission and ACTION. Future service-learning funding for Pennsylvania from the Corporation will be awarded through a population-based formula, competitive grants, and special initiatives. The new legislation requires the creation of a bipartisan state commission for national service to oversee the state's activity. Furthermore, the Pennsylvania Department of Education will assume responsibility for administering a portion of the service-learning programs.

In December 1993, we met in focus groups consisting of 4 to 7 programs at 11 different grant sites across Pennsylvania. Represented were 59 of the 63 funded programs, which included the programs funded in the current school year that were not fully operationalized. Each focus group followed a standard format and responded to the same questions. The questions selected for discussion were drawn from suggestions from coordinators, students, teachers, community members, parents, and researchers of service-learning. The major purpose of the questions was to provide feedback and learning. The meeting schedule is in appendix A. In addition, each coordinator provided numbers and demographics of participants, service hours, and program descriptions. A separate report highlighting that information is in preparation.

This report presents the reflections of the coordinators of the 59 PennSERVE programs, including the 43 schools and community-based organizations and 10 Volunteer Centers funded during the 1992-1993 school year and the 10 school and community-based organization programs funded during the current school year. Just as reflection is critical to children and adolescents involved in service-learning, it is also critical to the adults who are making it happen.

### Section 3--Implementation

**"What is working in your efforts to implement service-learning?"**

**"What more needs to happen to make service-learning successful?"**

**Service-learning's successes are many.** It is reflected in the number of service activities and the diversity of levels and subjects. It is working in elementary, middle, and high schools as well community-based organizations. It presents few barriers to special populations. Teachers and community-based organization staff have tackled so many diverse areas that it is hard to identify a subject area for which service-learning would not be appropriate.

**The support for service-learning is evolving.** Sometimes it is slow-going. Schools and communities already have full agendas, different histories of seeking out and supporting innovative programs, and varied access to service-learning information, materials, and training. But conversations about service-learning are occurring at a number of critical leverage points within both schools and communities. We heard from the focus groups how service-learning was being discussed in the context of the curriculum review process, authentic assessment, flexible scheduling, outcome-based education, staff training, strategic leadership, and community collaborations. These small "craft" discussions of teachers and community-based organization staff are first steps in developing the support and focus service-learning requires for full implementation.

**Students are super advocates for service-learning.** Again and again teachers noted that they are the most powerful motivators in supporting the craft conversations among their colleagues and developing true service-learning. When students talk enthusiastically to people--site coordinators, parents, other teachers--they are heard. As one coordinator put it simply: "What's working is the students' enthusiasm and involvement."

**Student and teacher enthusiasm and advocacy for service-learning are infectious in a positive way--they take root, and then they spread.** There are, however, concrete steps that coordinators have taken that have led to such success. Many coordinators said that being trained in service-learning has been very helpful. Also helpful is the existence of strong advisory boards, especially ones that are diverse enough to encompass many concerns and generate a variety of ideas and goals. Students can and should play an important role. Coordinators said that establishing communication with other service-learning programs is beneficial. This enables program coordinators to compare notes and generate new ideas. Many coordinators said that good publicity goes a long way towards expanding interest in and support for service-learning. The use of a newsletter was touted as a

particularly effective way of publicizing a program's initiatives, both inside the school and in the larger community.

This is what is working in the effort to implement service-learning. But there are many things that coordinators said still need to happen before service-learning realizes its full potential. Coordinators expressed the desire to have what some other coordinators already have: release time for both students and teachers, flexibility in scheduling, and better communication about service-learning--imparting service-learning benefits to the school, community, and parents, as well as connecting with other service-learning programs to share strategies for success.

