

Linking Service and Civics through Service-Learning:

The Report from the Civic Responsibility Work Group

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INTRODUCTION & SCOPE OF WORK

This document will provide guidance to CalServe grantees on what constitutes high-quality civic responsibility expectations for students engaged in service-learning activities. The document will focus attention on the important knowledge, skills, and ethics of civic responsibility that are needed to fully prepare youths as active participants in our “democratic” society.

A democratic society requires individuals who actively participate in its processes and institutions. Through education it seeks to prepare its citizens for public service, apply learning to real life experiences, and in general, make a difference. Fulfilling the role of a citizen of the United States requires a set of skills that have to be acquired, and the public educational system has a fundamental responsibility to teach those skills. Service is an instrument of civic education, a way of teaching young people responsibility, and a way of helping young people acquire the skills of liberty (Barber, p.17-18).

"Service-Learning makes academic content come alive as students apply their knowledge and skills to real-life situations. Students become more engaged in their studies and see that they can make a difference. Taking an active role in addressing community needs fosters responsible citizenship and contributes to character development."

Jack O'Connell
California State Superintendent of Public Instruction

However, not all service can be directly tied to creating a better civil system...not all service is civic service. Moreover, there is a growing body of knowledge that indicates a disconnection between young people and the affairs of their government. But the same research suggests that young people are involved in service that leads to meeting the needs in their own communities and reflects a preference for direct, one-on-one individual service. The focus of young people's plans for civic engagement seems to be moving away from civic service, toward involvement in local communities through individual and small group service.

In the 2002-2003 school year, the California Department of Education (CDE), CalServe Initiative, convened a Civic Responsibility Work Group to address issues related to implementing the civic mission of education through service-learning. The members of this group met to address the question of how the service-learning instructional strategy can provide opportunities for students to gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be civically responsible and to fully engage them as active participants in a democratic society.

To guide their discussions, the Work Group relied on the definition of service-learning given by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. This Act identified the following five elements of service-learning:

- Students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community.

- The service is done in connection with an elementary school, a secondary school, institutions of higher education, or community service programs and with the community.
- The service helps foster civic responsibility.
- The service is integrated into and enhances the curriculum of the students.
- Time is set aside for students to reflect on the service.

The focus of this report is on the linkages between service-learning and civic education that engage students as active, responsible citizens. It is intended to reflect current thinking and to make such recommendations as may move communities and schools to adopt practices that promote active and responsible youth engagement in civic life. The Work Group acknowledged the critical importance of knowledge of history and understanding of the democratic processes and cultural norms. Because this knowledge base has been delineated in the *California History Social Science Content Standards*, it will not be described here. Rather, this document will focus on linking service-learning and civic education to engage students as active, responsible citizens.

Although this report provides specific recommendations for improving the civic engagement of students, the implementation of these recommendations should be aligned within state-adopted academic content standards and the textbook-based curriculum. As an instructional method, service-learning should be used to enhance the curriculum and to reinforce student understanding.

The Work Group sought ways to encourage students to know, understand, and appreciate democratic history and process; understand how to engage in the democratic process and recognize when they are involved in it; and know how decision-making occurs in the development of public policy and participate in it in appropriate ways.

To better understand the contribution that youths can make to our civil system as they engage in service-learning activities, the Civic Responsibility Work Group explored a number of aspects of citizenship, civic responsibility, and civic engagement, including similarities and differences between service-learning activities that focus on engaging youths as participants in our democratic civil system, and the many other forms of community service and volunteerism.

There is a large degree of ambiguity among the service, volunteerism, and educational communities regarding the definition of civic responsibility/engagement. Some people contend that all service is civics, advocating that any service to the community has an impact on our civil society. Others, while supporting service and volunteerism, choose to more narrowly define civic responsibility/engagement as taking responsibility for our civil system and actively participating in the design, implementation, and accountability for public policy. Those who differentiate between the two point out that in order to prepare the next generation of participants in our democratic society, service-learning activities must go beyond service to individuals or participation in organized community service. There must be a deliberate educational intent to develop youths who will actively participate in the kinds of service that seeks to develop or improve our current civil system.

Civic education should be grounded in an understanding of government and political institutions and teach youths the skills to influence and affect social, political, and economic change while protecting civil liberties. Teaching democratic values and beliefs and the need for civic education were a major focus of the Work Group's deliberations. Such instruction will lead to civic responsibility and active citizenship. John J. Patrick identified civic knowledge, cognitive civic skills, participatory civic skills, and civic disposition as key components of a common education for citizenship and democracy (Patrick and Mann, p. 4). To this list the Work Group added knowledge about one's own community, empathy, fairness, justice, and concern for the welfare of others as important to include in civic education.

