Community Service and Service-Learning in America's Schools

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Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development

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KEY FINDINGS

In the spring of 2008, 1,847 principals of K-12 public schools, nationwide, responded to a survey on the prevalence of community service and service-learning in their schools. The *National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools*, sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service and conducted by Westat, collected data on the scope of community service and service-learning activities, as well as the policies and supports for service-learning provided by and for schools during the 2007-08 academic year. The survey utilized the same methodology as surveys of community service and service-learning conducted in 1999 and 2004, thereby allowing for a look at the trends in school-based community service and service-learning over the past decade.

Key findings include the following:

■ Schools continue to demonstrate commitment to student participation in service to their community with 68 percent of K-12 school principals reporting that their students participate in community activities that are recognized by the schools, compared to 64 percent in 1999.

■ While school-based community service remains robust, the substantial growth in service-learning documented by federally funded studies conducted in 1979 and 1999 has not continued. In fact, the 2008 survey reveals a reversal of that trend, with the percentage of schools with service-learning declining from 32 percent in 1999 to 24 percent in 2008.

■ The diverging trends for community service and service-learning may be explained, in part, by the tendency for principals to be more likely to value service for its benefits in promoting civic behaviors than in fostering academic engagement. When faced with budget constraints and state curriculum requirements, many schools are likely to place service activities outside of the curriculum and use methods other than service-learning in the classroom.

■ Elementary schools are less likely to opt to integrate service into their classrooms through service-learning than secondary schools (20% to 35%), in part because more than half of elementary school principals who report no service-learning activities (51%) believe that their students are too young.

■ Among schools that have service-learning activities today, commitment to those activities is strong – the vast majority of these schools (96%) has either maintained or increased the percentage of students participating in service-learning activities over the past five years.

■ Only 19 percent of all K-12 school principals report that their school district has a policy that encourages the integration of service-learning into the course curriculum, and more than a quarter of principals (28%) are not aware of whether or not their district has such a policy.

■ When a principal knows that there is a district-level policy encouraging the integration of service-learning into the course curriculum, the school is three times more likely to have service-learning activities than a school where the principal knows that the district does not have a policy in support of service-learning.

■ Schools that have service-learning today are somewhat more likely to have policies and practices that support it than in 1999; still, a minority of schools have institutionalized service-learning, measured in terms of the presence of a service-learning coordinator, the inclusion of service-learning in improvement plans and board-approved curriculum, and financial and technical support for teachers and staff who implement service-learning activities.

■ Schools in low-income areas are significantly less likely to have service-learning activities than other schools (20% compared to 27%); however, the gap has decreased since 1999 (23% compared to 36%). Whereas schools in low-income areas were 36 percent less likely to have service-learning activities in 1999, they are now only 26 percent less likely to engage students in service-learning.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteerism, or the donation of one's time and skills to fill a need in the society, is an American tradition with deep roots. Alexis de Tocqueville, during his travels through the nation during the 1830s, found that the ethic of service "prompts [Americans] to assist one another and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the state."[1] Through this ethic of service, Americans express their belief in the importance of individual effort and concern for others. One way in which this value has been passed on to younger generations is through the inclusion of community service and service-learning opportunities in our schools, where young people begin to develop their roles as active members of the community who make contributions to addressing community needs. The idea that the nation's schools serve as a crucial place for young people to learn this ethic has been corroborated by research by scholars such as John Dewey. Based on his work on education, Dewey found that the habits of democracy are most effectively achieved when students, educators, and community members actively work together to address society's needs.[2]

The 20th century witnessed a burgeoning of opportunities for community service through the

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[1] Tocqueville (1998) p 230.

[2] See for example, Dewey (1900) and (1919).

establishment of programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, the Peace Corps in 1961, and AmeriCorps in 1993. At the local level, schools began to institutionalize school-based community service through recognition of student participation, arrangement of specific opportunities, and the adoption of service requirements for their students. According to a 1979 study, 92 percent of secondary school principals reported that extracurricular community service activities were available to their students.[3] By 1999, 83 percent of secondary schools, and 64 percent of all K-12 schools, were actively recognizing and/or arranging these community service activities for their students.[4] Today, the involvement of schools in recognizing student participation in community service remains robust, at 86 percent of secondary schools and 68 percent of all K-12 schools.[5]

Indeed, school involvement in the recognition and arrangement of student participation in community service may help to explain the growth of volunteerism among America's young people. An analysis of volunteer data collected through the Bureau of Labor Statistic's Current Population Survey shows an increase in the volunteer rate of 16 to 19 year olds from 13 percent in 1989 to 28 percent in 2005.[6] In addition, a Higher Education Research Institute annual survey demonstrates that concern for others among college freshmen in 2005 was the strongest it has been in the past 25 years, with two of three (66%) entering freshmen saying that they believe it is essential or very important to help others who are in difficulty. [7]

The development of service-learning as a pedagogical method that integrates community service into the course curriculum began to crystallize in the 1970s. The field has defined the practice through the establishment of a set of research-based standards, which has been used to inform practitioners and promote policies that would encourage the growth of service-learning.[8] In 1990, the National and Community Service Act created Serve America (now known as Learn and Serve America), a federal program dedicated to providing grants and other supports for service-learning activities in America's schools, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations. In addition, the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act included service-learning as a recognized method for meeting the aims of federal school funding. These federal policies

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[3] Statistics on community service and service-learning in 1979 are based on the National Center for Service-Learning's National Survey of High School Student Community Service Programs. Findings are based on a survey of a sample of 1,800 schools across 46 states. See National Center for Service Learning (1980).

[4] Statistics on community service and service-learning in 1999 are based on the National Student Service-Learning and Community Service Survey, sponsored by the Department of Education and the Corporation for National and Community Service. The survey of a nationally representative sample of 2,000 public elementary, middle and secondary schools was conducted through the National Center for Education Statistics' Fast Response Survey System in the spring of 1999. See Skinner & Chapman (1999).

[5] Unless otherwise noted, statistics on community service and service-learning during 2007-08 are based on the National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools, 2007-08.

[6] See Corporation for National and Community Service, (December 2006) Volunteer Growth in America: A Review of Trends Since 1974, Washington, DC.

[7] See Higher Education Research Institute (2006).

[8] For a current work on research-based recommendations for service-learning policies and practices, see Education Commission of the States (2008) and Billig & Weah (2008).

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were accompanied by the adoption by some states, school districts, and individual schools of service-learning policies that either encourage or mandate the incorporation of service-learning into the course curriculum.

Research has shown that the prevalence of service-learning in America's schools grew considerably during the end of the 20th century. In 1979, only 15 percent of secondary schools offered curriculum-related community service programs. By 1999, service-learning was found in 46 percent of secondary schools and nearly one-third (32%) of all K-12 public schools. While comparisons between the 1979 and 1999 studies must be made with caution because of methodological differences, the findings suggest considerable growth in the prevalence of service-learning in public secondary schools over the 20 year period.[9]

A national study of community service and service-learning conducted in 2004 was the first sign of a downward trend in the prevalence of service-learning. According to the National Survey of Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools, 2003-04, the percentage of K-12 public schools had fallen to 28 percent, while 44 percent of secondary school principals reported service-learning opportunities for their students.[10]

The possibility of a gradual decline that was signaled by the 2004 survey has been confirmed by the 2008 study. As we present through this report, not only has the expansion of service-learning ended, but the *National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools*, shows that the prevalence of service-learning has declined since 1999, although remaining well above the level in 1974. According to the 2008 survey, only 24 percent of all K-12 public schools and 35 percent of secondary schools offer service-learning opportunities for their students.

Why are we seeing this decline in the prevalence of service-learning while school-based community service activities remain robust? We lack the longitudinal data that could tell us why a school that had service-learning in 1999 no longer has service-learning in 2008, but the two national surveys in 1999 and 2008 provide some information that help to explain this phenomenon.

From the 1999 study, we know that only 12 percent of principals at schools with service-learning programs reported that the program was important because it improved student achievement in core academic courses, and just 19 percent found it important for

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[9] For the 1979 study, service-learning was defined as "curriculum-related community service," or community service activities that are integrated into existing academic courses or are part of a special course oriented specifically for the community service activities. The 1999 survey utilized a more rigorous definition of service-learning, limiting service-learning activities to curriculum-based community service that has clearly stated learning objectives; addresses real community needs in a sustained manner over a period of time; and assists students in drawing lessons from the service through regularly scheduled, organized reflection or critical analysis. The fact that only 55.6% of the schools with service-learning in the 1979 survey indicated that teachers regularly met with students to help them learn from their community experiences suggests that the percent of schools in 1979 that had service-learning activities that met the definition used in 1999 was less than 15 percent.

