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# Core Indicators of Civic Engagement

## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

### *Civic indicators*

- *Community problem solving.* Have you ever worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live? IF YES, Was this in the last 12 months or not?
- *Regular volunteering for a non-electoral organization.* Have you ever spent time participating in any community service or volunteer activity, or haven't you had time to do this? By volunteer activity, I mean actually working in some way to help others for no pay. IF YES, Have you done this in the last 12 months? I'm going to read a list of different groups that people sometimes volunteer for. As I read each one, can you tell me if you have volunteered for this type of group or organization within the last 12 months? An environmental organization; A civic or community organization involved in health or social services. This could be an organization to help the poor, elderly, homeless, or a hospital; An organization involved with youth, children, or education; Any other type of group. Thinking about the work for (type of group) over the last 12 months, is this something you do on a regular basis, or just once in a while?
- *Active membership in a group or association.* Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally? Are you an active member of this/these group(s), a member but not active, or have you given money only?
- *Participation in fund-raising run/walk/ride.* [Now I'm going to read you a quick list of things that some people have done to express their views. For each one I read, please just tell me whether you have ever done it or not.  
(FOR EACH YES, PROBE: And have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?)] Personally walked, ran, or bicycled for a charitable cause - this is separate from sponsoring or giving money to this type of event?
- *Other fund raising for charity.* And have you ever done anything else to help raise money for a charitable cause?

### *Electoral indicators*

- *Regular voting.* We know that most people don't vote in all elections. Usually between one-quarter to one-half of those eligible actually come out to vote. Can you tell me how often you vote in local and national elections? Always, sometimes, rarely, or never?
- *Persuading others.* When there is an election taking place do you generally talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates, or not?
- *Displaying buttons, signs, stickers.* Do you wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car, or place a sign in front of your house, or aren't these things you do?
- *Campaign contributions.* In the past 12 months, did you contribute money to a candidate, a political party, or any organization that supported candidates?
- *Volunteering for candidate or political organizations.* From volunteering sequence, respondent indicated having volunteered for "A political organization or candidates running for office"