Coordinators said they want to be able to clarify the definition of service-learning. In doing so, colleagues, administrators, parents, students, and community members have a more clear idea of what they are trying to accomplish. Many coordinators lamented that service-learning is often viewed as another program that will create a burden. One coordinator phrased it this way: "We still need to make more teachers aware of the fact that service-learning is a *natural outgrowth* of what is already going on in the classroom and not an 'add on' which requires more work, more planning, etc." Teachers need to be shown that service-learning is supportive and connected to the curriculum. It was also suggested that teachers be provided with clear examples on how service can be used as a teaching tool.

Because service-learning coordinators are busy people doing a great deal of work, one of the overriding requests was for more human resource support to make service-learning happen. The feeling of most service-learning coordinators is that they are fighting a difficult, often lonely battle. Having more people working with them would ease the process tremendously. Some schools are receiving help from Pennsylvania Service Corps and VISTA volunteers to support their programs. Still others are linked with Volunteer Centers and other local agencies that assist in providing human resources.

Finally, coordinators seek more emotional and philosophical support for service-learning. This results from effective communication around what service-learning is and how it benefits students, communities, and those people who are implementing it. The media can play an important role in strengthening service-learning, but most coordinators feel that the media has not paid enough attention.



## Section 4--Impact on Students

We began our discussion of students by asking each coordinator to think of a student who is involved with service-learning and to identify for us the student's gender, race, and grade. Having done this we proceeded to discuss the impact of service-learning on these students.

### What is the impact of service-learning on youth's school engagement?

Students involved in service-learning programs have demonstrated concrete improvements in their school engagement. This can be measured in numerous ways--improved grades, reduced absenteeism, more time "on task," etc. One simple yet powerful improvement in school engagement is that kids involved in it come to school. At Steel Valley High School, for example, several students are helping to monitor a transition of students from one school building to another. The service-learning coordinator there was struck by the fact that these kids are always at school and on time on the days when they serve as monitors. What is new for these students is that other students are depending on them to be there. There can be no more effective lesson in responsibility than being needed.

Students' grades have improved through participation in service-learning. Some coordinators said they thought it was too early to expect an improvement in grades, but noted cases where students have been markedly more involved in their own education. This is evidenced by students who were apathetic now showing interest by asking teachers questions. They are also using school services, such as tutors, more often and taking more responsibility for their own learning. Concerning time spent "on-task", many coordinators noted that students were engaged during the service-learning activities but that it did not necessarily generalize to other activities or content areas.

Many service-learning programs use high school or middle school students to tutor elementary school students. Being on the other side of the teacher-student relationship has given many of the tutors a new understanding and appreciation of education. One of the most salient features of this new attitude is the recognition on the part of students that they can impart knowledge to others, which gives them a much higher stake in their own educations.

Service-learning has brought together students who have not interacted with one another: at-risk, older and younger, physically challenged, gifted, learning-disabled, black, brown, and white. The result has been a spirit of working together as a team and a greater understanding and appreciation of the "other" group.

**Service-learning transforms lives.** We heard numerous stories of kids who were either apathetic or behaved poorly in school. These are the kids who were failing in the traditional classroom: getting poor grades, missing school, and acting out in class. Service has given these students another life option and a place to belong. Teachers related time and again the phenomenon of a community-based organization representative calling to tell them that a particular student has been invaluable at the service site. The teachers' response has been the same: "This can't be the same kid!" The powerful result of this transformation is that teachers are able to view the student in a new, positive light. A fresh perspective on the student enables the teacher to teach the student in a more positive, beneficial way.

**Service-learning has changed the relationship between teacher and student.** The service-learning coordinator at Keystone Elementary School said that her students constantly bombard her with ideas for service projects. This is an important point: kids feel that they have a stake in service-learning. The coordinator at Kensington High School in Philadelphia described service-learning as a "shared responsibility" that he has with his students, and said that because of this he has begun to view his students more like colleagues. Another coordinator phrased it this way: "Now, I am viewing my students not only as students, but also as *people*."

At South Allegheny High School, several students are involved in the day-to-day management and operation of the service-learning program. This is an additional, even more powerful way in which kids develop a vested interest in seeing service-learning succeed.