[10] Statistics on community service and service-learning in 2004 are based on the National Survey of Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools, 2003-04. The study, sponsored by the National Youth Leadership Council and conducted by Westat, surveyed 1,799 public elementary, middle, and secondary schools and utilized the same methodology as the studies in 1999 and 2008, allowing for a mid-point comparison between 1999 and today. The weighted and adjusted percentage of schools with service-learning in 2004 was 28%. See Scales & Roehlkepartain (2004).

teaching critical thinking and problem-solving skills.[11] By contrast, the majority of principals believed that service-learning helped their students become more active members of their community (53%) and increased students' knowledge of the community (51%). In addition, nearly half believed that service-learning was an effective means to meet community needs and foster relationships between the school and the local community (48%), and to encourage student altruism (46%). The findings indicate that school principals are considerably more likely to think of service-learning as an important activity for improving students' civic and social engagement than their academic achievement.

The diverging trends for community service and service-learning, however, suggest that even though the majority of schools continue to believe that the public education system has a responsibility to promote youth awareness of the obligations and value of active citizenship, most schools are looking to community service to fulfill this responsibility. According to the 2008 survey, schools without service-learning are most likely to say that the reason why they do not have a service-learning program is because state curriculum requirements do not

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[11] Respondents were asked to give the top three most important reasons why the school encouraged student involvement in service-learning.

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allow time for service-learning, or that they lack the funding to support such a program. Since both service-learning and community service might be viewed as beneficial media for fostering civic and social participation, it would be reasonable to conclude that schools, faced with making choices because of state curriculum requirements and budget cuts, might discontinue service-learning programs while maintaining support for community service activities.

Research indicates that service-learning leads to positive impacts on students' civic and academic engagement and achievement.[12] However, the field lacks the kind of rigorous evidence that would compellingly demonstrate to principals and teachers the academic benefits of service-learning. Without this evidence, it will be a challenge to convince teachers and principals to introduce service-learning into the school curriculum.[13]

This report on the *2008 National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools* will provide more detailed information on the prevalence of community service and service-learning, as well as the policies and practices that schools with service-learning have in place to support the program to help inform efforts to understand the state of community service and service-learning and plan for future efforts.

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[12] For research on the relationship between service-learning on academic engagement and achievement, see Furco (2002), Klute & Billig (2002), Kraft & Wheeler (2003), Scales & Roehlkepartain (2005), Davila & Mora (2007), and Furco & Granicher (2007). For overviews of research on service-learning, see Billig (2004) and Bradley (2005).

[13] To contribute toward rigorous research on the relationship between service-learning and academic engagement, the Corporation has initiated a rigorous evaluation of Learn and Serve America-funded service-learning programs.

Through the National Survey of Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools, 2007-08, 1,847 public school principals reported on the extent to which they recognize student participation in community service and arrange community service opportunities for their students during the 2007-08 academic year. For the purposes of the survey, community service is defined as follows:

Community Service may be carried out as school-wide events, separately organized school programs, or school-sponsored projects conducted by other organizations, such as the Boys and Girls Club and National Honor Society. Examples of service activities could include cleaning up a local park, visiting the elderly, or collecting and distributing food to those in need. They:

- Are non-curriculum-based;
- Are recognized by the school;
- May be mandatory or voluntary;
- May be arranged by the school or other organizations;
- Generally do not include explicit learning objectives or organized reflection or critical analysis activities; and
- May include activities that take place off of school grounds or may happen primarily within the school.

Based on the responses of school principals, we estimate that 14.6 million students in approximately 57,000 elementary, middle, and secondary schools have participated in community service activities that were recognized by the school during the 2007-08 academic year. The percentage of schools that recognize student participation in community service activities shows a gradual increase since 1999, moving from 64 percent to 66 percent in 2004 and 68 percent today. [See Table 1] While secondary schools[14] are consistently most likely to have students participate in community service that is recognized by the school, fluctuations between 1999, 2004, and 2008 indicate that growth among different instructional levels has not been uniform.

TABLE 1: Prevalence of Student Community Service Activities Recognized
by Schools, 1999, 2004 and 2008[†]

YEAR	ALL SCHOOLS		ELEMENTARY		MIDDLE		SECONDARY	
	PERCENT	SE	PERCENT	SE	PERCENT	SE	PERCENT	SE
1999	64	2.6	55	4.0	77	2.2	83	1.3
2008	68	1.2	60	1.7	74	2.2	86	1.8

† For data on the percentage of schools that recognize community service by various school characteristics, see the Appendix. *SE, or Standard Error, provides an estimate of the possible error in how the data were weighted to represent all schools. When comparing percentages between years, it is necessary to take into account the standard error for each percentage. Standard errors are not available for 2004.

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[14] For the purposes of the survey, "secondary schools" refers to secondary schools and combined schools. Combined schools are schools that contain both elementary and secondary grades. The highest grade in these schools must be at least 9th grade.

While not all schools that recognize student participation in community service are actively involved in arranging opportunities for students to participate in community service, the majority of these schools do arrange at least some of the activities.[15] According to the survey, of the 68 percent of schools that recognized student participation in community service, 85 percent were involved in arranging community service opportunities, which equates to 58 percent of all K-12 schools. Again, secondary schools are the most likely to arrange those community service opportunities. [See Chart 1]

The fact that the majority of schools with students participating in recognized community service activities also arrange at least some of these activities for students is one sign of the commitment of the nation's public schools to community service, as is the fact that 86 percent of schools incorporate these community service activities, at least in part, into school time.

Interestingly, less than a quarter of schools that recognize community service activities (23%) also have a requirement for all or some of their students to participate in these activities. Not surprisingly, community service requirements are most common among secondary schools (43%), followed by middle schools (30%) and elementary schools (11%).[16]

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[15] Respondents are initially asked whether they have students who participate in community service as defined in the box on page 10, which includes any community service that is recognized by the school and may or may not be arranged by the school. Those respondents who answer "yes" to this initial question are then asked if they actually arrange those activities or not. Those who answered "yes" to the initial question are presented in this report as those who "recognize student participation in community service." Those who answered "yes" to the follow-up question are a subset of the initial group and are presented in this report as those who "arrange community service opportunities for their students."

[16] The presence of community service requirements does not appear to make schools more likely to arrange community service opportunities for their students; although, it should be noted that the vast majority already do arrange those opportunities.

THE PREVALENCE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

CHART 1: Schools that Recognize Students Participation in Community Service
and Arrange Community Service Opportunities for Students, 2008

