



BRYAN ALLEN STEVENSON SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE

Service-Learning Research Brief

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Secondary schools have been enhancing their curricula through the pedagogy of service learning (SL) for close to fifty years in the United States. Funding, largely supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Carnegie Foundation over almost twenty-five years spurred both significant growth in SL curricula and extensive peer-reviewed research exploring the impact of SL in two broad areas: 1) academic performance and school success; and 2) civic engagement, leadership and commitment to community and service. A brief review of the literature, below, highlights some of the key findings.

Academic Performance and School Success

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that students engaged in SL scored statistically significantly higher than students not engaged in SL on measures including proficiency tests, state academic assessments, and students engaged in SL earned higher grades and had better attendance than students not engaged in SL. For example, Weiler, LaGoy, Crane, and Rovener (1998) demonstrated higher scores on reading and language arts portions of standardized state examinations (California Test of Basic Skills) for students engaged in SL curriculum. Research in 2002 (Klute & Billig), and 2003 (Kraft and Wheeler) supported the same outcomes. Similarly, SL participation improved math test scores (Melchior & Bailis, 2002) and science test scores of students engaged in SL (Klute & Billig, 2002); and Davila and Mora (2007) demonstrated student's engagement in SL was related to positive gains in scholastic achievement in mathematics, science, and history. Laird and Black (2002) demonstrated that students participating in SL scored higher on the Michigan State Assessment; in another study by Furco and Granicher (2007) 82.9% of students engaged in SL met or exceeded proficiency on teacher selected California Academic Content Standards. Follman and Muldoon (1998) studied programs involving over 29,000 students engaged in SL to discover that 62% reported decreased student absenteeism, and 74% reported pre-post improvement in student grades. A 2006 study also demonstrated students had better overall attendance and grades than their counterparts who did not participate in SL (Scales, et. al.)

While measures of motivation and commitment to learning are not direct measures of student academic achievement, they are recognized as closely related to school success, and SL has been shown to impact these measures as well. For example, research demonstrates that students engaged in SL express higher levels of motivation for and interest in their learning, and SL experiences expose students to factors known to impact academic achievement including increased self-esteem and opportunities to act more independently (Conrad & Hedin, 1981), and

from the Scales study cited above, students engaged in SL scored higher on a scale measuring commitment to learning. Drawing on data from the 1988-2000 National Education Longitudinal Study, Davila and Mora (2007) showed that students who participated in SL activities in high school were 22 percent more likely to graduate from college than those who did not participate.

In other studies, Yamauchi and colleagues (2006) showed that student engaged in SL had a stronger set of job and career-related skills and aspirations including knowledge of how to plan activities, desire to pursue post-secondary education, and job interview skills; and that students engaged in SL scored higher on a constellation of measures related to resilience, leadership, and prevention of school drop-out.

Civic Engagement, Leadership, and Commitment to Community and Service

In addition to significantly impacting academic performance and school success, there is a body of literature that concludes students engaged in SL also score significantly higher on measures of civic engagement, leadership, and community to community and service. For example, Kim and Billig (2002) demonstrated in Colorado that students engaged in SL scored higher on measures of connection to community, connection to school, and civic responsibility; and students engaged in SL in the Philadelphia Freedom Schools Junior Leader Study demonstrated increased scores on measures of connectedness with community, connectedness to American Society, taking action and making changes in their communities (Kim and Billig, 2002). Similarly, Furco (2002) demonstrated that California HS students engaged in SL showed increased awareness of societal issues and willingness to take active roles in the community. More specifically, a study by Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, and Hawkins (2004) showed that students engaged in SL students developed a greater sense of efficacy and stronger connections to the community norms and values, thereby contributing to community cohesion. Results from a national study indicated that both the Serve America and Learn and Serve Programs had a statistically significant positive impact on students' civic attitudes and behaviors particularly in the areas of personal and social responsibility, service leadership, and acceptance of diversity and communications skills (Melchior and Bailis 2002). Similarly, in the Constitutional Rights Foundation's City Works Program research Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh (2002) found students engaged in SL demonstrated greater commitments to become participatory citizens, and to justice-oriented values in service. Additionally, Henness (2001) studied programs in rural communities and found student social capital development was much higher for students engaged in SL.

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