We witnessed on numerous occasions the effect that students can have in furthering and expanding service-learning. At Phoenixville Elementary School, for example, there is an intergenerational program for 4th-graders in which senior citizens come to the school once a week to serve as "grandparents" to the kids. The kids love it. When the first class of students to participate in the programs moved to the fifth grade, they found that their grandparents were no longer there. "You're in fifth grade now. That program is only for 4th-graders," they were told. The students made it known very clearly and vocally that they wanted the program in the fifth grade too, and it was instituted that year. Clearly, when kids feel that they have a stake in service-learning, they can be its best advocates.

**What is the impact of service learning on youth's knowledge and skills?**

**Service-learning has resulted in students learning more and developing new skills.** In some cases, as mentioned, grades improved within the particular content area. Students have demonstrated an increased understanding of social issues such as homelessness, literacy, and issues facing the elderly. They have seen clearly the "real world" value of their learning.



Students have acquired a variety of important skills through service-learning. They have developed work skills such as understanding the importance of being on time and communicating well with others. Work like child care and first-aid have provided kids with practical skills. Group service projects are firsthand lessons on what it takes to cooperate and work in a group. Service-learning has brought self-confidence that has led to the development of leadership skills. Not to be overlooked is the fact that service-learning strengthens existing skills and competencies such as reading and writing. This is particularly salient in cases where these skills are purposefully incorporated into service activity.

**What is the impact of service-learning on youth's sense of civic responsibility?**

Students' sense of civic responsibility has been enhanced as a result of service-learning. Students are able to see firsthand the important role that they can play in making improvements in their communities. Seeing that they can make significant contributions to society has changed their perspectives on their education, community, and their lives. In one case, a group of high school students taught a group of senior citizens how to play games on a computer. This was a knowledge base and a skill that the students took for granted, but the senior citizens were thrilled to receive these lessons. This experience validated the students' knowledge and was a powerful demonstration that they did have something to offer. Many students who have been involved in service-learning have said that they want to continue serving others in the future.

A service-learning coordinator who teaches children with learning disabilities said that service-learning has caused her students to look beyond themselves for the first time in their lives. They have always been the recipients of service; now, they are the ones providing service to others. This has meant that the kids have viewed themselves and their abilities in a new, positive way and have developed empathy for others.

## **Section 5--Impact on Community Members' Attitudes Towards Youth**

**Students' increased confidence in their abilities to make contributions to their communities has received a strong, positive response from the communities themselves. While each site's experience is unique, the positive impact of service-learning on the community is clearly evident from the feedback received by community members, school personnel, and students.**

**Service-learning has awakened the community to the valuable contributions that youth can make. The most significant impact of service-learning on communities has been the changing attitudes toward youth. Through service-learning programs, community members witness contributions made by students. The students offer energy and vitality that enhance the relationship between the school and community and bridges generations.**

**Community-based organizations originally opposed or reluctant to having young people in their programs are now eager to have them and are requesting more. One coordinator phrased it this way: "Community members have come to view the students as having the potential to be contributing members of the community. The image of teenagers as being totally self-centered has changed . . ." This reflects not only the change in community attitudes but also the change in students' perceptions of themselves.**

**An important contributing factor to the changing beliefs is the increased visibility of students. Service has been brought out "into the open" through community beautification projects and with students working closely with other community members. Many projects paired students with senior citizens. The students were sensitized to the challenges of senior citizens, who likewise grew in awareness of issues facing students.**

**While many of the relationships between communities and schools have been strengthened, relationships with the media and community boards leave room for improvement. Coordinators said they would like the media and community boards to give more recognition to students' efforts and show more support for the goals of service-learning programs.**

**There is an increasing interdependence between services offered by communities and schools. The enthusiasm generated by collaborative partnerships between schools and communities has served as a catalyst for further development of service-learning programs.**