Schools that Recognize Student Participation in Community Service

Schools that Arrange Community Service Opportunities for Students
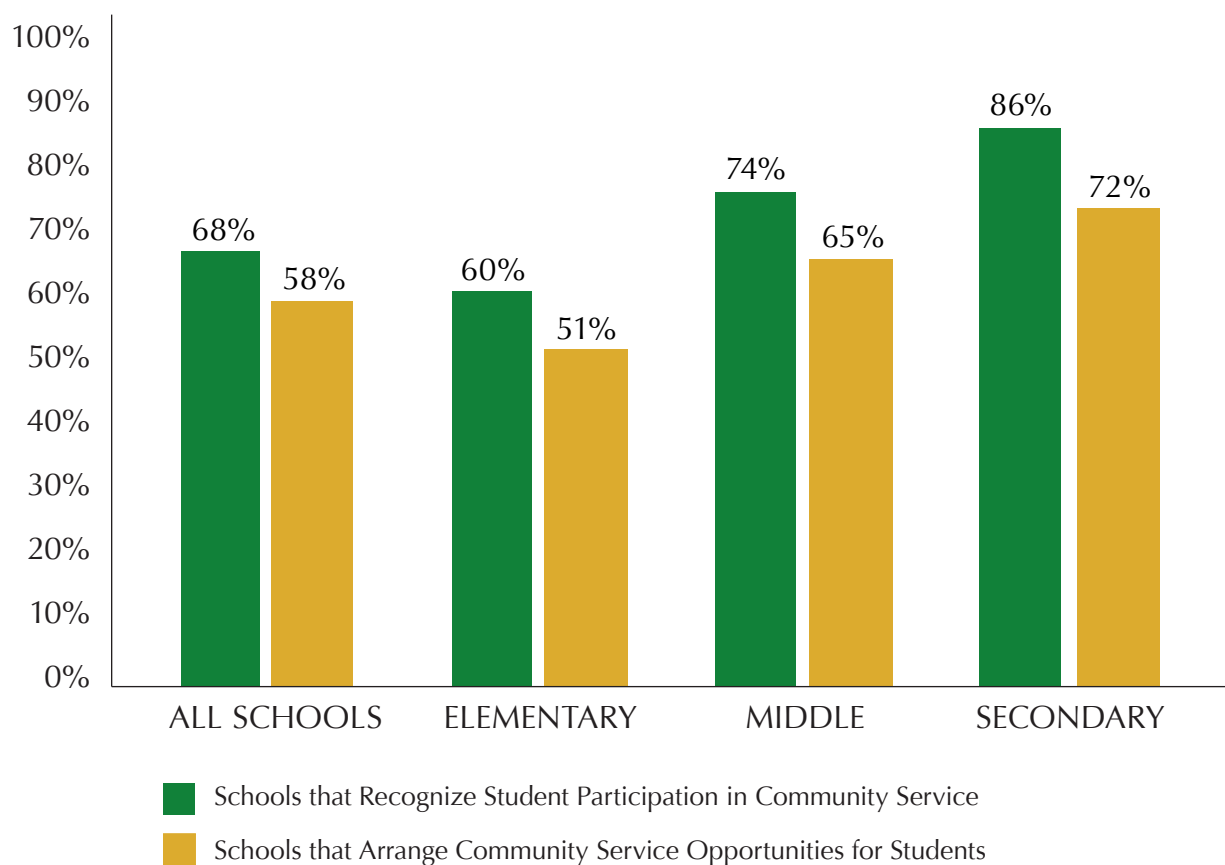
The school principals who responded to the *2008 National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools* provided information on the extent to which they offered service-learning opportunities to their students during the 2007-08 academic year and the types of practices and policies provided by and for the schools to support these service-learning activities. For the purposes of the survey, service-learning is defined as follows:

Service-Learning is curriculum-based community service that integrates classroom instruction with community service activities. Like community service, service-learning may be mandatory or voluntary, and may have service activities that take place outside of or within the school. However, service-learning also:

- Is organized in relation to an academic course or curriculum;
- Has clearly stated learning objectives;
- Addresses real community needs; and
- Involves students in drawing lessons from the service through regularly scheduled, organized reflection or critical analysis activities such as classroom discussions, presentations, or directed writing.

THE PREVALENCE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

According to the study, we find a gradual decrease between 1999 and 2008 in the percentage of schools that have service-learning activities, from 32 percent to 24 percent. Among middle and secondary schools, the decline exceeds 10 percentage points, while elementary schools have experienced a relatively mild drop from 25 percent to 20 percent. [See Table 2]

TABLE 2: Prevalence of Service-Learning in Public Schools, 1999, 2004 and 2008[†]

YEAR	ALL SCHOOLS		ELEMENTARY		MIDDLE		SECONDARY	
	PERCENT	SE*	PERCENT	SE*	PERCENT	SE*	PERCENT	SE*
1999	32	2.0	25	2.9	38	2.6	46	1.9
2004	28	---	22	---	31	---	44	---
2008	24	1.0	20	1.4	25	2.1	35	2.3

† For data on the percentage of schools with service-learning by various school characteristics, see the Appendix.
*SE, or Standard Error, provides an estimate of the possible error in how the data were weighted to represent all schools. When comparing percentages between years, it is necessary to take into account the standard error for each percentage. Standard errors are not available for 2004.

Reasons Why Schools Do Not Have Service-Learning

Principals who indicate that their school does not have service-learning activities were asked why that is the case. The most common reasons they give for not having service-learning are:

- Lack of time because of state curriculum requirements (48%)

- Lack of funding or other resources (38%)

- The absence of someone to coordinate the activities (34%)

It is also notable that more than half of principals at elementary schools without service-learning activities (51%) believe that their students are too young for service-learning, thus indicating that there is a misconception that younger students are not capable of participating in quality service-learning activities.

While we do not deny that schools face real constraints, it is just as likely that schools with service-learning activities must also deal with state curriculum requirements and budget shortages, and the study shows that the majority of schools with service-learning (74%) operate without a service-learning coordinator. Therefore, it becomes necessary to understand why some schools might give greater priority to service-learning than others. While it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a conclusive answer, the findings from the 1999 study can provide some insight into this issue, and we encourage further studies to better understand these findings.

According to the 1999 study, school principals are considerably more likely to think of service-learning as an important activity for improving students' civic and social engagement than their academic achievement. [See Table 3] This helps to explain why a school might continue to arrange community service opportunities for their students, yet not maintain a service-learning program when faced with the need to ensure that their students achieve academic proficiency. It also suggests that it would be beneficial to highlight the evidence around the positive benefits that high-quality service-learning can bring to academic engagement and achievement for those schools that might not be familiar with the research available on the topic of service-learning.

THE PREVALENCE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

TABLE 3: Reasons the Principals in Schools with Service-Learning Give for Encouraging Student Involvement in the Activities, 1999[†]

REASON	PERCENT[*]
To help students become more active members of the community	53
To increase student knowledge and understanding of the community	51
To meet real community needs and/or foster relationships with the surrounding community	48
To encourage student altruism or caring for others	46
To improve student personal and social development	26
To teach critical thinking and problem solving skills	19
To increase career awareness and exposure among students	48
To improve student participation in and attitudes toward school	16
To improve student achievement in core academic courses	12
To reduce student involvement in risk behaviors	10

† SOURCE: Skinner, R. & Chapman, C. (1999). Service-Learning and Community Service in K-12 Public Schools. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

*Respondents were asked to select the three most important reasons for the list provided.

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

According to the survey, 24 percent, or approximately 20,400 schools, have service-learning activities for their students, and it is estimated that over 4.2 million elementary, middle, and secondary school students have participated in their activities during the 2007-08 academic year. The vast majority of these schools with service-learning (91%) also arrange community service opportunities for their students.

On average, principals of schools with service-learning activities report that 36 percent of their students are involved in service-learning activities, while 32 percent of teachers use service-learning as part of their classroom instruction. [See Table 4] Elementary schools with service-learning activities are more likely to involve a higher percentage of students (42%) than both middle schools (38%) and secondary schools (25%). It is valuable to keep in mind, however, that elementary schools tend to be smaller than secondary schools and that, therefore, on average, a greater number of students from secondary schools participate in service-learning activities than from elementary schools.

In addition, a sizable majority of the school principals reported that the percentage of students participating in service-learning activities at their school has either increased (55%) or remained steady (41%) during the previous five years. This finding indicates that among schools that have service-learning programs today, there is a widespread commitment to maintaining or expanding service-learning opportunities for their students.

TABLE 4: Percentage of Students and Teachers Involved in Service-Learning Activities, 2008

	STUDENTS INVOLVED IN SERVICE-LEARNING	TEACHERS WHO USE SERVICE-LEARNING
Average	36%	32%
Percentile		
25	10%	9%
50	25%	20%
75	50%	50%

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

Curriculum Subject Areas

The most common subject areas in which service-learning takes place include Social Studies, Science, and English/Language Arts. [See Chart 2] While differences between survey instruments do not allow a direct comparison between 1999 and 2008, we find a similar ranking of curriculum areas, with Social Studies, Science, and English also appearing as the top three areas in 1999.

Of those schools with service-learning activities, 39 percent of principals indicate that service-learning is part of their board-approved course curriculum in at least one subject in at least one grade in the school. When asked to indicate into which curriculum areas service-learning is incorporated, we find again that Social Studies, Science, and English/Language Arts are the most common subject areas. [See Chart 2] These findings also suggest that, when schools have service-learning activities, the service-learning programs are most often part of the schools' core curriculum because they occur in basic subject areas, such as Social Studies, Science, and English.

