

THE ADVOCATE



Be a Champion

A Texas student council fights hunger with sustainable community service.

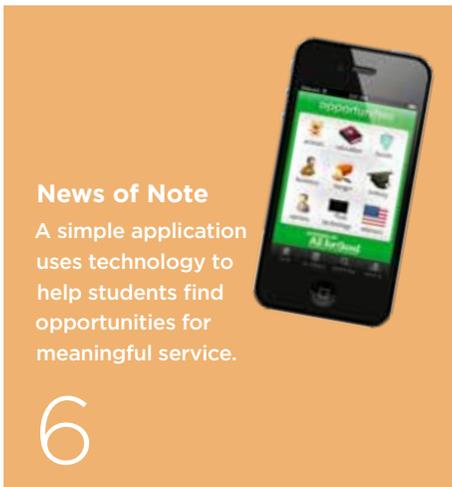
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Activity Connection

Service-learning program provides the perfect mix of STEM skills, service, and common core standards.

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News of Note

A simple application uses technology to help students find opportunities for meaningful service.

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Exponential Benefits

Service Learning Reaches Far Beyond the Classroom

BY KATHLEEN WILSON SHRYOCK

It sounds cliché, but common sense tells us an important truth. Young people are the future. Equipping them with the skills and motivation to serve as productive citizens is a shared goal of our schools and communities. Unfortunately, statistics regarding dropout rates and the status of the nation's civic health indicate that many students are not invested in a long-term plan. Luckily, there is a positive factor that can change their outlook. When X = service learning, students perceive an increase in the value of their education, and civic responsibility becomes a vital part of the curriculum.

A recent report from Civic Enterprises suggests that service learning is an effective way to tame the dropout crisis and prepare students for success in high school, college, career, and community. Eighty-two percent of students surveyed said that their feelings about high school became more positive as a result of service learning. Other research indicates that service learning can increase students' self-confidence and lead to improvements in leadership skills, academic performance, and behavior.¹

For David Cordts, associate director of Honor Societies at the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the positive power of service learning comes as no surprise. In a survey conducted by the NASSP, a sampling of more than 2,400 student council and honor society advisers reported a collective \$3.2 million in charitable donations during the 2012–2013 school year. In addition, these student councils contributed an average of more than 4,200 service hours per council, and the reporting honor societies contributed more than 980 service hours per chapter.² →



While communities, schools, and charitable organizations reap tangible benefits as a result of student service, Cordts believes that the personal benefits gained by students are equally important. “Service learning provides students with an opportunity to participate in something that has meaning and value,” he said. “It allows them to use problem-solving skills and other classroom concepts to make a difference. When we promote a high level of engagement (through activities that tie service to learning), the quality of education is increased and we create a generation of life-long service providers.”

In some cases, the presence of service opportunities, academics, and an altruistic nature inspires students to take their service work to a higher level, especially when the mission is sparked by a special interest and the ability to make a difference. For Carter Jenkins, a junior at JSerra Catholic High School in San Juan Capistrano, CA, an interest in photography led to a passion that has not only changed his life but has also impacted the lives of classmates, local community members, and far-away villagers in Latin America.

In 2010, Jenkins came across a photo essay about the world water crisis. While the amazing photos drew his attention, they also told an unforgettable story. “I learned that one of every eight people—nearly a billion people in all—lack access to clean drinking water,” Jenkins explained. “I was lucky to have attended schools where community service is valued. I knew that when you identify something you are passionate about and think about creative solutions, you can bring about change.”

Jenkins’ first step was to educate himself about the cause. Then, with the help of his parents, teachers, and classmates, a determined Jenkins founded Students for Safe Water, a nonprofit organization designed to educate others about the world water



“When we promote a high level of engagement (through activities that tie service to learning), the quality of education is increased and we create a generation of life-long service providers.”

crisis. The group also raises funds to install safe water systems in Latin America and around the world. In the summer of 2012, Jenkins and a team traveled to Nicaragua for the first time to help with a water sanitation project.

