

## CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on  
Civic Learning & Engagement

## Volunteering Among High School Students

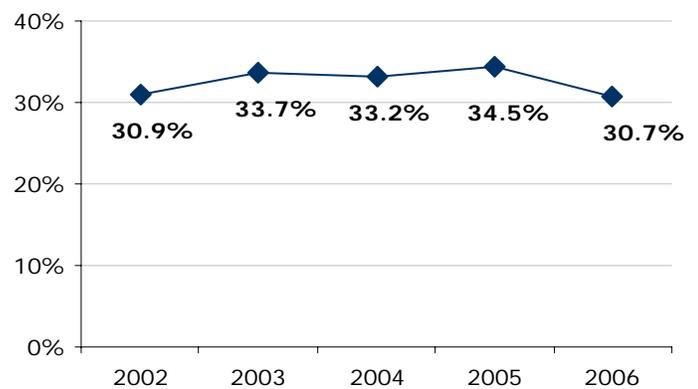
By Karlo Barrios Marcelo<sup>1</sup>  
July 2007

Volunteering among young people often is broadly high among young people who are in high school.<sup>2</sup> Many students face high school graduation requirements that include volunteer service.<sup>3</sup>

This fact sheet explores volunteering among high school students, ages 16-18. Overall, volunteering among high school students was down slightly in 2006 to 30.7 percent from 34.5 percent in 2005. Figure 1 shows the volunteer rate among high school students from 2002 to 2006 from the Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys, indicating that the volunteer rate among high school students was relatively stable between 2003 and 2005. Similar declines in volunteering are evident in other data sources as well.<sup>4</sup> For example, according to the Civic and Political Health of the Nation surveys (CPHS), the volunteer rate for high school students, ages 16-18, was down 4.2 points in 2006 to 53.7 percent from 57.9 percent in 2002.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Monitoring the Future data collection from the University of Michigan shows a leveling off in volunteering among high school seniors and sophomores. See Figure 5.

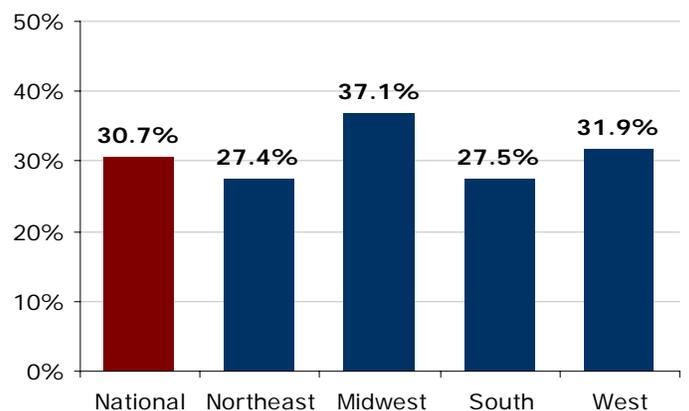
This fact sheet presents additional information on the volunteer rates of high school students, ages 16-18, as

Figure 1: Volunteer Rate Among High School Students, Ages 16-18, 2002-2006



Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2002-2006

Figure 2: Volunteer Rate Among High School Students, Ages 16-18, 2006



Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2006

well as information on types of volunteer organizations, volunteer activities, and ways that high school students get involved in volunteer activities.

## Regional Variation

### *Volunteering*

Volunteer rates vary by region of the country.<sup>6</sup> Figure 2 shows the volunteer rate by region of the country, with the Midwest region leading at a rate of 37.1 percent, nearly 7 percentage points above the national average. The West region led in median volunteer hours among all regions of the country (see Figure 3).