The Civic Responsibility Work Group identified and discussed three key focus areas:

- Evidence of the need for civic education that includes active participation of youths in the democratic process;
- Levels of service commitment and increasing civic contribution throughout the grade spans K-5, 6-8, and 9-12; and
- Civic contribution and its implications for schools, classrooms, and instructional practice.

Recommendations of the Work Group were based on consensus within these three focus areas.

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY WORK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Provide instruction that grounds youths in civic service and in knowledge** of government and political institutions; enables them to analyze public policy, and provides the skills to inform and affect social and political change while protecting civil liberties.
- 2. Strengthen civic engagement and participation** among youths to empower them as participants in shaping public policy through involvement in service-learning.
- 3. Link the world of youths with deeply rooted, real world civic issues** to promote effective civic knowledge, skills and dispositions; provide opportunities for them to collaborate, investigate, apply their knowledge; share the results of their work and reflect on their experiences.
- 4. Encourage the personal connections with people and organizations** in the civil service sector or government agencies that are crucial to involving youths in civic service.
- 5. Direct civic service toward informing observable systemic change** that benefits the development or implementation of public policy in the youth's own localities and beyond.
- 6. Provide every student with increasingly complex and sophisticated service-learning experiences** that focus on civic issues throughout their K-12 learning years.
- 7. Develop an attitude of civic commitment in youths** that recognizes the cumulative effect of service-learning as students progressively take more initiative, become more vocal, show more knowledge of processes and procedures to work with the governmental system and associated public institutions.

DISCUSSION OF THE THREE FOCUS AREAS

1. EVIDENCE OF THE NEED FOR CIVIC EDUCATION THAT INCLUDES ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTHS IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Results reported from recent research studies on the civic attitudes of today's youth indicate a disconnection between young people and government. The same research notes that young people are highly active in ways that lead to results in their own communities, and prefer service that connects closely to people they know personally. Youth civic engagement seems to be moving away from civic service, toward involvement in local communities through social and personal service.

When asked about their priorities in two studies (Hart in 1989 and Tarrance/Lake in 1998), youths responded as follows:

	1989	1998	change
• Becoming successful in your job and career.	72%	70%	-2%
• Having a close knit family life.	68%	76%	+8%
• Doing well financially, making a lot of money.	51%	41%	-10%
• Being involved and helping your community be a better place.	24%	40%	+16%
• Being a good American who cares about the good of the country.	49%	43%	-6%
• Being involved in your religion and living up to your religious principles/spiritual values.	38%	49%	+11%

(The New Millennium Project, p. 29.)

Moreover, an international comparison of adolescents' political knowledge and attitudes conducted in 1999 among 90,000 14-year-olds offers insights into the impact that civic education has on fostering democracy:

- Nearly 85 percent of U.S. students rated voting as important for adult citizens; only around one-half rated joining a political party or engaging in political discussions as important.
- About 70 percent of U.S. students reported trusting the local government, the U.S. Congress, and the national government always or most of the time.
- Teachers who foster an open climate for discussion and explicitly promote civic knowledge and engagement...have a positive impact on students' civic achievement and engagement. (2001)
- More than 75 percent of the U.S. students studied the U.S. Constitution, the U.S. Congress, and the making of laws. More than 85 percent of them read the textbook and filled out worksheets. Fewer than 45 percent reported such active student involvement as debating, discussing and participating in role-plays or mock trials. (2001)
- About 75 percent of U.S. students reported explicit instruction on the importance of elections and voting while 25 percent did not (Torney-Purta, p. 45-50).

One of the indicators of growth in a developmental process toward increased civic engagement is political involvement. A 1998 Annenberg Institute on Public Engagement

for Public Education study found several shared traits of communities and schools that foster public engagement:

- They were inclusive and dialogue-driven;
- They sought meaningful and long-term improvements;
- They attempted to establish common ground and broad consensus around complex and controversial issues; and
- They featured an atmosphere of candor and trust.

(The Annenberg Institute, p. 5)

While research results on service-learning have been mixed, there is evidence to suggest that educational institutions which thoroughly integrate service and academic learning through continuous reflection promotes development of the knowledge, skills, and cognitive capacities necessary for students to deal effectively with the complex social issues that challenge citizens (Eyler, p. 517-534). Activities in service-learning lead to further interest in civic issues. Interest leads to involvement. Students must work on issues they personally care about. Service-learning has the potential to be a catalyst for future political participation if it makes explicit the link between service and civics (Gibson, p. 17).