Jenkins believes that education and service work are complementary. His organizational skills, public speaking skills, and leadership abilities have been strengthened through work with his nonprofit initiative. Membership in Future Business Leaders of America has provided additional familiarity with key business concepts. “Service work has helped me see the big picture in regards to life after high school,” he said. “I want to be a social entrepreneur (who creates positive, sustainable social change). I have learned skills that apply to the job market, and I am comfortable talking with people in a business setting. At the same time, it feels great to pour myself into something that I am really passionate about.”

In 2007, Amy Carlton was a freshman at Lake Oswego High School in Oregon when a student activity fueled her desire to make a difference. Carlton was researching facts about the United States for Model United Nations, an

academic simulation that educates students about important world issues while developing critical 21st century skills. “I was shocked to find that 13 million children were going hungry each month,” said Carlton. “It sparked my interest in helping those less fortunate than me.” Carlton decided that her jewelry-making hobby would be an ideal way to fight hunger.

Like Jenkins, Carlton’s first step was to become knowledgeable about her cause. She researched the facts about hunger in the United States. Armed with information, Carlton applied for nonprofit status, developed a business plan, and harnessed the energy of other teens

SERVICE LEARNING RESOURCES



KEY CLUB

Key Club is an international student-led organization which provides its members with opportunities to provide service, build character, and develop leadership.



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT COUNCILS

Established in 1931, NASC provides student councils and their advisers with the knowledge, skills, and resources that students need to become active, engaged leaders in their schools and communities.



NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY / NATIONAL JUNIOR HONOR SOCIETY

The NHS and NJHS recognize students who have demonstrated excellence in the areas of character, leadership, service, scholarship, and citizenship. NHS and NJHS also challenge students to develop further through active involvement in school activities and community service.



NATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING CLEARINGHOUSE

Funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, NSLC promotes the strengthening of schools through service learning. The site provides information and resources to support educators and researchers.



TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT COUNCILS (SERVICE PROJECTS)

The mission of TASC is to promote, develop, and empower successful student councils in secondary schools in Texas. These great project ideas from TASC member schools are sorted by category.



YOUTH SERVICE AMERICA

YSA strives to create a global culture of youth who are committed to a lifetime of service, learning, and leadership. The organization provides grants, resources, and project campaigns aimed at engaging students in service and service learning.

a4sa.org/resources

who wanted to help. Since its formation, Teens Fighting Hunger has raised over \$80,000 by selling high quality arts and crafts created by an army of teen hunger fighters. The proceeds have helped feed more than 130,000 children. Currently, Carlton is a senior at Santa Clara University in California where she is a student government member and has started an on-campus club to fight hunger. Her original organization still seeks to educate the public about the issue of childhood hunger and raises funds through an online store.

For Kyle Capin, a lifelong love of the great outdoors and a desire to share it with others sparked a service-learning journey that has spanned more than six years. In 2007, Capin was a senior at William Henry Harrison High School in Evansville, IN. He was serving as a peer mentor for a group of special needs students and had formed a close bond with them. "I realized that because many of the students were in wheelchairs and had other disabilities, they might never get to go fishing. Some of them told me they had always wanted to," Capin says. "I promised that I would take them some day. I knew I would have to jump through hoops to make it happen, but once I decide to do something, I don't give up."

Capin called on the community connections he had built through his school, the local bass club, his father's construction company, and other area organizations. His fundraising efforts hooked \$2,600, enough to cover transportation costs, fishing equipment, t-shirts, and the fixings for a lunchtime picnic. In addition, more than 30 volunteers signed on to assist. The inaugural Catchin' with Capin event hosted 25 students. It was so successful that Capin was inspired to make it an annual celebration. In 2013, the event hosted more than 300 special needs students. Capin is expecting more than 500 students next year, and a school district in another city has contacted him about providing the business model for starting a second event in their town.