Table 1 shows the five highest and lowest states in terms of volunteer rates among high school students.<sup>7</sup> Nebraska's high school students had the highest volunteer rate among all states in 2006.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1 – Volunteer Rate Among High School Students, ages 16-18, 2006**

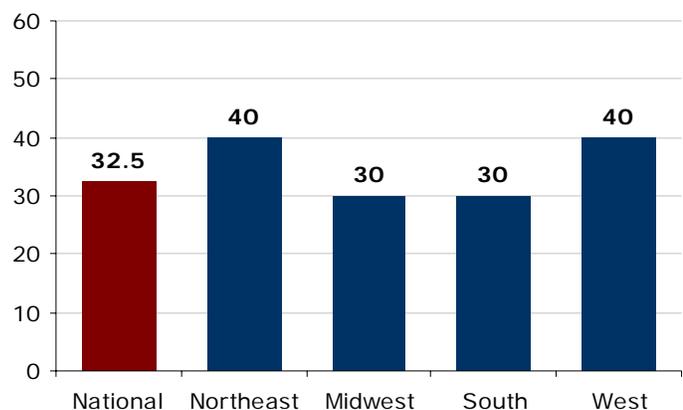
Top 5 States	Volunteer Rate
Nebraska	53.3%
North Dakota	50.3%
Vermont	50.0%
Washington	49.4%
Minnesota	45.4%
Lowest 5 States	
Nevada	14.6%
Delaware	18.1%
New Jersey	20.9%
Louisiana	21.3%
Georgia	21.5%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2006

### *Median Volunteer Hours*

While the Midwest region had the highest volunteer rate among all regions in 2006, the median high school volunteer in the Midwest region was not the most dedicated. The median high school volunteers in the Northeast and West regions dedicated 40 volunteer hours each, twenty-five percent more hours than their counterparts in the Midwest and South regions.

**Figure 3: Median Volunteer Hours Among High School Students, Ages 16-18, 2006**



Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2006

## Type of Volunteer Organization

High school student volunteers were most likely to volunteer for a religious organization (39.9 percent) and were least likely to volunteer for an immigrant/refugee assistance group. See Table 2.

**Table 2 – Type of Organization Volunteered for by High School Students, Ages 16-18, 2006<sup>9</sup>**

<i>Type of Organization</i>	<i>Percentage of High School Volunteers</i>
Religious	39.9%
Children's educational, sports, or recreational	32.6%
Social and community service	15.5%
Other educational	10.5%
Hospital, clinic, or healthcare	5.9%
Civic	5.3%
Youth services	5.2%
Some other type of organization	4.0%
Health research or health education	3.4%
Sports or hobby	2.7%
Environmental or animal care	2.4%
Cultural or arts	2.0%
Public safety	0.9%
Political party or advocacy	0.7%
International	0.2%
Labor union, business, or professional	0.1%
Immigrant/refugee assistance	0.0%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2006

## Type of Volunteer Activity

High school student volunteers were most likely to “fundraise or sell items to raise money” (28.7 percent), while they were least likely to “provide counseling, medical care, fire/EMS, or protective services.” A significant proportion of high school student volunteers mentored youth (20.5 percent) and tutored or taught (18.5 percent). See Table 3.

**Table 3 – Type of Volunteer Activities among by High School Student Volunteers, Ages 16-18, 2006<sup>10</sup>**

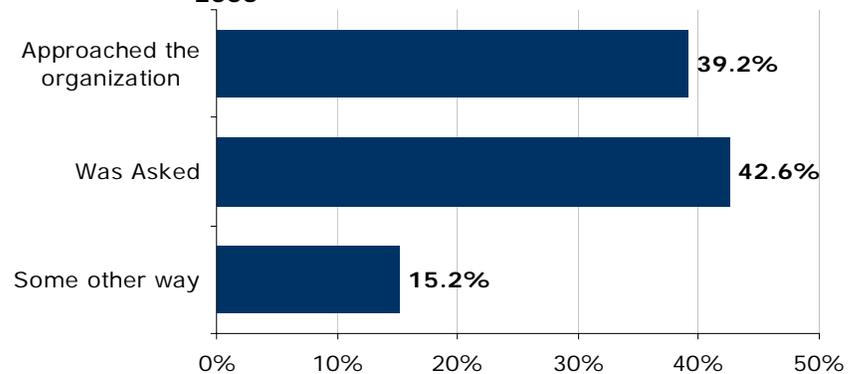
<i>Volunteer Activity</i>	<i>Percentage of High School Volunteers</i>
Fundraise or sell items to raise money	28.7%
Collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food	25.0%
Engage in general labor, supply transportation for people	23.0%
Mentor youth	20.5%
Tutor or teach	18.5%
Engage in music, performance, or other artistic activities	15.5%
Other activity	15.5%
Collect, make, or distribute clothing, crafts or goods other than food	14.6%
Coach, referee, supervise sports team	11.1%
Be an usher, greeter or minister	9.8%
Provide general office services	7.3%
Provide professional or management assistance including serving on a board or committee	6.0%
Provide counseling, medical care, fire/EMS, or protective services	3.2%