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

CHART 2: Curriculum Subject Areas in which Service-Learning Takes Place, 2008

Subject	Service-Learning is Part of the Core Curriculum	Subject Area Has Service-Learning
Social Studies	52%	48%
Science	42%	32%
English, Language Arts	34%	23%
Art, Music, Theater	20%	9%
Other Areas	20%	16%
Elective	19%	16%
Career Education	16%	18%
Math	15%	10%
Special Eduation	13%	6%
Health	12%	10%
Gifted, Talented	12%	5%
Physical Education	11%	4%
Advisory Period	7%	5%
Foreign Languages	7%	1%
Capstone Project	4%	1%
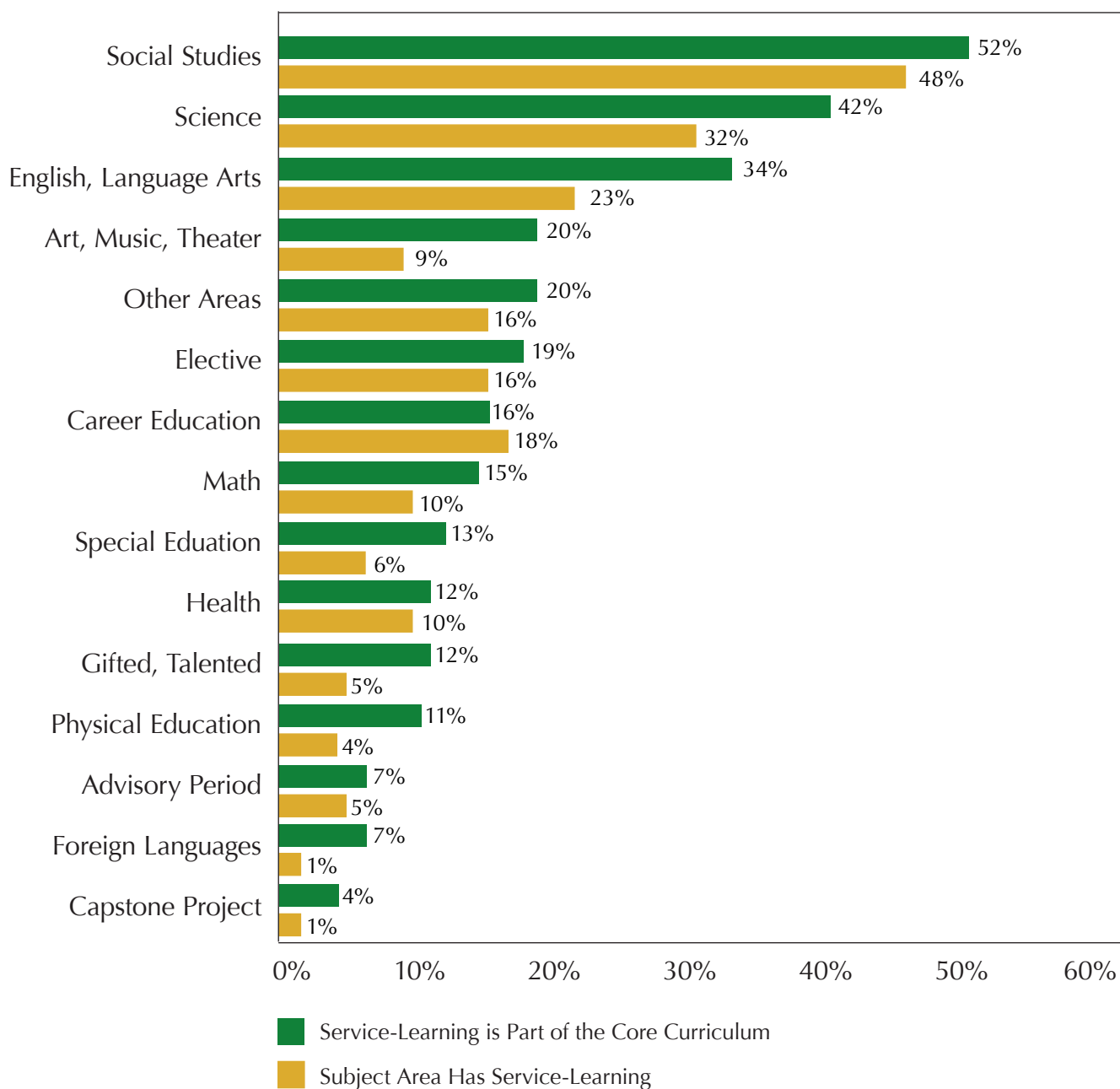
■ Service-Learning is Part of the Core Curriculum
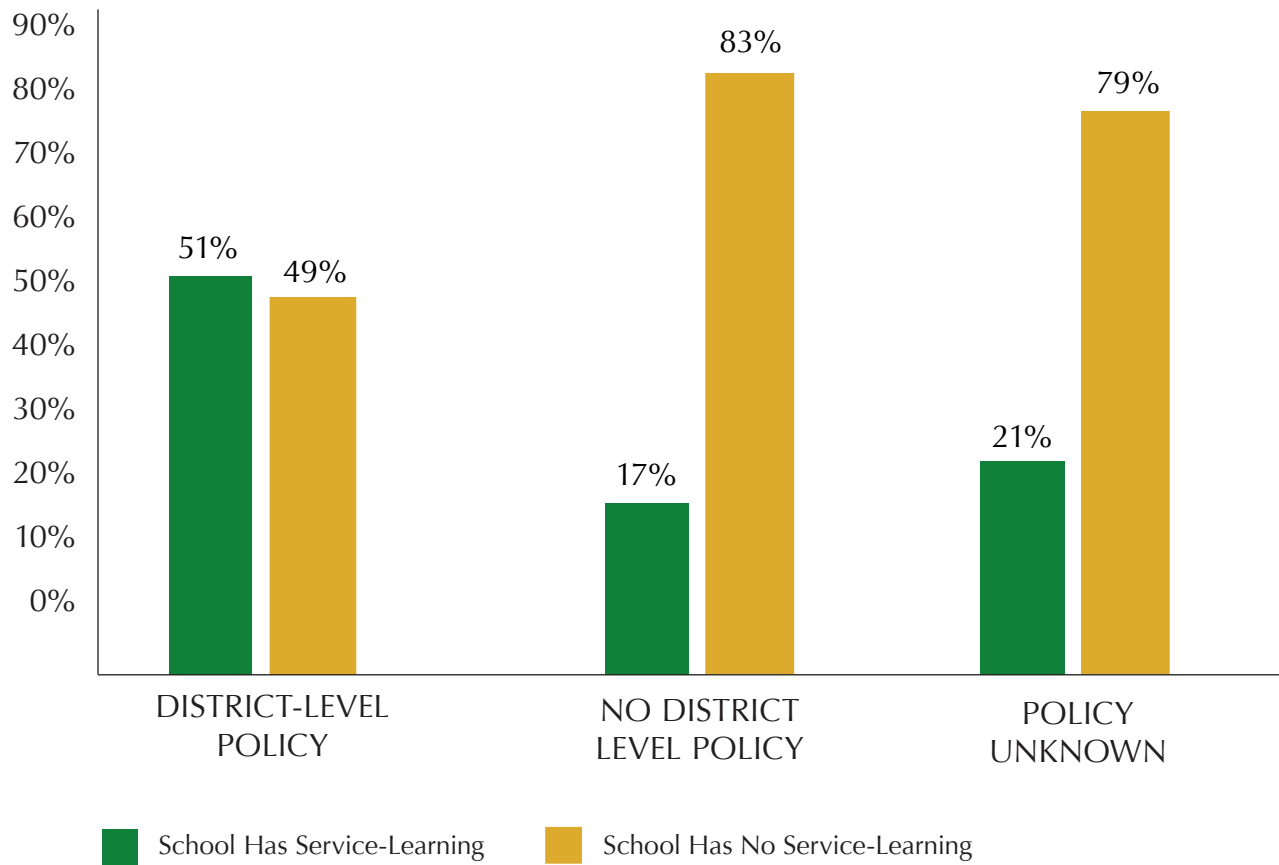■ Subject Area Has Service-Learning

For the survey, school principals were asked whether their district has a formal policy encouraging the integration of service-learning into the course curriculum. Notably, 28 percent of school principals do not know if their district has such a policy, while only 19 percent indicate that their district has a policy that encourages the integration of service-learning.[17]

While it is important to recognize that a substantial portion of school principals are not aware of whether the district takes a position on service-learning, we do find that when a school principal knows of a district policy that encourages integration of service-learning, the school is three times more likely to have service-learning activities than a school where the principal reports that the district does not have such a policy. [See Chart 3] When a school principal does not know if the district has a policy, there is a similar relationship. It may be the case that the principal of a school that has service-learning activities is more likely to look for the district's policy on service-learning; however, these findings suggest that a district emphasis on service-learning could have a positive effect on the adoption of service-learning at the school level.