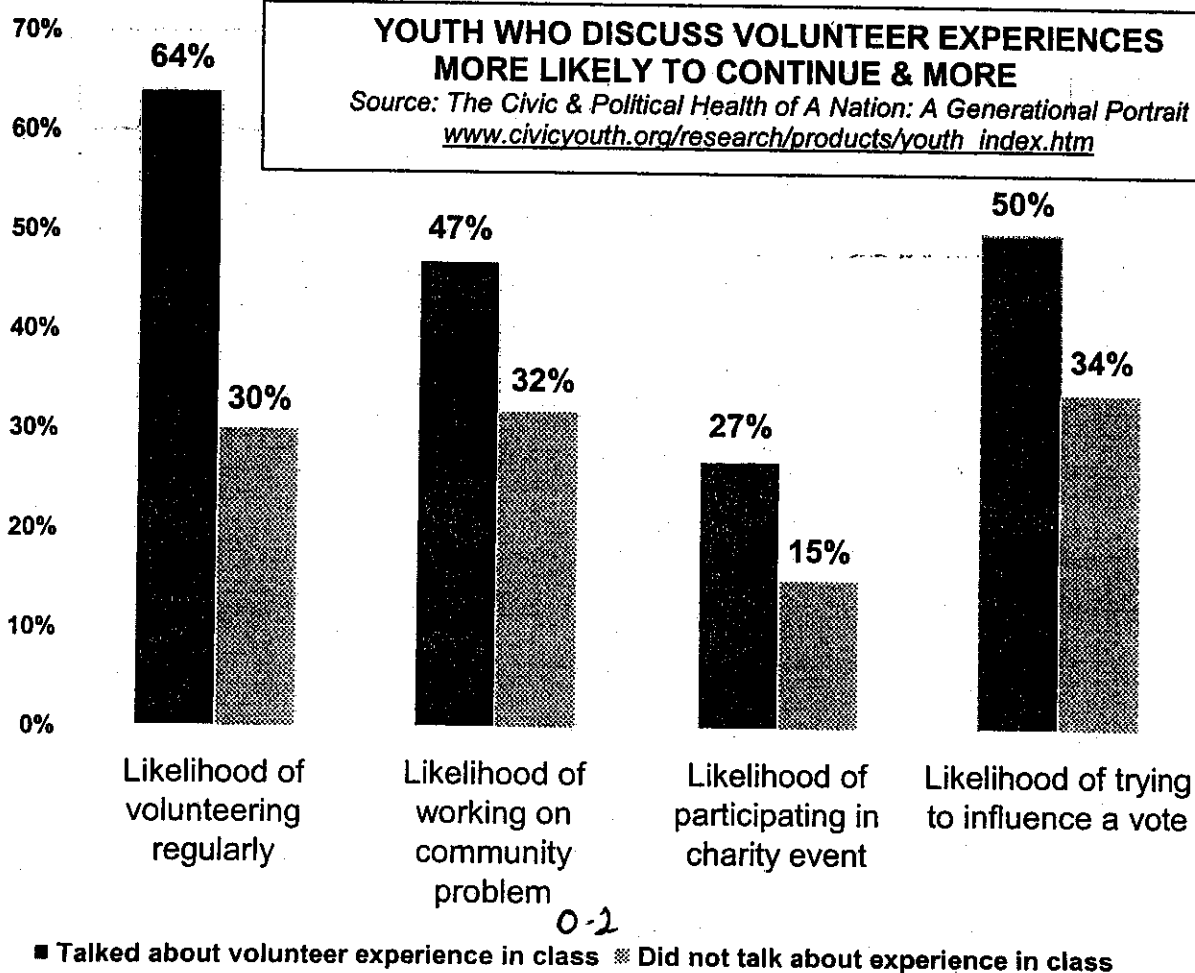
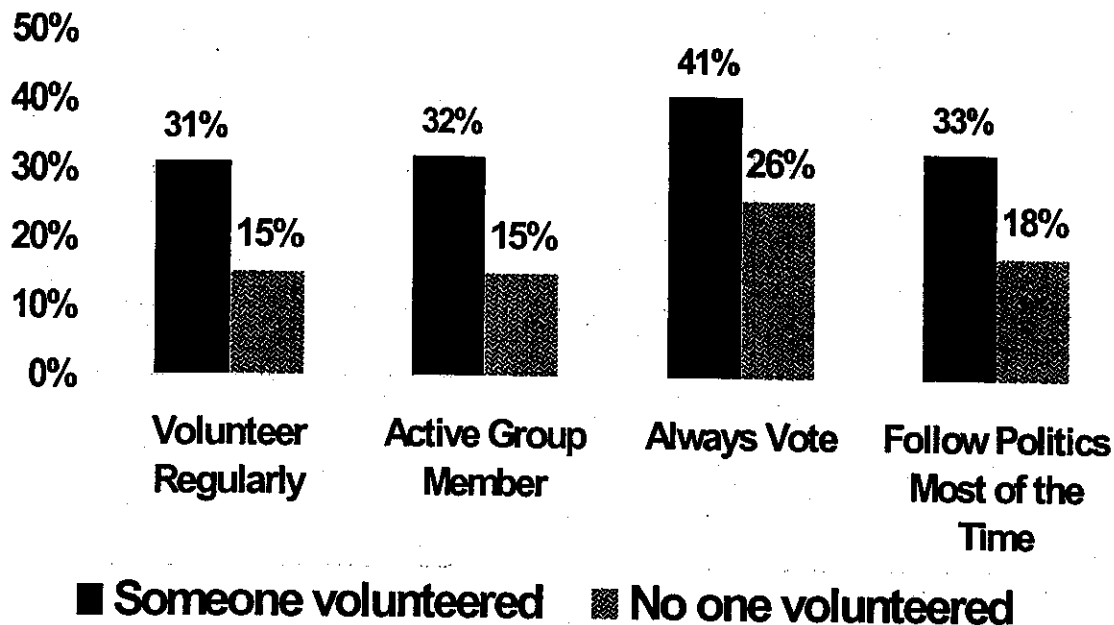
### *Indicators of political voice*

- *Contacting officials.* [Now I'm going to read you a quick list of things that some people have done to express their views. For each one I read, please just tell me whether you have ever done it or not. (FOR EACH YES, PROBE: And have you done this in the last 12 months, or not?)] Contacted or visited a public official - at any level of government - to ask for assistance or to express your opinion?
- *Contacting the print media.* Contacted a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue?
- *Contacting the broadcast media.* Called in to a radio or television talk show to express your opinion on a political issue, even if you did not get on the air?
- *Protesting.* Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration?
- *E-mail petitions.* Signed an e-mail petition?
- *Written petitions.* And have you ever signed a written petition about a political or social issue?
- *Boycotting.* NOT bought something because of conditions under which the product is made, or because you dislike the conduct of the company that produces it?
- *Boycotting.* Bought a certain product or service because you like the social or political values of the company that produces or provides it
- *Canvassing.* Have you worked as a canvasser - having gone door to door for a political or social group or candidate.