2. LEVELS OF SERVICE COMMITMENT AND INCREASING CIVIC CONTRIBUTION THROUGHOUT THE GRADE SPANS (K-5, 6-8, 9-12)

Individuals participate and engage in the affairs of their community in a variety of ways and along a continuum of commitment. This continuum begins with commitment at the personal level, through individual volunteerism and community service, for example, and extends to active participation in civic affairs in ways that promote systemic change by addressing deeply rooted issues of public policy. Each level of commitment is beneficial to the community and serves to empower youths both individually and collectively, and as such, serves the greater good. Civic education seeks to encourage youths to participate across the continuum of commitment, but especially to identify public systems that inadequately serve the common good and work to change them.

Consider the work of Westheimer and Kahne who defined levels of citizenship as follows:

- The personally responsible citizen acts responsibly in his/her community by, for example, picking up litter, giving blood, recycling, volunteering, obeying laws, contributing to food or clothing drives, and voting.
- The participatory citizen actively participates in the civic affairs and social life of the community at local, state, and national levels by, for example, church work, Parent Teachers Association membership, fundraising efforts to benefit the community, and participating in community planning sessions.
- The justice-oriented citizen seeks social movement and to affect systemic change to improve society and address its injustices.

(Westheimer and Kahne, p. 5)

Aligned with the above levels of citizenship, the Work Group developed definitions of responsible citizens:

- A personally responsible citizen as one who cares for individuals and works mostly alone;
- A socially responsible citizen as one who participates in organized service;
- A civically responsible citizen as one who works either alone or in groups to take responsibility for designing and implementing public policy.

All youths should be provided with successive service experiences of increasing sophistication throughout their K-12 learning years, recognizing the need for vigilance and on-going monitoring of policies on issues of community importance. The service focus and personal motivation or rewards at each of the three contribution levels is described by the Work Group below:

- Service at the personal contribution level is usually individually selected. The selection tends to reflect the values and priorities of the individual. The service may or may not be as a member of a group and is targeted at meeting the needs of an individual. The service is usually direct, personal, and local. Recognition may or may not be public. Rewards are frequently internal, such as a personal feeling of well-being, of having made a contribution, or of having made a difference.
- Service at the social contribution level can be either individually selected or selected by members of a group. The service is targeted to meet the needs of groups of individuals or the community in general. The service may be direct or indirect. Recognition by the contributing social group is frequently an important motivating factor. Rewards are both personal and social. They may be internal or may be "pats on the back" from others either within the social group or outside of it.
- Service at the civic contribution level can be either individually selected or selected as a member of a group. The service is focused on working with the civil sector (governmental agencies and/or institutions) on issues of public policy. The service may be direct and local or may be indirect. Advocacy is frequently important at this level. Recognition may or may not be public. Rewards may be both personal and social. Internal rewards are an important motivating factor as is a feeling of having contributed to the development and implementation of public policy.

The remainder of the discussion of the Work Group centered on the third element, the civic contribution level of engagement and its implications for schools, classrooms, and instructional practice.

3. CIVIC CONTRIBUTION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOLS, CLASSROOMS, AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

An effective service-learning experience leads to an increasing sense of civic responsibility in youth, engages them in instruction that is grounded in knowledge of government and political institutions, and teaches the aspects to influence social, political, and economic change. These are the skills that protect civil liberties in a democratic society. The learning experience must also be designed to engage youths in meaningful service applications that address real world problems and issues, and provide opportunities for youths to research, collaborate, apply content knowledge, reflect, and share their conclusions with others.

One purpose of education is to engage youths in activities that foster participation in social and political life for the purpose of furthering the common good and protecting individual rights. Many students have a limited understanding of what is required to be involved at the civic contribution level. Many schools are not yet providing opportunities for youths to develop competencies and dispositions to participate in public policy development or implementation. There are a number of factors that contribute to this situation. Among them are the ways we often teach (classroom and teacher-centered, lacking in real life, hands-on experience); what we often teach (irrelevant, uninteresting, disconnected, does not encourage active participation); and what we do or do not model (core values and behaviors).

In the report of the Wingspread College Conference, Campus Compact, February 2002, the problem with such instruction was described as "...pedagogy that requires youths to live in bifurcated worlds of theory and action. Youths are told to ingest large amounts of information that point to a concern, yet are often discouraged from acting on their knowledge and idealism until they have secured their own economic futures. This deferral, coupled with a belief in the primacy of one's rights, leads to a perception that disengagement and apathy are youthful character flaws, when they are more accurately flawed social norms."