[17] The percentage of schools that report that their district has a formal policy encouraging the integration of service-learning in 2008 is roughly equal to the percentage of schools (18%) that reported the same district-level policy in 1999; it should also be noted that a larger portion of schools reported that they did not know in 2008 than in 1999 (28% to 21%). Given the rather large percentage of 'Don't Knows' for both years, the responses should not be taken as a reliable measure of the actual percentage of districts that have a formal policy for service-learning; however, for the purposes of this analysis, the extent to which schools are aware of a formal district policy can serve as a meaningful variable.

CHART 3: Presence of Service-Learning by District-Level Service-Learning Policy, 2008

Legend:
- School Has Service-Learning (green)
- School Has No Service-Learning (gold)

	DISTRICT-LEVEL POLICY	NO DISTRICT LEVEL POLICY	POLICY UNKNOWN
School Has Service-Learning	51%	17%	21%
School Has No Service-Learning	49%	83%	79%

THE ROLE OF DISTRICT-LEVEL SERVICE-LEARNING POLICIES AND SUPPORTS

We observe similar findings when we look at whether the principal reports that the school district provides support for implementing service-learning activities, such as a district staff member who provides support to schools in using service-learning as an instructional approach and technical assistance materials for service-learning. Again, a minority of school principals indicate that their district provides supports, while a notable percentage are unaware of whether their district provides them. [See Table 5]

TABLE 5: District-Level Supports as Reported by School Principals, 2008

DISTRICT-LEVEL SUPPORTS	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
District staff member who supports schools and teachers in using service-learning as an instructional approach	28%	58%	14%
Training and/or professional development workshops for service-learning	20%	66%	14%
Service-learning technical assistance materials or other publications	19%	64%	16%
Listserv or other form of on-line exchange about service-learning	12%	67%	22%

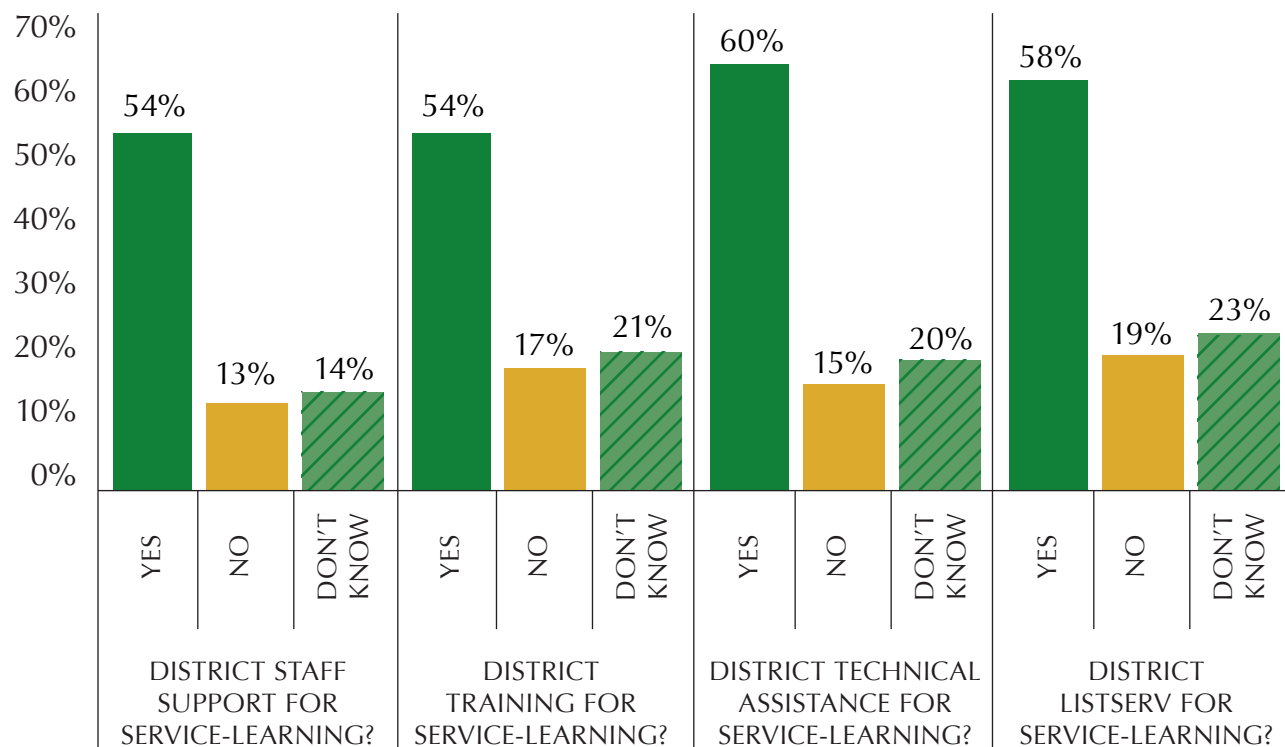NOTE: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

When we look at the relationship between these district-level supports for service-learning and the likelihood that a school offers service-learning activities, we find, as with a formal policy, significant positive correlations. [See Chart 4] In fact, when we focus exclusively on those schools where principals know about the presence of district supports for service-learning, two of those supports – staff assistance and technical assistance – have an even stronger correlation with the likelihood that the school will have service-learning activities than a district policy encouraging the use of service-learning.

CHART 4: Percentage of Schools with Service-Learning
          by Principal's Awareness of District Supports, 2008

Bar chart. Y-axis from 0% to 70%.

DISTRICT STAFF SUPPORT FOR SERVICE-LEARNING?
- YES: 54%
- NO: 13%
- DON'T KNOW: 14%

DISTRICT TRAINING FOR SERVICE-LEARNING?
- YES: 54%
- NO: 17%
- DON'T KNOW: 21%

DISTRICT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR SERVICE-LEARNING?
- YES: 60%
- NO: 15%
- DON'T KNOW: 20%

DISTRICT LISTSERV FOR SERVICE-LEARNING?
- YES: 58%
- NO: 19%
- DON'T KNOW: 23%

SCHOOL-LEVEL POLICIES AND SUPPORTS FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

Several school policies can be used as indicators of the institutionalization of service-learning, or of policies that help to ensure that service-learning is a standard practice and is likely to continue at the school. An example of such a policy has been noted already on page 18: 39 percent of principals at schools with service-learning activities report that service-learning is a part of the board-approved course curriculum for at least one subject area in at least one grade level.

Other policies include recognition of service-learning in the school improvement plan, inclusion of service-learning in teacher and staff

orientation, and consideration of service-learning as a criterion for teacher and staff evaluation. [See Table 6] Nearly half of schools with service-learning (47%) have recognized service-learning in their strategic plan, although fewer schools have integrated service-learning into teacher and staff orientation (24%) and evaluations (15%). The majority of schools (64%) demonstrate at least some degree of institutionalization through the adoption of at least one of the policies; however, only 8 percent of schools have all four policies in place, or what could be considered the highest degree of policy-related institutionalization of service-learning.

TABLE 6: Prevalence of Service-Learning Policies, 2008

SCHOOL-LEVEL POLICY	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Service-learning is recognized by the school as an improvement strategy in its strategic or improvement plan	47%	44%	9%
Service-learning is part of the board-approved course curriculum in at least one subject in at least one grade	39%	48%	12%
Service-learning is included in new teacher and/or staff orientation	24%	64%	12%
Service-learning is considered one of the criteria for teacher/staff evaluations	15%	78%	7%

NOTE: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

School-Level Supports for Service-Learning

The institutionalization of service-learning can also be measured by the extent to which schools provide support for the implementation of service-learning. One key support for service-learning is the presence of a service-learning coordinator, who typically provides technical support to teachers and assists in coordinating activities with the community.