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, PROCEDURES, & ETHICS  
DATE: 5/16/03 ROOM: 3132 EXHIBIT 01 of 10  
SUBMITTED BY: Deborah Loesch-Griffin

## YOUTH WHO GROW UP WITH VOLUNTEER ROLE MODELS AT HOME ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE ENGAGED

Source: *The Civic & Political Health of A Nation: A Generational Portrait*  
[www.civicyouth.org/research/products/youth\\_index.htm](http://www.civicyouth.org/research/products/youth_index.htm)



# The Civic Mission of Schools



**CIRCLE**  
The Center for Information & Research  
on Civic Learning & Engagement

programs are best implemented. Thus, supervisors and administrative officials should have access to professional development programs that will provide them with tools needed to implement effective civic education programs at the school and district levels.

We recommend that the leading organizations that work with school administrators—Education Commission of the States, American Association of School Administrators, National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Education Support Professionals division of the National Education Association, the National School Boards Association, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Design, and the National Council for the Social Studies—be supported to provide this training and include civic education as a major focus of their national and regional programs. In addition, we recommend that these organizations create publications and forms of recognition that can highlight quality civic education programs.

#### **FOR STATE AND FEDERAL POLICYMAKERS**

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Increase the amount of federal funding available to states for civic education. There is widespread agreement that civic education is still starved for financial support compared to other subjects. While there is support for civic education through the U.S. Department of Education, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and other federal agencies, this needs to be sustained and expanded. Therefore, we recommend the establishment of new federal funding streams for civic education—or the expansion of existing ones such as Learn and Serve America and “We the People,” the new American history initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities. This kind of federal investment, we believe, will help to drive research in the areas of conceptual development and best practice, state education policies, and the development of new and better civic education programs.

Explore the possibility of establishing a new federal entity with responsibility for civic education. Currently, programs relevant to civic education are fragmented across several agencies, including the Department of Education, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Archives, and others. We believe that establishing a single, ongoing federal entity to coordinate national efforts in this crucial area may help to address this problem. One proposal, for example, is to establish a National Civic Education Foundation, which would commission research on civic education, encourage the development of model programs, help design and implement curricula, and serve as a national clearinghouse on civic education for teachers and schools across the country. This would provide visibility and stature to the issue, much as the National Science Foundation did with science, by providing funds for research, facilitating professional development in the field, offering fellowships, and disseminating best practices.

Provide financial incentives and rewards to schools and educators who demonstrate exemplary skill in developing and implementing effective civic education curricula in their institutions. Many good civic education programs exist, but most are small in scale and lack the capacity or resources to be replicated in other communities. Therefore, we recommend that some funding be provided to showcase these model programs, evaluate them, and, ultimately, disseminate the results to communities across the country. This dissemination can occur through case study documents, regional conferences, and national recognition for exemplary programs.

Provide more resources for school and community partnerships that encourage students to be active in volunteering, community problem solving, voter registration, producing cultural products with civic value, and other nonpartisan activities that state funds can and should support. Local governments can also develop civic internship programs with their local school districts so that immediate experiential learning opportunities are available to students.

Promote civic responsibility and engagement through actions and words. In addition to standard good government practices such as promoting high ethical standards, open government, and effective constituent communication and service, political leaders can encourage greater involvement among young people in two ways. First, although healthy skepticism about government and vigorous criticism of our leaders and institutions are valuable democratic traditions practiced by citizens, the news media, interest groups, and candidates, excessively negative political campaigns, particularly ones that target democratic institutions, may undermine public trust and foster cynicism among young people about the efficacy and importance of government and civic engagement. We recommend, therefore, that all elected officials and candidates for public office follow campaign practices that focus on issues (including those of concern to young people); address substantive aspects of their opponents' records; and promote, rather than denigrate, democratic institutions and citizens' confidence in them.