Capin believes his secret to success has been his determination to never give up and to find creative solutions to objections. He returned to the school board multiple times before his initial request was approved. The process has also provided him with valuable life skills. "My goal was to share a fun activity with other kids. What keeps me going is the joy on their faces," he said. "I have also learned skills that I need as an adult. Skills that apply to everything from my job to one day helping my own kids succeed."

The tangible impact of community service can be measured by the hours contributed or the dollars donated. But to measure the true value of service learning, it is important to consider the benefits gained by students when they integrate service with authentic learning. Not only are students connecting classroom instruction with real-world applications, but they are fostering a sense of civic responsibility. The ripple effect can be seen in a new generation of productive citizens and in the students who are influenced by the altruistic actions of their peers. "It isn't just about my charity. It's about encouraging people to find what matters to them, something that they are passionate about, and then working hard to make a difference," said Jenkins. ●

TO SEE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS IN ACTION, view these videos: Carter Jenkins at www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6sXPnFNIGs Amy Carlton at teensfightinghunger.org/news-events

Strategies for Creating Sustainable Service Programs

EFFECTIVE SERVICE LEARNING can provide opportunities for authentic learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen the community. Kyle Capin, Amy Carlton, and Carter Jenkins are three young people who combined service learning with their passion for a cause. As a result, they developed effective, sustainable programs. Here are their strategies for linking service to success:

Know the facts. Research your cause and be able to speak intelligently about it without needing notes.

Identify your goals beyond just "making a difference." Define your mission in detail and be willing to modify it if necessary.

Develop important skills like public speaking and meeting management.

If you want to go big, you must **establish nonprofit status**. Individuals and businesses are more likely to donate when they can deduct their donations. Search crowd funding websites to raise funds for filing fees.

Recruit an enthusiastic team of volunteers but understand their level of commitment. Some volunteers are more than happy to serve at a one-time event or to contribute funds, but to serve on the board, they must share your passion for the cause.

Don't be afraid to **ask for support**. Use every meeting as an opportunity to educate others. The worst that can happen is that they will say "No."

Tell your supporters how they can help. Be specific.

Provide others with opportunities to build on their own creative talents to offer unique support.

Reinforce your supporters' efforts by acknowledging their contributions.

Show your supporters the difference they are making through facts, figures, reports, photos, and videos that document progress.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the organizations discussed in this article, visit these sites:

Catchin' with Capin at catchinwithcapin.com

Future Business Leaders of America at fbla-pbl.org

Students for Safe Water at sfsh2o.org

Teens Fighting Hunger at teensfightinghunger.org

National Honor Society and National Junior Honor Society at www.nhs.us

1. John M. Bridgeland, John J. Dilulio, Jr., and Stuart C. Wulsin, Engaged for Success, Civic Enterprises, April 2008.

2. NASSP Student Service Programs Report 2013, NASSP Student Service Programs, 2013.

Student Council Champions: Service with a Purpose in Texas

FOR LISA PETTY and her students, the decision to serve others has cultivated a community-wide network of service-oriented champions. Petty is the student council sponsor at Llano High School in Llano, TX. She explains that with 60% of the district's students on a free and reduced lunch program, council members wanted a tangible way to make a difference for students in need. They reviewed various service projects and selected a program that would provide students with nutritious food on the weekends. Now in its third year, Jacket Backpack Buddies raises more than \$20,000 a year and distributes backpacks of food to as many as 200 students a week on four district campuses.



A service project by students at Llano High School received top ten honors from the Texas Association of Student Councils.

Why is Jacket Backpack Buddies such a successful, sustainable project?

Kids want to feel relevant. With this project, the kids have owned it from the beginning. It is real to them because they see the needs every day in their own community. At the start of every year, I ask the students if they want to continue with the project, how they plan to keep it going, and why it's important to them. They understand that this is not "The Lisa Petty Show." It's all about them, and they are impacting an entire campus culture. We had 16 kids on the council when we started this program. This year we have 57. The kids are responding to the sense of purpose they feel when they serve in a tangible way.

How does this program combine community service with learning?