In some cases, the school has an individual whose primary task is to work as a service-learning coordinator; however, this is relatively rare, with only 8 percent of school principals reporting that the school has a full-time coordinator. It is more likely for a teacher or staff member to devote part of their time to coordinating service-learning activities beyond the scope of his or her own classroom, with 18 percent of school principals reporting that the school has a part-time coordinator. Nevertheless, the majority of schools with service-learning activities do not have any service-learning coordinator, indicating that most teachers and staff work independently to design and implement service-learning activities into their curriculum. [See Chart 5]

CHART 5: Prevalence of Service-Learning Coordinators, 2008

NO COORDINATOR 74%

FULL-TIME COORDINATOR 8%

PART-TIME COORDINATOR 18%
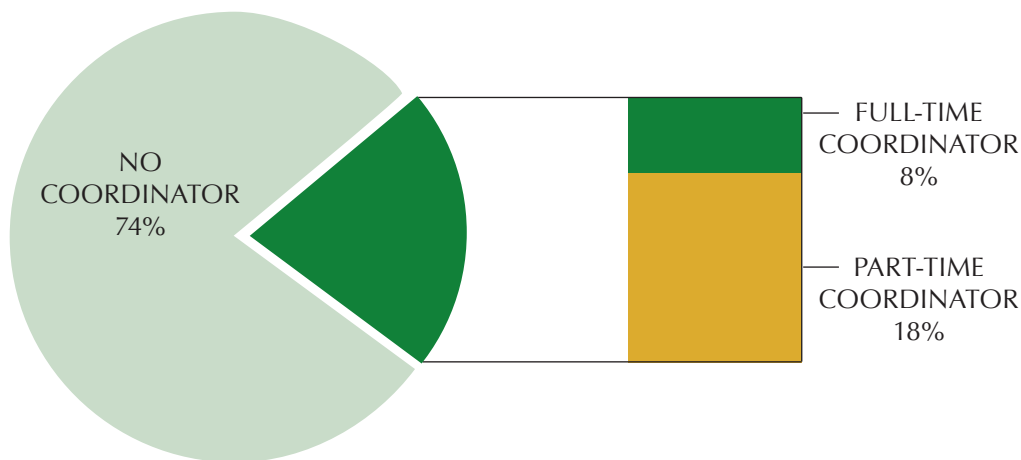
SCHOOL-LEVEL POLICIES AND
SUPPORTS FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

In addition to a service-learning coordinator, schools with service-learning activities may provide other types of supports to teachers and staff for service-learning, such as financial resources for curriculum development, technical assistance for the planning of service-learning, and reduction in teaching load for teachers and staff who supervise service-learning. The majority of principals report that the school provides these other supports (with the exception of workload reduction) at least occasionally to the teachers and staff who implement service-learning activities. [See Table 7] However, more than half (56%) of principals report that the school does not consistently provide even one of these supports, and only 13 percent of school principals say that the school provides at least three of the five supports frequently or always, indicating that many teachers and staff who implement service-learning projects must do so within their own resources.

TABLE 7: Supports Available for Teachers and Staff Involved with Service-Learning, 2008

SUPPORT FOR SERVICE-LEARNING	ALWAYS	FREQUENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	RARELY	NEVER
Recognition for staff who provide high-quality service-learning	10%	20%	31%	17%	23%
Financial support for planning, training and/or implementation	6%	13%	33%	22%	26%
Technical assistance on planning or implementation	8%	13%	30%	22%	27%
Mini-grants for programs or curriculum development	5%	10%	35%	20%	30%
Reduction in teaching load for development or supervision	3%	5%	14%	26%	52%

NOTE: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

In general, service-learning tends to be less institutionalized in elementary schools than middle or secondary schools. For example, only 19 percent of elementary schools have a full- or part-time service-learning coordinator, compared to 29 percent of middle schools and 34 percent of secondary schools. Secondary schools are also more likely to include service-learning as an improvement strategy in their strategic plan (60%) and to have service-learning as part of the board-approved course curriculum in at least one subject in at least one grade (59%) than elementary schools (39% and 28%) and middle schools (44% and 37%).

Service-Learning Requirements

Among schools that have service-learning activities, 41 percent of principals report that there are requirements for all or some of their students. [See Chart 6] While the prevalence of service-learning is lower than that of community service among K-12 public schools, it is interesting to note that when schools have service-learning activities they are almost twice as likely to make it a requirement for some or all of their students (41%) than schools that recognize and/or arrange community service activities are to make community service a requirement of some or all of their students (23%). As we saw with community service requirements, secondary schools are most likely to have service-learning requirements (58%), followed by middle schools (45%) and elementary schools (27%).

CHART 6: Prevalence of Service-Learning Requirements, 2008

NO REQUIREMENT 59%

REQUIREMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS 11%
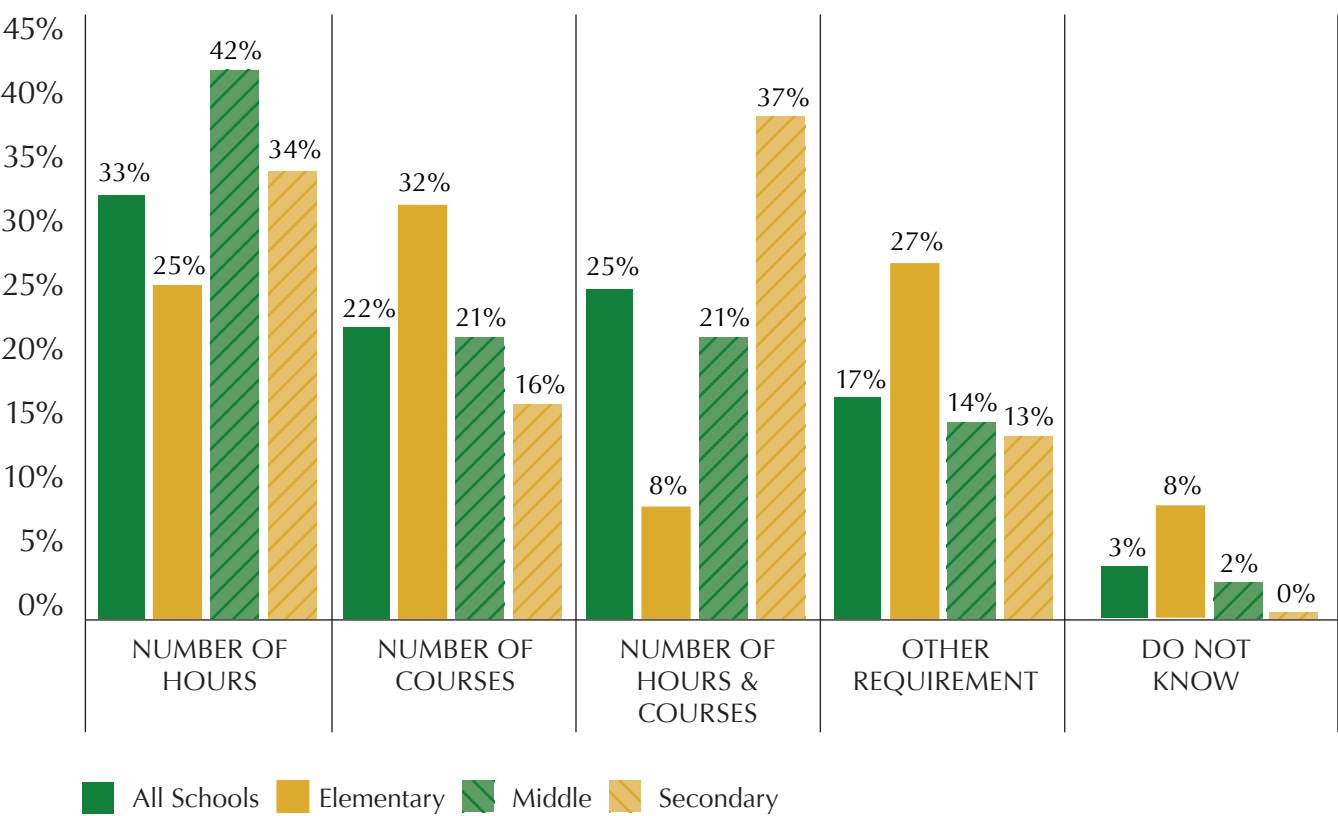
REQUIREMENT FOR SOME STUDENTS 30%
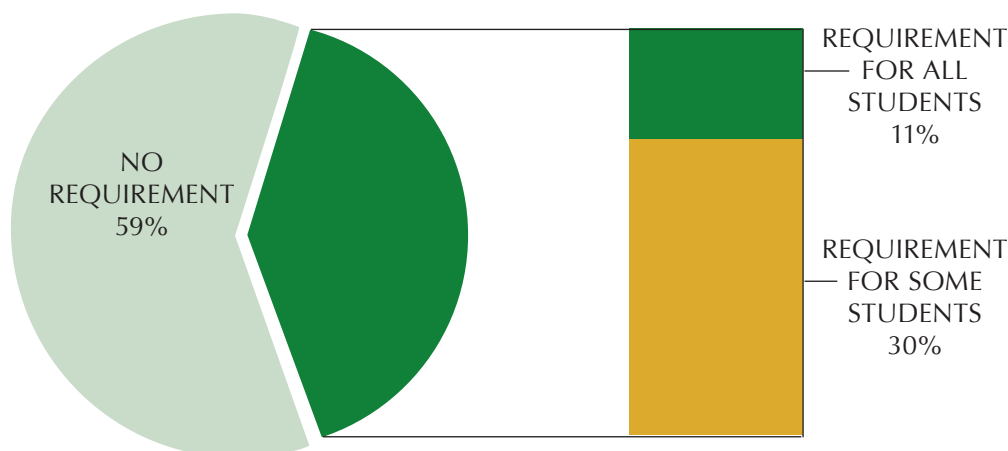
SCHOOL-LEVEL POLICIES AND SUPPORTS FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