Source: Author’s tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2006

## How High School Students Become Involved in Volunteering

The plurality of high school students volunteered their time with an organization because they were asked (42.6 percent). Also, a significant percentage reported approaching the organization as the way they became involved (39.2 percent).

**Figure 4: How High School Student Volunteers, ages 16-18, Become Involved with an Organization, 2006**



Source: Author’s tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2006

Of those high school student volunteers who were asked to become involved with an organization, Table 4 shows the breakdown of who asked them. In the majority of cases, someone in the organization reached out to these volunteers (63.4 percent), while relatives and friends were also persons who asked these high school volunteers to get involved.

**Table 4 – Who Asked High School Student Volunteers to Become Involved with an Organization in 2006**

Someone in the organization	63.4%
Relative	19.8%
Friend	10.9%
Someone else	4.6%
Boss or employer	0.7%
Co-worker	0.6%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2006

Of those high school student volunteers who reported that they became involved with an organization through "some other way," Table 5 shows that the plurality of these high school volunteers became involved with an organization through their own involvement in that organization. A "family member's involvement in the organization/school" and "school requirement" were also ways that these high school volunteers became involved. As Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate, many high school volunteers had a personal connection or contact with an organization before they volunteered.

**Table 5 – Other Ways High School Student Volunteers Become Involved with an Organization in 2006**

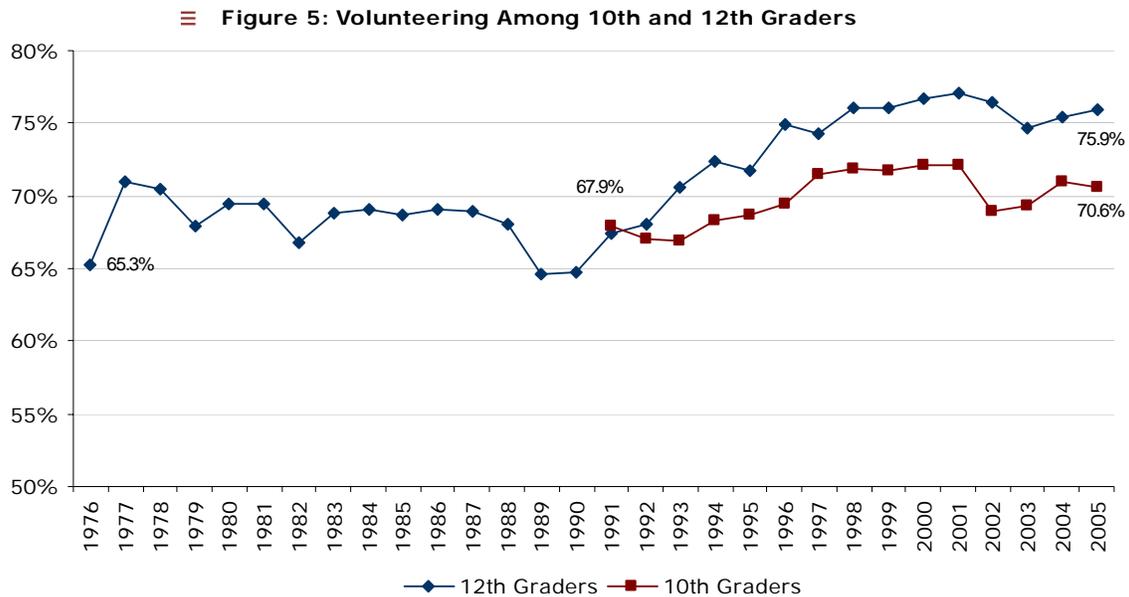
Own involvement in the organization/school	29.6%
Family member's involvement in the organization/school	23.1%
School requirement	21.3%
Other	17.0%
Friend's, co-worker's, or roommate's involvement in the organization	6.0%
Court-ordered community service	3.0%