The Work Group delineated a rationale and basic instructional practices needed for effective civic education (not a matched list):

Why We Need Civic Education	How We Need To Do Civic Education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the survival of democracy. • To represent democracy. • To create change, growth, and systemic improvement of the civil system. • To meet state adopted academic content standards and raise student achievement. • To create highly literate citizens in a complex world. • To unify and connect communities and halt decreasing social capital (Robert Putnam). • To develop personal efficacy which leads to non-violent solutions to problems. • To participate in the electoral process or risk losing self-governance in a democracy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We must <u>model</u> responsible citizenship. • Let youths take an active role in the course of study and how they can apply their knowledge. • More interactive, hands-on pedagogy (e.g. service-learning). • Recognize varied forms of service and community engagement. • Articulate a continuum of civic education and allow youths to reflect and evaluate their engagement. • Teach effective communication skills and dispositions.

The Work Group believes that all K-12 youths should acquire universal skills and dispositions and be able to use them as active citizens in a democratic society. The benchmarks and instructional strategies will differ by grade level, as will the increasing

levels of sophistication and complexity of civic engagement. Participants delineated the skills and dispositions needed by youths to support, complement, or directly provide civic service. The following skills and dispositions were suggested as those needed by youths to be effective citizens and important for staff to model:

- Interpersonal and Communication Skills—listen, understand another person’s perspective, and articulate one’s own position in a respectful way; negotiate and compromise, facilitate group process, arbitrate and mediate, solve problems, and resolve conflicts; value diversity and work respectfully with diverse groups; work and interact positively with adults and people in leadership positions; make a good case for a particular point of view and build coalitions.
- Inquiry and Critical Thinking Skills—ask meaningful questions, research and understand issues, acquire information and evaluate what is presented; analyze local, state, national and world problems in relation to history, economics, cultures, politics and geography.
- Action—make decisions and initiate and implement meaningful solutions; participate in civic and political processes; take the role of community advocate; actively participate in school and community decision-making and problem solving.
- Dispositions/Self-Awareness—assess one's own level of civic commitment and responsibility and set goals for oneself; reflect on process in order to improve, learn and grow personally; value service and community involvement; believe in democratic values; desire to serve the common good while protecting the rights of individuals.
- Tools—use technology to voice and express ideas and opinions; create media and cultural productions to share with community.

The challenge is to find a way to communicate with other youths, teachers, and community leaders and to make a difference. Examples of service-learning experiences for each of the grade spans that include research, collaboration, and policy formation are as follows:

- High school students identified youths loitering and petty crime as an important community problem. They investigated by interviewing other youths and adults in the community, including city council members. This investigation revealed a need for attractive, engaging activities for youths’ leisure time. The teacher connected this interest to the 12th grade content standards in civics and government and decided to use service-learning to teach about the local political process for introducing a proposal and obtaining political support. The result was a skateboard park.
- Middle school students addressed the problem of bullying/harassment, researched and identified underlying causes, and created a campaign to foster care and respect using multiple strategies. They took their campaign to school officials and later to the school board to advocate for an improved, more clearly defined school district policy.
- Elementary school students identified a problem of students crossing a busy street, researched possible solutions, and presented a proposal for a stop sign in front of school to the city council.

CONCLUSION

Schools must focus on helping learners increase their knowledge of what it is to be involved in civic contribution and participate in the political life of their communities. Schools must teach students skills, competencies, and dispositions to engage in public policy development, implementation, and accountability. Schools must ensure that students are able to cope effectively with rules, laws, constraints, and present realities by helping them determine when and how working to change those rules, laws, constraints, and realities might be appropriate.

Teachers and their students must become aware of the range of choices for civic education and develop successive learning experiences that increase in levels of complexity and sophistication as students progress through the grade spans. Teaching strategies must include critical inquiry into a variety of current and historical public policy issues; an assessment of needs in the school, community, nation, or world; building partnerships with others; and engagement in developing and implementing new public policy.

Youths must become active participants in decision-making and problem solving. They must develop leadership skills and serve on school and community committees and boards. Public policy analysis and presentation of such analysis to community leaders must be part of the civics curriculum. Youths at all levels of civic commitment and at all grade spans must be seen as resources, problem solvers, and decision-makers.

Service-learning as an instructional strategy enables students to participate actively in the processes and institutions of government. It prepares them for public service now and in the future and gives them opportunities to make a difference on increasingly complex issues. The service provides the context for the learning and the learning provides the context for the service.

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