Typically, schools implement service-learning requirements through mandating that students complete a certain number of service hours outside of the classroom and/or participate in a certain number of courses with service-learning. [See Chart 7] However, a small percentage of school principals report other types of service-learning requirements, which include special projects, such as a senior capstone project or character education project, or activities organized by student and community-based groups.[18]

CHART 7: Types of Service Learning Requirements by Instructional Level, 2008

Legend: All Schools | Elementary | Middle | Secondary

	NUMBER OF HOURS	NUMBER OF COURSES	NUMBER OF HOURS & COURSES	OTHER REQUIREMENT	DO NOT KNOW
All Schools	33%	22%	25%	17%	3%
Elementary	25%	32%	8%	27%	8%
Middle	42%	21%	21%	14%	2%
Secondary	34%	16%	37%	13%	0%

[18] In a small number of cases, schools reported that they had other service-learning requirements in addition to a number of hours and/or courses; in those cases, schools were classified according to their hours or courses requirement.

While the majority of principals (66%) at schools with service-learning activities report that they receive at least some funding for service-learning and community service activities, about one out of every five principals (21%) report that their school does not receive any funding to support their activities. An additional 13 percent of principals are uncertain about whether the school has received any funding for service-learning.

Principals of schools that receive funds are most likely to report that the funds come from school or district operating funds. [See Table 8] However, a considerable portion of schools with service-learning (33%) received special grants or funding dedicated to supporting service-learning activities during the 2007-08 year. These special funds for service-learning come from a variety of sources, including foundations, corporations, and state and federal programs, such as Learn and Serve America and AmeriCorps.

TABLE 8: Sources of Funding for Service-Learning Activities, 2008

FUNDING SOURCE	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
School or District Operating Funds	40%	45%	15%
Foundation Grants	20%	62%	18%
Corporate Grants	20%	64%	16%
State Grants	16%	66%	18%
Federal Grants	11%	71%	18%
AmeriCorps Grants	7%	77%	16%
Learn and Serve America Grants	7%	81%	13%

NOTE: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

Only 7 percent of school principals reported receiving Learn and Serve America funds during the 2007-08 academic year, which is slightly lower than in 1999, when 10 percent of school principals indicated that they had received a grant through Learn and Serve America. The decrease is not significant, but would be expected given the decline in the amount of available Learn and Serve funds (adjusted and actual) between 1999 and 2008.

It has been suggested that previous national surveys of the prevalence of service-learning have under-represented the percentage of schools that receive Learn and Serve America funds because some schools are unaware that Learn and Serve America funds are included in the district operating funds that they receive. However, based on data collected through Learn and Serve America's annual reporting system (LASSIE), it appears that the financial support for service-learning has a broad base, of which Learn and Serve America funds are one part. According to LASSIE, 741 schools and 506 districts received Learn and Serve America funds during the 2008 program year. Even if the funds given to districts were distributed to multiple schools, it would be reasonable to conclude that Learn and Serve America funds might reach around 10 percent of the estimated 20,400 schools that have service-learning activities.[19] Nevertheless, Learn and Serve America grants support approximately 1 million K-12 students, or about one-quarter of all K-12 service-learning participants nationally.[20]

[19] For more on Learn and Serve's annual program and performance survey, visit the LASSIE website at www.lsareports.org. The site provides copies of the survey instrument and a public-use data set for the general public.

[20] Due to the nature of Learn and Serve's three-year grant cycle, there is some fluctuation in the number of K-12 participants in Learn and Serve-funded projects. Over the past three years, an annual average of 1.3 million K-12 students participated in Learn and Serve funded service-learning activities (1.3 million in 2005-06; 1.5 million in 2006-07; and 1 million in 2007-08).

Volunteer Support for Service-Learning

While financial support may be relatively limited, the findings indicate that schools with service-learning often turn to another form of support – volunteers. According to the survey, 85 percent of schools have volunteers who work with students on service-learning activities. Most commonly, parents and other family members volunteer with the school. [See Table 9]

TABLE 9: Types of Volunteers who Work with Students on Service-Learning Activites, 2008

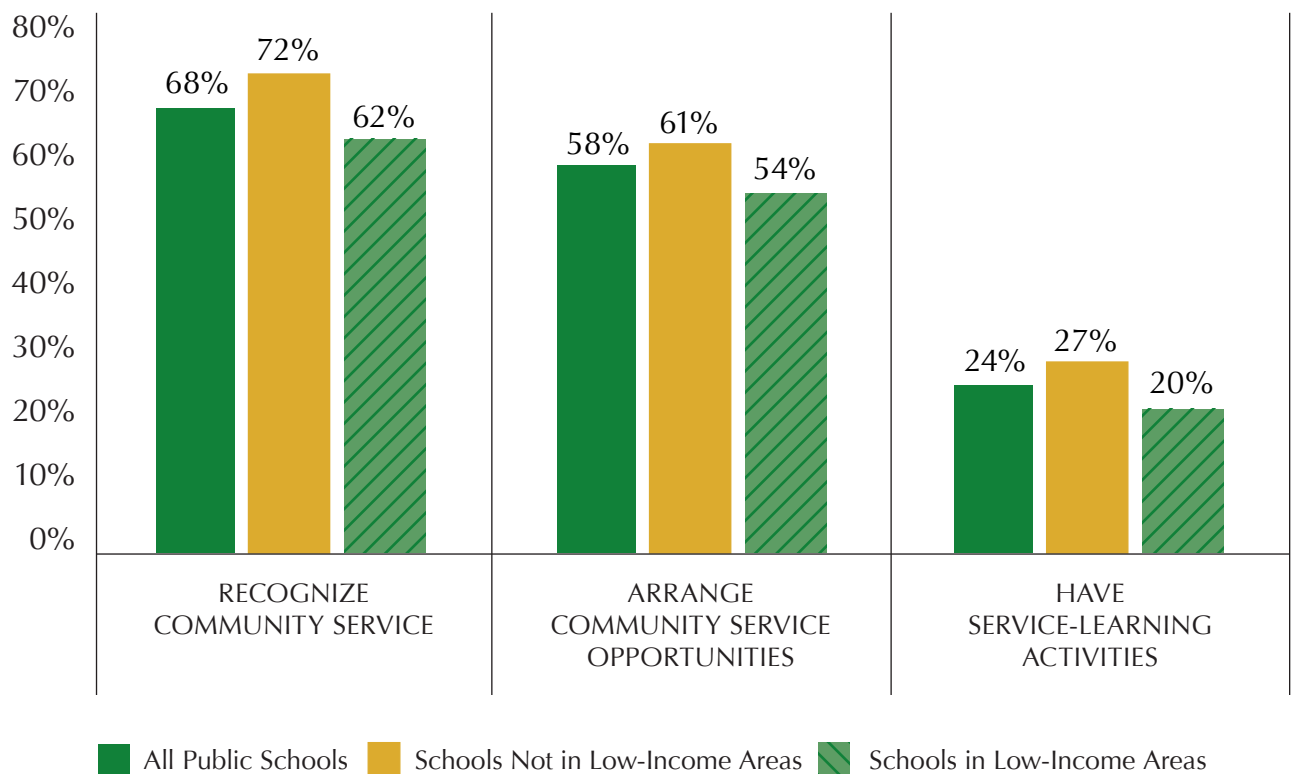| FUNDING SOURCE	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
Parents and/or family members	76%	21%	3%
Adult volunteers who are not family members	67%	29%	4%
College Work Study students	14%	79%	7%
AmeriCorps members	8%	85%	7%