Second, we recommend that elected officials, as part of their representational function, actively promote civic education by regularly visiting schools to interact with students, talk with them about democracy, and provide them with materials about democratic institutions. Policymakers can also work with educators to increase students' knowledge about democracy by helping to strengthen the educational content of participatory learning programs such as mock trials and legislatures, internship programs, and tours of democratic institutions.<sup>74</sup>

Work within national organizations to promote civic education in all states. Policymakers who are committed to civic education and civic engagement should not only promote programs within their own states and jurisdictions, but also work to make or keep civic education a priority of organizations such as the National Governors Association, the National Association of Secretaries of States, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Education Commission of the States, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Council of the Great City Schools, the National School Boards Association, and other associations of policymakers with national reach.

Promote standards for civic education. In the current educational environment of "high-stakes testing," the focus tends to be on math and reading while civics and government get little attention. As a result, a message is being sent that civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes are not valued. We believe that education for citizenship is on a par with reading, math, and science and, in fact, could and should be included in standard setting when developing education policy. This is an opportunity to devote special attention to closing the gaps that currently exist between rich and poor students in their tendency to engage civically. We therefore recommend that schools be held just as accountable for their ability to instill civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes in their students as they are for reading and math. This could be accomplished in two ways:

*Offer the National Assessment of Educational Progress Civics Assessment frequently, in the states as well as nationally. Commonly referred to as the "nation's report card," the NAEP is useful for assessing approaches to instruction used in various states, identifying gaps in knowledge or differences in performance among demographic groups, and holding policymakers accountable for the overall success of schools. The NAEP Civics Assessment has been conducted only occasionally, while assessments in reading and mathematics are conducted annually. Also, unlike the assessments in reading, writing, mathematics, and science, the civics assessment does not have a state-level component (with separate representative samples), so it is impossible to assess state programs using NAEP data.*

*While the 1998 NAEP Civics Assessment is not a perfect instrument, experts agree that it is a worthy vehicle, subject to continuing debate and modification. Thus, we recommend that the NAEP Civics Assessment be conducted every three years with separate representative samples in each of the states. This would allow researchers and educators to learn much more about what works in civic education, as well as help citizens hold their own elected officials responsible for progress in civics. Finally, it would give the field the higher stature and visibility it deserves.*

*Work with states to reexamine their existing social studies and civic education standards. Policymakers and education leaders should work together to ensure that standards reflect the promising approaches and goals of civic education outlined in this report. They can draw on comprehensive standards for civic education that have been developed by voluntary associations such as the Center for Civic Education and the National Council for the Social Studies. Whatever standards and frameworks are considered or adopted, they should be based on current research regarding the development of students' conceptual understanding of civic principles, institutions and processes.*

#### **FOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

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Few topics related to K-12 civic education produce as much agreement in the field as the need for greatly improved teacher education and professional development, even if there might be disagreement over what constitutes the best training. The value or need for professional development may be highest in social studies, where the traditional civics or government courses are taught. We, therefore, recommend that institutions preparing or serving teachers:

Strengthen the civic dimensions of pre-service and in-service teacher education. Schools of education must help teachers and administrators understand the democratic and civic mission of schools and the first principles of our framing documents. Administrators, for example, should understand First Amendment issues—challenges they face almost daily. It is impossible to model democratic freedom and constitutional principles if one doesn't know what they are. Teachers and administrators also need to understand methods and issues in the teaching of civic education. These methods are relevant to social studies courses and other subjects in the K-12 curricula.

Thus, we recommend that agencies that accredit teacher education programs (such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) institute new standards relating to civic education. As part of the accreditation process, schools and colleges of education should be held accountable for teaching pre-service teachers and administrators about the role of education in a democracy. This teaching can be integrated within courses or offered through other structured educational experiences.

We also recommend that schools of education reexamine their required, foundational courses to strengthen the dimensions of in-class and out-of-class experience that relate to understanding the civic purpose of schools in a democracy and ways of creating a strong civic education curriculum and a democratic atmosphere in schools. Courses that cover such matters should be rigorous and should be offered early in the teacher education program.

Initiate efforts to elevate the stature of civic education and educators who contribute to it. In the field of civic education, there is a need not only for more and better teacher education, but also for inspiration and an enhanced stature of the discipline. Currently, few institutes are focused on developing a critical mass of promising new civic education teachers, expanding the field to include science and English teachers, and/or becoming prestigious forums to promote the richer approach to civic education outlined in this report. We therefore recommend that more

government and foundation funding be provided for these kinds of training institutes, so that the stature of civic educators can be enhanced. Fellowships, for example, might be offered to new educators to encourage them to pursue a teaching career in civic education. The James Madison Memorial Fellowship Program, established and supported by Congress, is an example of a successful fellowship program that, with continued support, can help elevate the stature of civic education.