## **Section 6--Impact on Service-Learning Coordinators**

**Service-learning has had a major impact on the people who are doing the work to make service-learning happen.** Most are teachers; some are administrators, and others are community-based organization staff. All the service-learning coordinators said that they feel that they are engaged in worthwhile activity. This sense of great satisfaction, however, has been accompanied by busier schedules, higher stress levels, and feelings of exhaustion. Most of the teachers involved find themselves in unfamiliar administrative roles for the first time. They are doing things that they never had to do as classroom teachers, or at least not as often: attending meetings, filling out paperwork, interacting with community-based organizations, generating publicity for service-learning, and fighting bureaucracies. Those teachers without strong advisory boards or other networks described feelings of frustration in trying to make service-learning succeed. Two phrases used to describe this feeling were "spinning wheels" and "long, uphill battle." Coordinators also said that those teachers who are not involved in service-learning often express resentment towards them, asking questions like this: "Why do your kids get to miss my class to do service?"

**Many teachers claimed that service-learning has re-invigorated their teaching careers.** They have stated a reluctance to return to the traditional classroom. They spoke of relationships with students that have changed for the better and being able to view students in new, beneficial ways. Some mentioned the positive benefits of working with colleagues in an interdisciplinary way. This, in addition to utilizing the concept of service-learning, has persuaded many teachers to begin thinking more creatively. In addition, service-learning has provided many coordinators with professional development and networking opportunities outside the school building. They have become more aware of the services and opportunities that exist within their communities.

**Being a service-learning coordinator requires certain challenging administrative skills.** The professional training of school-based coordinators is pedagogical, not managerial. Community-based organization staff have more experience managing programs but less understanding of schools and learning. Advisory boards thus become critical. Coordinators need to be advised on how to put a strong advisory board together and how to nurture it. Media support is equally important, as is training on how to effectively use the media. In addition, political support is frequently indispensable. Coordinators need to be able to tap the resources of parent groups and public figures. In short, because they are operating a program that cuts across many lines, coordinators need operational training that is multi-dimensional.

## **Section 7--Policy and Procedural Changes Resulting from Service-Learning**

The initiation of service-learning across the state has resulted in concrete procedural and policy changes on the part of schools and community-based organizations. Awarding academic credit for service and allowing release time for teachers to prepare service activities and for students to do those activities were the two most frequently cited and consequential changes. In the case of a number of middle schools, the teachers' team time was given over to planning and carrying out the service activities which were tied back into a number of subjects across the curriculum. It is important to remember that service-learning in the ideal sense means that service is simply another avenue by which kids learn; service is infused in the curriculum. Awarding credit and allowing release time are important first steps toward reaching this goal.

Frequently, changes to accommodate service-learning are steps taken by schools as a way to explore more flexible scheduling and activities. They are relatively easy, low-risk steps that a principal can take with little danger of negative backlash or problems. The amount of initial work for the school varies. Much of it is detail work, such as finding buses to get students to and from a service site or providing assurances to community organizations that students will behave while at the site. Likewise, community organizations have frequently had to alter their policies and procedures to accommodate students. Typical of these changes is lowering the minimal age for providing service at a community organization and waiving the minimal weekly service hour restrictions that many organizations have. In other cases, city and county governments have allowed students to adopt parks, lakes, and streams and to care for by students.

There were other, less frequently cited changes. In one case, the PTA is paying for service-related field trips. As mentioned earlier, community-based organizations have demonstrated an increased willingness, and in fact eagerness, to have students performing service. Several service-learning coordinators from Volunteer Centers said that service-learning has changed the role of the Volunteer Center from that of a clearinghouse of information to a tool for solving community problems. Another change has been a school opening its doors to community use. More community meetings are happening in schools as a result of new ties and relationships developed through service-learning. A final example of how service-learning has had a concrete effect on school procedure and policy is that service is now considered as one important factor by many post-secondary educational institutions when making decisions related to acceptance and scholarships.