In our group, the students learn that the council exists to serve others like our federal government exists to serve the people. Backpack Buddies has motivated students to serve and also to reach out to others in the community to gain support. There have been opportunities for speaking engagements and networking with business owners. As a result, several students have developed career interests or started internships. As a teacher, I can't teach these types of lessons from a book.

Why are connections within the school and surrounding community important to the success of this project?

The project wouldn't be a success without outside support. The superintendent, administrators, and faculty members provide encouragement and affirm that what the kids are doing is important. Counselors and administrators identify at-risk students and help coordinate distribution so that the identities of participating students remain private. Students in the National Honor Society, the junior high student council, and the Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America provide assistance and further promote a service-oriented atmosphere. We have two parent volunteers whose help with the shopping and bookkeeping is invaluable. Businesses and individuals throughout the community support our fundraising activities.

What is the most important lesson you have learned as a student council sponsor?

An adviser has to be fearless enough to take a step back and trust the kids to take care of the problems. As advisers, we love to watch our kids step up, generate new ideas, and create solutions. ●

TO READ MORE about outstanding service projects in Texas including Llano High School's Jacket Backpack Buddies, a top ten project of 2013, go to a4sa.org/TXTopTen.

A NEW RESOURCE from Youth Service America will provide teachers with strategies for engaging their students in service learning while addressing childhood hunger. To learn more, read YSA's blog at a4sa.org/YSA-hunger-blog.



Service Learning: The Benefits at a Glance

TERRY HAMM, director of the Texas Association of Student Councils, believes that service-learning programs requiring students to search for a need, set a goal, and take action create an authentic experience that carries into future life. To be effective, service learning should include specific academic goals and intentional reflection at project end. Hamm encourages educators to make the time for service learning by fostering a culture of appreciation for service-learning programs.



Studies indicate that service learning results in improvements in student engagement and educational outcomes:

- In Kansas, students who participated in service learning showed strong gains on measures of attitude toward school, on writing scores, and in grade point averages. (Kraft and Wheeler, 2003)
- A review of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 showed that participation in service learning enhanced academic achievement and raised graduation rates. (Davila & Mora, 2007)
- Compared to their peers, young adults who participated in K-12 service learning were more likely to discuss community issues, vote in elections, and remain more politically and socially connected to their communities. (Martin, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Crossley, 2006)
- Civic engagement of families influences students' commitment to civic participation, but the impact of service learning and other classroom-based civic learning opportunities is substantially larger. (Kahne & Sporte, 2007)
- Students in service learning had a stronger set of career-related skills and aspirations, including knowledge of how to plan activities, desire to pursue postsecondary education, and job interview skills. (Yamauchi, 2006)
- The Search Institute identifies service to others as a "gateway asset" and finds that service learning can have positive effects on at least 20 of the 40 developmental assets. (a4sa.org/40-Assets) ●

TO REVIEW RESEARCH about the value of service learning, see: "Impact of Service Learning from National Service-Learning Clearinghouse" at a4sa.org/servicelearnfacts. "Ten Facts about Youth Service from Youth Service America" at a4sa.org/ysatop10.

The Elements of Authentic Learning: STEM Skills, Service, and Common Core Standards

FOR 25 YEARS, Youth Service America (YSA) has promoted youth development through engaging local and global community service. In 2009, YSA introduced STEMester of Service, a three-year pilot program designed to connect common core standards with STEM skills and community service. Evaluations from an independent research group showed that the program substantially improved student engagement and academic outcomes.¹ Now presented as a resource for educators, STEMester of Service's best practices provide a framework for maximizing service-learning potential.

Susan Abravanel, vice president of education at YSA, explains the STEMester of Service is a common sense strategy for addressing current issues in the classroom. By linking common core standards and STEM skills to service learning, teachers can create authentic applications that boost student participation and performance. "Students are engaged by their natural desire to make a difference and to address substantive problems to which they can relate," said Abravanel. "Once engaged, they become committed learners. They no longer ask, 'Why do we have to learn this?' They know that they need to learn in order to come up with solutions."