Encourage teachers already in the classroom to obtain continuing education credits in this area. We recommend that all teachers be offered the opportunity to acquire continuing education credits related to civic education so that they can become better skilled at inculcating the civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes students need to become responsible and engaged citizens. Examples of this kind of opportunity might include seminars that introduce educators to policymakers and community leaders; curricula that help educators bring these individuals into their classrooms; programs that help teachers learn to establish a classroom and school climate likely to foster democracy; financial support for ongoing or advanced education in teaching government, civics, history, and/or service; and conferences at which interested teachers can share experiences.

Encourage college teachers in many disciplines to offer courses and to provide enrichment programs and teaching materials that benefit civic education at the K-12 level. Current and future K-12 teachers should have opportunities to take college-level courses that help them to understand complex social issues, the role of citizens in a democracy, and how to grapple with moral questions. It is also beneficial for other community members (such as parents, civic leaders, and clergy people) to experience such courses. Moreover, to meet their civic responsibilities, scholars should consider translating their research into formats that are appropriate for use in K-12 classrooms.

#### **FOR SCHOLARS AND RESEARCHERS**

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Develop and implement more rigorous studies (including longitudinal research) about effective service-learning and other civic education approaches. Little research currently exists that compares various programs, examines long-term effects, focuses on civic outcomes (such as likelihood of voting, keeping abreast of current events, and volunteering) as well as academic and psychological benefits (such as increased self-esteem or improved grades), and considers risks and costs in addition to benefits. In many cases, important indicators are overlooked altogether, among them a tolerance for diversity (of people and ideas), the ability and willingness to engage in civil discourse, and the ability to analyze news and information critically. To better ground standards and develop effective curricula, educators need to have more thorough analysis of the critical concepts that need to be addressed at each age so that programs can build on a solid developmental framework. These studies will require ongoing support as part of an extensive research program that examines comparable populations of students who are exposed to different forms of civic education and that look for long-term effects on specifically civic outcomes. Studies of other countries' programs and their effectiveness can also make a considerable contribution. All these studies require more substantial and long-term funding than is currently available to support civic education research.

In addition, researchers use different measures of civic engagement, which makes conclusions or generalizations about these studies difficult, if not impossible. Thus, we recommend conducting more research that helps to define and develop standardized indicators of civic engagement, especially those that expand the meaning of citizenship and take a broader view beyond voting, volunteering, and knowing facts about the government. We also recommend



more independent research, particularly studies that evaluate programs in ways that illuminate which programs are effective and why. Finally, there must be more analysis of civic engagement programs across heterogeneous populations, particularly identification of programs that are effective with young people who experience disproportionate amounts of marginalization and discrimination.

Develop indicators for civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes at each phase of K-12 schooling. These indicators should go beyond the measures of knowledge that are appropriately assessed by the NAEP Civics Assessment. They should also include measures of attitudes and behaviors appropriate to each grade level, including efficacy, interest in current events, participation in community organizations, volunteering or community service, and taking part in politics.

#### **FOR FUNDERS**

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Create a new Teacher Corps of master civic education teachers who will be given the platform and resources to train and inspire a large, new cadre of young civic educators.

Support efforts to bring new players to the table. To generate interest in civic education—and ultimately, to implement this ambitious agenda—we recommend broader outreach to constituencies that may have an interest in these issues such as news companies and journalists; educational associations, including math, science, and English teachers and administrators; school reform groups; groups that organize after-school programs; business leaders; artists and entertainers; specialists in marketing to youth audiences; and young people themselves.

Support efforts to build national and state coalitions of educators, policymakers, parents, young people, and community leaders to advocate for better and more civic education in schools. There are constructive and vigorous debates within the fields of youth civic engagement and civic education, but there is also remarkable consensus—reflected in this document—about the nature of the problem and the array of effective solutions. Thus, it is time for the field to organize for effective advocacy; private funders can play a useful role in supporting such advocacy.

Issue an annual “report card” on the nation’s schools as to which are best practicing civic education and why. This should be a collaborative document describing aggregate trends in civic education and youth engagement and also case studies on new and promising practices.