## Section 8--Programmatic concerns and issues

The evolution of service-learning continues. In July 1993 we identified five programmatic concerns and issues: service-learning is young; the eight key ingredients of service-learning programs; student success measures; the roles of coordinators; and problems. These concerns and issues are ones which programs currently face and will continue to face as they evolve. Programs also face new challenges in light of the changes both at the national and state level in addition to any changes occurring at the local level.

We reported in July that programs were working to address these concerns and that the extent of their plans and preparations was largely a function of their level of development. Six months later, in December, the picture of how programs face challenges is clearer. Three new challenges have now been identified: collaboration; political aspects of service-learning; and perceptions of change.

Service-learning is only six months older since the last report: it's still young: Not many people know about service-learning. It is competing for teachers' time with every other initiative as well as with the daily school routine. It is not in the mainstream of schools and community-based organizations. Community-based organizations know less about service-learning than schools. Among the coordinators there does appear to be increasing clarity about service-learning as an instructional methodology. However, this has not yet translated into application and practice.

The eight key ingredients are very different and how they are mixed together is different depending on program category: We learned from the first report that commitment and interest are not enough to implement service-learning. Eight key ingredients are necessary to make service-learning work. They are: students, adults, advisory councils, service activities, linkages, community support, parents, and communication. Our focus groups showed us that the ingredients as well as how they are mixed together vary by program category. Variations can be seen at all levels: between disseminators and mini-grants; programs funded during the 1992-93 school year and those funded during the 1993-1994 school year; schools and community-based organizations; rural, suburban, and urban; east, central, and west; and elementary, middle, and high schools. Differences are expected, and perhaps even necessary and healthy. As concluded in the earlier report, however, each program needs to choose one or two ingredients and work on them over time. A conclusion of the focus groups was that it would be most productive if coordinators were able to share the diversity of their work and get more support and feedback.

**Student Success Measures:** As discussed earlier, evidence that service-learning makes a difference for students is building. Teachers talk about students involved with service-learning being engaged and on-task during



the classroom and service-related activities. Teachers and coordinators involved with service-learning seem not to be overly concerned with student success measures. They are aware of them and would like to validate that service-learning has as much credibility as any other available teaching method. The attitude of coordinators is that service-learning is an instructional method that works for them. It doesn't work all the time, but it is one more tool they have and they are getting better at it. Service-learning helps them to engage students, exercise creativity, and change the routine of their teaching. It is important for coordinators to remember, however, that the ultimate determination of whether service-learning succeeds is the degree to which it can be shown that it affects student performance in concrete, measurable ways. Each program has to identify a concrete measure of service-learning's effectiveness.

**Roles of Coordinators:** Have service-learning coordinators clearly defined a role for themselves? In most cases they are struggling with this question and will continue to over the course of the grant. What is particularly striking is that for many coordinators this is their first grant experience. They are learning as they go. They are not concerned about knowing how to do something. Rather, their concerns focus more on having enough energy and time to make service-learning work for their communities, schools, students, and colleagues.

**Problems:** The earlier discussion of what more has to happen to make service-learning work provides a good indicator of current problems and, most importantly, possible solutions. Once again, problems are norms as programs develop.

**Collaboration:** Collaboration makes a difference – for many reasons. A big one is support. The clearest evidence for collaboration is a community where the school district, Volunteer Center and community-based organization have each individually applied for and received a grant. What has developed in these cases is a community of support for service-learning. It's not just a single coordinator or agency, but a team working together. While most service-learning programs are collaborating with schools and community-based organizations, what distinguishes some programs from others is the gradations of inter-organizational sharing and communication which facilitates programming to meet the needs of the students and each organization.