Source: Author's tabulations from the Current Population Survey, September (Volunteering) Supplement, 2006

## Trends in Volunteering

### *10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, 1976 to 2005*

The Monitoring the Future survey asks about volunteering, though with a different question than other surveys. Specifically, the MTF asks “Have you participated in community affairs in the past 12 months.” Responses to this question generally show a very high volunteer rate in 2005, 75.9 percent for high school seniors and 70.6 percent for high school sophomores. The trend in volunteering among 12<sup>th</sup> graders and 10<sup>th</sup> graders is shown in Figure 5. Since the initial survey years for each cohort, volunteering was up for 12<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders. From 1976 to 2005, high school seniors increased their volunteer rate by 10.6 percentage points. 10<sup>th</sup> graders have not reported as large an increase—a 2.7 percentage point increase from 1991 to 2005. Since 2001, the apex of volunteering among 12<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders, the incidence of volunteering has fallen slightly.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Research Associate. I thank Mark Hugo Lopez and Peter Levine for comments on earlier drafts of this fact sheet. Special thanks to Mark Hugo Lopez for creating Figure 5. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

<sup>2</sup> See the fact sheet “Volunteering among young people” by Mark Hugo Lopez and Karlo Marcelo of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the state of Maryland, students are required to perform 75 hours of community service before graduating from public high school, or to meet state-approved county-level standards. Currently, all Maryland counties have their own state-approved requirements in place. Similar requirements exist in many school districts, including Miami-Dade, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Seattle.

<sup>4</sup> Difficulties with measuring volunteering rates stem from two measurement issues. First, survey participants often have difficulty remembering or classifying activities as volunteer activities. Second, surveys employ different methods to acquire information on volunteering rates from survey participants. For more information and discussion of issues surrounding the measurement of volunteering, see the following:

Toppe, C. “CIRCLE Working Paper 43: Measuring Volunteering: A Behavioral Approach,” (2006) Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)

Toppe, C. and Galaskiewicz, J. “Measuring Volunteering: Committee Report.” (2006) The Points of Light Foundation. <http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/resources/research/CommitteeReport.pdf>

Steinberg, K., Rooney, P., and Chin, W. “Measuring of Volunteering: A Methodological Study Using Indiana as a Test Case,” in the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Volume 31, Issue 4, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation report (CIRLCE) for more information about the survey: [http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/2006\\_CPHS\\_Report\\_update.pdf](http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/2006_CPHS_Report_update.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Geographic regions are classified by the Current Population Survey as following: Northeast Region—Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont; Midwest Region—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin; South Region—Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia; and West Region—Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

<sup>7</sup> For state rankings of the volunteer rate, see “Volunteering in the States: 2002 to 2006,” by Sara E. Helms and Karlo Barrios Marcelo. [www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)

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<sup>8</sup> The state of Maryland and the District of Columbia require community service to graduate from high school. Interestingly, neither is in the Top 5 in Table 1. High school students in those areas may not view the community service requirements as volunteering. See the references in endnote 4 for more information.

<sup>9</sup> Percentages in Table 1 do not add up to 100 percent, because volunteers could select more than one organization.

<sup>10</sup> Percentages in Table 2 do not add up to 100 percent, because volunteers could select more than one volunteer activity.