Abravanel stresses that the STEMester program does not provide a static, step-by-step curriculum. Instead, it recognizes that teachers are at varying stages of implementation in regards to common core standards and district and state requirements. As a result, the program is designed to provide practical teaching and learning strategies regarding the investigation of a relevant community need.

Here are some additional takeaways from YSA's STEMester of Service:

- For service learning to yield significant outcomes, students need to be committed over an extended period of time. Research indicates that the duration must be at least 70 hours. YSA programs incorporate these hours over the course of a semester.
- A training program and consistent support for teachers is critical to success. Teachers were most motivated by issues that were personally meaningful.
- The programs emphasize student ownership. Students need to know that their work will have a positive impact on the community. ●

GET PROJECT IDEAS and learn from teachers and students who have successfully implemented semester-long projects at ysa.org/semester/projects.

1. Learn how to implement a STEM-based semester of service and review the results of YSA's pilot program. See *STEMester of Service: Engaging Students through High-Quality Service and Learning* at ysa.org/resources.

A Mobile App Sparks Meaningful Service

ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY are occurring at breakneck speed, and students expect quick and easy access to electronic information. The Opp-Guide App reaches students where they roam through a simple mobile application that connects students with volunteer opportunities.

17-year-old Lance Oppenheim is the president of the Opp-Guide to Community Service, a nonprofit organization based in Florida. In 2004, Oppenheim's sisters first designed the guide for high school students. Their paper pamphlet provided a comprehensive list of service opportunities and was distributed to students through schools, churches, synagogues, and other local establishments. Today, the Opp-Guide App is a national electronic database that allows young people to search almost 300,000 organizations for a variety of volunteer opportunities.

At the heart of the organization's mission is the desire to make "required" service hours more meaningful to students as well as the organizations they serve. Opp-Guide organizers believe that matching a student's interests with appropriate, engaging opportunities can reaffirm a student's volunteer efforts and create the desire to be a lifelong service provider. Opportunities can be searched by keyword, zip code, or category. The app is available through the Web at opp-guide.com or for free through the iTunes store at a4sa.org/iTunes-Opp-Guide.

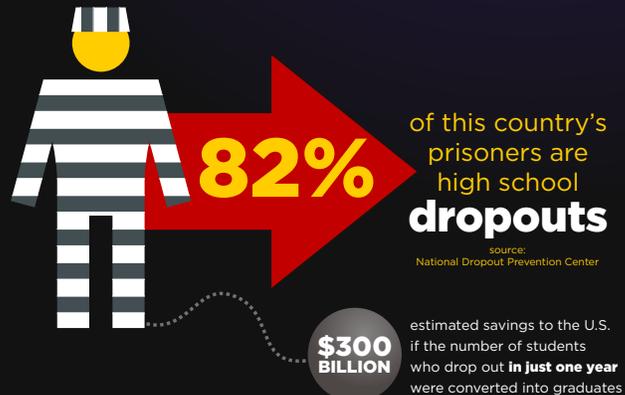
TO LEARN MORE about the Opp-Guide, read the *PBS NewsHour Extra* interview with Lance Oppenheim at a4sa.org/PBS-OppGuide.



unintended consequences

In too many schools, budget cuts, time crunches, and increased emphasis on test scores have led to a decreased appreciation for the value of arts, athletics, and activities programs. Student activities and their crucial role in preventing drop outs are the missing variable in many of today's educational reform equations.

The unintended consequences can be severe.



Average cost of incarcerating one high school dropout, per year



\$31,000

source: Vera Institute of Justice

Average state and federal funding that comes from keeping one at-risk student in school, per year



\$12,000

source: National Center for Education Statistics (FY 2011 data)



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THE ADVOCATE

The Advocate is published ten times a year by the Alliance for Student Activities, a nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the value of student activities through advocacy, training, resources, and networking.

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Submissions of student activities research and other inquiries are welcome. Contact advocate@a4sa.org

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