**Political Aspects of Service-Learning:** The political aspects of service-learning distinguish it from many other educational initiatives. Being part of the Presidential agenda affords service-learning additional attention. At the same time, however, it is susceptible to being seen as trendy and lacking substance. It also means more competition for the limited amount of funding available. Furthermore, the likelihood of it getting lost and forgotten once the spotlight

turns away is an everpresent danger. An additional concern is that K-12 service-learning within the Presidential agenda is low when compared to service programs such as the Pennsylvania Service Corps and Conservation Corps. State and local politics, however, are of greater concern to coordinators. It seems that coordinators feel they not only have to deal with the politics of their own school or community-based organization, but now they may have to deal with state representatives, mayors, and council people who are interested in adding their names as supporters of service. Managing these aspects of service-learning is an additional responsibility and experience.

Service-learning is also linked to a number of other education strategies frequently tied to the educational reform efforts. This appears manageable for the coordinators in schools. For most coordinators in community-based organizations, school reform is not an issue.

**Perceptions of change:** The past six months have been a time of change, with the passage of the Community and National Service Trust Act of 1993 and changes occurring in the PennSERVE leadership. These changes are in addition to any that have occurred at the grant sites. We know, for example, that at least 25% of the sites have experienced a change in coordinator or key support person. The management of these or any changes is a concern for service-learning programs. The programs are not yet well-defined and established, which makes them vulnerable to failure. Change increases anxieties, particularly when viewed to be beyond local control. The ability to see change as bringing risks and opportunities appears critical to program development. Changes should be expected. They are not to be ignored or dismissed as incidental to the process of service-learning's development. People involved with service-learning need to view themselves as change agents who are involved in setting direction and policy.

## Section 9--Recommendations for Service-Learning Practitioners

This section highlights recommendations for service-learning practitioners. It is aimed at the administrators, teachers, Volunteer Center directors, and community-based organization staff charged with implementing service-learning.

- 1. Develop a service-learning support system:** Service-learning is a public activity. Coordinators move out of the classroom and into the community where the potential for problems is increased. People watch what you do. Service-learning is risky for teachers who have primarily worked in the privacy of their classroom and school building. To a somewhat lesser degree, service-learning is also risky for staff of the Volunteer Action Centers and community-based organizations. As they move into schools, their actions are scrutinized. Schools don't want community people coming in and causing problems so they tend to be cautious. The recommendation for individuals practicing service-learning is to build a personal service-learning support system. It will provide guidance, resources and support.
- 2. Be active in the development of service-learning :** Service-learning is changing the role of schools and community-based organizations. It also is part of a changing view of the way schools work and what children and adolescents should learn. At any one time, service-learning is linked with school reform, apprenticeships, outcome-based education, tech prep education, and substance abuse prevention. Similarly, the passage of the 1993 Act and subsequent formation of the Corporation for Community and National Service may cause practitioners to lose sight of the larger efforts on their behalf. There is always the danger that the bureaucracy assigned to implement and support service-learning will be negatively viewed as being "out of touch" by those on the front lines. The Corporation and State can guard against this potential hazard through vigorous outreach and information dissemination. This is not a one-way street, however. The individual practitioners also have the responsibility to be proactive in staying abreast of changes and developments. Since practitioners are the authorities on service-learning, they should participate in the development of service-learning through their active involvement with the state plan development and application process to the Corporation.
- 3. Focus evaluation on programs and students:** Practitioners need practical information they can use to improve the implementation of service-learning and to talk to others about the impact service-learning has on students, community members, and parents. Similarly, there is the practical need to have information on the number of participants and the amount of time involved with service-learning. An essential element of any teaching method is student assessment, and service-learning is no different. Schools should therefore develop an approach for student assessment. It is



recommended that service-learning evaluation includes both program and student evaluation.

**4. Support craft discussions:** To move from service activities as add-on activities to true service-learning requires that service-learning be discussed at every possible leverage point within the community and school. These leverage points include pre-service training, in-service, staff training, meetings with administrators, strategic planning, board training, curriculum reviews, and budget meetings. Such discussions will help to focus a community and school on the role service plays in the curriculum, assessment process, and student learning.