Provide support for a national commission that will bring attention to the issue and advocate for better civic education in schools. This commission should be part of a national campaign that brings together leading educational organizations, as well as leading organizations representing policymakers, to promote civic education within and across each organization’s arena.

*Service-Learning and Civic Engagement:  
A Nevada Perspective*

The Nevada Service-Learning Partnership supports the goals and intent of SB309 and applauds the importance of involving schools and higher education institutions in evaluating current efforts to meet their civic missions.

The Nevada Service-Learning Partnership is an affiliate group of individuals and organizations that support service-learning as an effective strategy for youth development, civic development, and academic learning. The goals of the NSLP are:

- *Every young person will have multiple opportunities to participate in service-learning as a vehicle for learning civic skills, building social capital, impacting community problems, strengthening academic learning, and developing career skills;*
- *Service-learning opportunities will be of high quality to ensure that we derive maximum benefits from the service and the learning,*
- *Communities will benefit, not only from direct services, but also from improved social capital and an engaged populace.*

Through current funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service

- more than **5,000 young people** have participated in school/community partnerships through service-learning that addressed local community problems;
- over **30 higher education faculty** are actively incorporating service-learning into their curriculum/courses;
- over **300 teachers** have utilized service-learning in K-12 classrooms;
- over **45 community organizations** are using service-learning as a strategy in out-of-school or youth development programs;
- the first **Nevada Youth Summit** brought 130 young people together from across the state to focus on addressing issues of concern to youth.

New funding requests from CNCS, totaling over \$1 million dollars, emphasize the development of civic knowledge, skills, and values through service-learning in colleges, universities, community organizations and schools. The UCCSN Chancellor's Office, the State Board of Education, and the Nevada Commission for National and Community Service are each supporting one of the funding requests.

Through SB309, the NSLP hopes that schools, colleges, universities, and community organizations will see service-learning as a strategy to engage young people, in concert with adults, in the practices related to participatory democracy that meets the academic and civic missions of our schools and makes real differences for the people in our communities. We recommend that SB309 be expanded to include youth as active participants in the work of the Advisory Committee on Participatory Democracy; that both curricular and co-curricular activities be reviewed within the work of the State Board of Education and Board of Regents; and that service-learning be identified as an effective strategy for enhancing both academic knowledge and the skills, values, and behaviors associated with civic behavior.

***Service-Learning and Civic Engagement:  
A National Perspective***

Across the country, service-learning is viewed as a strategy that can strengthen the learning and practice of civic values among young people. ***Service-learning is an educational process in which students' academic learning, personal growth, and civic development are intentionally connected to service activities that meet genuine community needs.***

The ***National Council for the Social Studies*** states that "Service-learning increases students' awareness of the community and world around them, the unmet needs in our society, the agencies and institutions involved in attempting to meet those needs, and a variety of strategies they can use to create a better world. Through direct experiences working with others in the community, students learn that our American society is "unfinished" and that they can play a key role in narrowing the disparity between our democratic ideals and the reality of daily life." [NCSS Position Statement on Service Learning, 2000]

***Research*** from across the country indicates that when students become involved in service-learning in which they have a voice in creating options and solutions to community problems, students...

- develop a greater sense of civic responsibility and efficacy
- increase their understanding of how government works
- have more sophisticated understanding of socio-historical contexts of issues
- are more likely to think about the politics and morality in our society
- increase their political attentiveness, political knowledge, and their desire to become more politically active
- feel that they made a positive contribution to the community

From the report of the ***2001 Wingspread Summit on Student Civic Engagement***, "Service-learning is an important mechanism that connects service and politics. Community service without a curriculum connection often does not allow students to realize interconnections between their service work and larger systemic issues. Service-learning provides the "why"—the reason for doing service, and shows us how we can attempt to bring about greater social change. By merging academics and service, service-learning makes systemic social and political issues an obvious extension and duty of ... education."

The ***Education Commission of the States'*** Every Student a Citizen Initiative states that education for citizenship is a moral enterprise, not a matter of teaching techniques or routines or of creating an education program that will deliver civic knowledge and skills, rather it is using people's needs, rights and responsibilities to create a common world. It is learned through practice, not out of a book. A curriculum that uses service-learning as an integrating force, combining needed service to the community with strong academic content and structured exercises of reflection, can provide this education for citizenship that youth need to become civically engaged in their communities.