Discussions about what we want children and adolescents to know, how we want them to learn and how to assess their knowledge is related to how money is spent in communities and schools. The small "craft" discussions that occur everyday about children and adolescent is where service-learning needs to be discussed. These discussions allow service-learning to gain sponsorship, resources, cross-fertilization, feedback and support. It becomes part of the "core" values of both the school and community. Hopefully, one result of this is documentation of service-learning "best practices" which helps to further advance service-learning.

**5. Recognize and validate program similarities and differences :** At this point implementation of service-learning depends on the individuals and organizations doing it. It is perhaps not even possible to say who is really doing a better job, given the unique characteristics of each site. Many of the similarities and differences that exist between individuals and organizations are largely related to the length of time and resources involved in service-learning. Discussions across types of programs and within the same type are desirable to pursue and encourage, because the potential for practitioners to learn from one another is high.

## Section 10--Recommendations for PennSERVE

This section highlights recommendations for PennSERVE.

**1. Encourage local communities to learn how to solve local problems:** The PennSERVE mission is to build a system of service, by encouraging children, adolescents, and adults to serve their communities by integrating service into their education, community, and work. Service-learning is one way in which PennSERVE fulfills this mission.

Working with the Department of Education, PennSERVE's vision for service-learning is to promote its growth and development within the schools of Pennsylvania. In formulating the vision it is critical to encourage service-learning, provide the framework and direction, but allow the local communities to select the needs they wish to address.

The PennSERVE vision for service-learning needs to reach out and also empower communities to solve problems that may utilize but ultimately goes beyond children, adolescents, and adults doing service. Community members and the children and adolescents providing the service need to become problem solvers and learn how to solve current situations and prevent future problems. This outcome would be in addition to the enhancement of the academic learning associated with the service.

**2. Build the Pennsylvania service-learning state plan to develop strengths:** Pennsylvania is a leader in service-learning. Developing the state plan provides an opportunity to fortify this position and to contribute to the further development of service-learning. A strong and clear Pennsylvania state plan results from the discussion of a number of important issues.

The future of the current schools and community based-organizations, Volunteer Centers, and infrastructure funded by PennSERVE needs to be addressed. Much of Pennsylvania's strength lies in its current programs. What is the best way to build on the strengths and continue to expand and improve? Some programs are successful and able to obtain an increasing amount of their own support. Others are still in the developmental stages and require additional time and support. Their futures are uncertain.

The model of funding disseminators and mini-grants needs to be discussed. Is it worthwhile, and what are alternatives? The specific requirements and expectations of both should be clearly outlined. Is a certain percent of service-learning involvement by teachers, staff, administrators, in-service, or subject area required? For disseminators, must the school or community-based organization first receive a min-grant before being awarded a disseminator grant? Is it realistic to expect disseminators schools to host a mini-conference once a year?

PennSERVE should also outline what is expected of schools and community-based organizations that show interest in service-learning but have no previous experience with it. For example will the proposal process used for them differ from programs which have already been funded? Perhaps smaller training grants are appropriate for them? Another possibility is the development of a collaborative with private foundations and businesses as an alternative approach to addressing these needs?

**3. Develop the service-learning support system:** One source of support for service-learning practitioners is the PennSERVE infrastructure. Whether it is attending training, calling for information, or receiving on-site consultation, use of the infrastructure needs to be encouraged. The PennSERVE fellows and Volunteer Centers also are potential sources of support for practitioners. For programs to fully realize their potential, however, additional training is indispensable.

A second source of support, not yet fully developed, consists of conferences and training for and by Pennsylvania service-learning practitioners. The state and national service-learning conferences provide this type of support. However, these occur only once or twice a year. Already-established conferences and trainings sponsored by the Department of Education and other community-based organization groups present numerous opportunities to disseminate information on service-learning. What needs to be determined is which conferences are the most appropriate and how to place service-learning on conference agendas.

Clear and consistent communication about service-learning is critical to support practitioners. At this point many practitioners are hungry for details about how to do service-learning. Strategies such as the Teachers' Pages hold promise, but there is a need for more user-friendly materials and traditional communication methods such as newsletters and news releases.

**4. Promote curriculum infusion:** How best to promote service as a learning activity? What does it mean to use service as a learning activity? Is it one teacher using a service activity to teach a single unit? Is it a team of teachers tying their curriculum to a service project? Or, is it an entire school working the last month of the school year in the community on several projects? The answer to these questions is that service-learning is all of these and much more. Realizing this and accepting that the route to curriculum infusion is often roundabout and creative, curriculum infusion promotion and expectation at every developmental phase of service-learning is a priority. PennSERVE and the Department of Education through their statement and support of curriculum infusion will speed the infusion of service into the curriculum.

## Appendix A: Focus Group Schedule

**December 3 - Steel Valley H.S.**  
9:00 am -12:00 pm

1. Steel Valley Senior High School
2. Elizabeth Forward School District
3. Carrick High School
4. QuakerValley School District
5. South Allegheny School District
6. Carmalt Elementary School
7. Phillips Elementary School
8. Greene County Area Vo-Tech
9. Keystone Oaks School District

**December 8 - Keystone Elementary**  
10:00 am - 1:00 pm\*

1. Keystone Elementary School
2. North East High School
3. Wattsburg Area School District
4. Sharon Lifelong Learning Council
5. Riverview Intermediate Unit
6. Volunteer Center of Clearfield County

**December 13 - Elizabethtown**  
8:30am - 11:30 am

1. Elizabethtown Area School District
2. School District of the City of York
3. Penn Manor High School
4. Volunteer Center of York County
5. The Volunteer Center-Harrisburg
6. United Way Volunteer Center - Lancaster
7. Union-Snyder Volunteer Center

**December 14 - Central High School**  
9:00 am - 11:30 am

1. Central High School
2. Furness High School
3. Kensington High School
4. Overbrook High School
5. South Philadelphia High School
6. West Philadelphia High School

**December 6 - Kutztown Area H.S.**  
11:30 am - 3:00 pm \*

1. Kutztown Area School District
2. Bethlehem Area School District
3. Carbon County Area Vo-Tech
4. Schuylkill Haven Area School District
5. Pine Grove Area Middle School
6. Berks County Office of Aging
7. Volunteer Center of Reading & Berks Counties

**December 10 - Altoona High School**  
11:00 am - 2:30 pm \*

1. Altoona Area High School
2. Moshannon Valley School District
3. Hollidaysburg Area Senior High School
4. Derry Area School District
5. Bellefonte Area High School

**December 13 - Downingtown Elementary**

12:30 pm - 3:00 pm.\*

1. Downingtown Area School District
2. Chester County Intermediate Unit
3. Phoenixville Area School District

**December 14 - Olney High School**  
12:30 pm - 4:00 pm \*  
New Grantee Focus

1. Olney High School
2. Franklin Learning Center
3. George Washington High School
4. Gratz and Germantown
5. Green Tree School

**\*Lunch Included**

**December 15 - Kennedy Crossan Elementary**

9:00 am - 12:00 pm

1. Kennedy Crossan Elementary School
2. Pulaski Middle School
3. Elwyn, Inc./Davidson School
4. Wanamaker Middle School
5. Volunteer Center Serving: Delaware, Chester, & Montgomery Counties

**December 15 - RSVP of Montgomery County**

1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

1. RSVP of Montgomery County
2. American Red Cross - SE PA Chapter
3. Central Bucks School District
4. Volunteer Centers of Southeastern PA

**December 17 - Scranton S.D.**

11:00 am - 2:30 pm \*

1. Scranton School District
2. United Way of Wyoming
3. East Lycoming School District
4. Susquehanna County Literacy
5. Voluntary Action Center of NE PA
6. Volunteer Action Center of Wyoming

\* lunch included .