NOTE: Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

COMMUNITY SERVICE AND SERVICE-LEARNING IN LOW-INCOME AREAS

Schools in low-income areas, defined as schools with 50 percent or more of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, account for 40 percent of all K-12 public schools. As expected, schools in low-income areas are also more likely to be located in urban areas and have a large percentage of minority students. We find that these schools are less likely than schools that are not in low-income areas to have opportunities for students to engage in community service and service-learning. [See Chart 8] This finding is supported by the data collected through the Corporation's 2005 Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey, which showed that youth from disadvantaged circumstances were nearly 40 percent less likely than youth from advantaged circumstances to report current or past participation in school-based service.[21]

CHART 8: Community Service and Service-Learning in Schools by Income Area, 2008

	RECOGNIZE COMMUNITY SERVICE	ARRANGE COMMUNITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES	HAVE SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES
All Public Schools	68%	58%	24%
Schools Not in Low-Income Areas	72%	61%	27%
Schools in Low-Income Areas	62%	54%	20%

■ All Public Schools   ■ Schools Not in Low-Income Areas   ▨ Schools in Low-Income Areas

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[21] See Corporation for National and Community Service, (March 2006) Educating for Active Citizenship: Service-Learning, School-Based Service and Youth Civic Engagement, Brief 2: Youth Helping America Series, Washington, DC.

Despite the fact that schools in low-income areas are less likely than other schools to have service-learning activities, a comparison with the data collected in 1999 indicates that the prevalence of service-learning in low-income schools has not experienced the same level of decline as schools that are not in low-income areas. That is to say, the gap in the availability of service-learning opportunities that has existed for youth based on their family's income is decreasing – in 2008, schools in low-income areas are 26 percent less likely to have service-learning (20% compared to 27% of schools not in low-income areas), while they were 36 percent less likely in 1999 (23% compared to 36% of schools not in low-income areas).

A study by Scale and Roehlkepartain (2005) may help explain, in part, why the gap in service-learning has declined. They found that principals in low-income schools are more likely than other principals to believe that service-learning has a positive impact on students' academic engagement and achievement. Some schools in low-income areas may place a higher value on service-learning as a promising approach for engaging at-risk youth through active learning projects that also provide opportunities for these youth to work with adults and develop leadership skills and a sense of self-efficacy.

Research indicates that the type of learning that occurs through service-learning, by connecting education to real world issues and allowing students to address problems they identify in their own community, may be particularly efficacious with students who might not respond well to more traditional teaching methods. The Corporation's 2005 Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey found that when youth from disadvantaged circumstances participate in school-based service-learning, they are more likely to be engaged and believe in their ability to make a difference in their community, while other research indicates that service-learning has a positive effect on resiliency and academic aspirations, and that students at risk of dropping out of school believe that service-learning projects would improve the likelihood that they would remain in school.[22]

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[22] See, for example, Kraft and Wheeler (2003), Scales & Roehlkepartain (2005), Yamauchi et al (2006), and Bridgeland et al (2008).

CONCLUSION

The *2008 National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools* has shown that K-12 public schools continue to value their role in educating young people to be active and committed citizens. They are opting to primarily support students' participation in community service activities, and over the past decade we have seen a decline in the percentage of schools that integrate the service into classroom curricula through service-learning. Those schools that have service-learning activities tend to have an environment that emphasizes the importance of service, with 91 percent of these schools also arranging community service opportunities for their students. To understand better the decline in the prevalence of service-learning over the past decade, we would benefit from further research into the dynamics of those schools that have programs in both community service and service-learning and those schools that rely on community service alone to engage their students in the community. Such research could provide us with more information on the reasons why some schools give greater priority to service-learning than other schools.

Service-learning coordinators are valuable for building the capacity of schools to carry out service-learning projects and providing the necessary support for teachers to integrate the activities into their classroom. Yet, we see

that the majority of schools operate service-learning activities without a coordinator and that teachers must often incorporate service-learning into their classes without external resources. While this is indicative of a strong commitment on the part of the teachers, relying on their efforts does not ensure that service-learning will be sustained in schools.

Existing research has demonstrated that the quality elements of service-learning, such as active student participation in planning and implementing service activities, clear connections between the course learning objectives and the service projects, and structured reflection on the students' service experience, lead to greater impacts on students' academic and civic attitudes and behaviors than community service alone. As well, principals of schools with service-learning value the benefits of the activities for their students. However, there is a need for more research on the impacts of service-learning on students' academic outcomes, particularly if those teachers and administrators who are unfamiliar with the pedagogical method are to adopt service-learning programs. If service-learning is to be viewed as a method of drawing young people into a life-long cycle of engagement, it is also necessary to show that age is not a barrier to active citizenship and that elementary school students also benefit from service-learning.

The study indicates that schools in low-income areas have not seen the same level of decline in service-learning that has occurred in schools that are not in low-income areas. As other research supports, this finding suggests that teachers and administrators of schools with a high proportion of students from low-income families are more likely to see the academic and civic benefits of service-learning. At a time when we see the civic and academic gap between youth from disadvantaged circumstances and those who are not growing, this is a positive sign that service-learning can help address this gap.

While the findings from the *National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools* raise a number of challenges for the expansion of service-learning, they also offer possibilities for constructively addressing those challenges. We recommend that further research be conducted, not just with those civic-minded schools that support both community service and service-learning, but also with schools that report that they lack the time and the funds to incorporate service-learning into their classrooms. By better understanding both these groups, it will be possible to be responsive to the goals of schools to see their students succeed.

APPENDIX

TABLE 10: Characteristics of Schools that Recognize Student Participation in Community Service and Arrange Community Service Opportunities for Students, 1999 and 2008

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS	SCHOOLS THAT RECOGNIZE STUDENT COMMUNITY SERVICE		SCHOOLS THAT ARRANGE COMMUNITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES	
	PERCENT		PERCENT	
	1999	2008	1999	2008
All Public Schools	64%	68%	57%	58%
By Instruction Level				
Elementary	55	60	49	51
Middle	77	74	71	65
Secondary	83	86	71	72
By Class Enrollment Size				
Less than 300	59	66	53	54
300 - 999	65	66	57	57
1000 or more	77	85	69	71
By Locale				
Urban	66	64	61	58
Suburban	63	67	57	57
Town	65	69	59	53
Rural	64	72	53	60
By Percentage of Minority Enrollment				
Less than 6%	67	73	58	58
6% to 20%	65	69	56	59
21% to 49%	72	73	67	64
50% or more	54	60	50	53
By Percentage of Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Price Lunch				
Less than 50%	69	72	63	61
50% or higher	50	62	43	54

The school characteristics were drawn from the Department of Education's Common Core Data (CCD). Characteristics for 1999 surveyed schools were pulled from the 1996-97 CCD; characteristics of the 2008 surveyed schools were drawn from the 2005-06 CCD. For more information on the definition dof schools characteristics, see the methodology section.

TABLE 11: Characteristics of Schools with Service-Learning, 1999 and 2008

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS	SCHOOLS WITH SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES	
	PERCENT	
	1999	2008
All Public Schools	32%	24%
By Instruction Level		
Elementary	25	20
Middle	38	25
Secondary/Combined	46	35
By Class Enrollment Size		
Less than 300	27	21
300 - 999	31	24
1000 or more	48	32
By Locale		
Urban	36	27
Suburban	27	24
Town	43	25
Rural	27	22
By Percentage of Minority Enrollment		
Less than 6%	31	24
7% to 20%	31	26
21% to 49%	36	24
50% or more	29	23
By Percentage of Students Qualifying for Free/Reduced Price Lunch		
Less than 50%	36	27
50% or higher	23	20

The school characteristics were drawn from the Department of Education's Common Core Data (CCD). Characteristics for 1999 surveyed schools were pulled from the 1996-97 CCD; characteristics of the 2008 surveyed schools were drawn from the 2005-06 CCD. For more information on the definition dof schools characteristics, see the methodology section.

METHODOLOGY

The sample of public schools for the *2008 National Study of the Prevalence of Community Service and Service-Learning in K-12 Public Schools* was selected from the 2005-2006 Common Core of Data (CCD) public school universe file, the most current file available at the time the sample was drawn. According to the 2005-2006 CCD, which is maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there were 87,419 schools, including 51,947 elementary schools, 16,636 middle schools, and 18,836 secondary schools. Special education, vocational schools, and alternative schools were excluded from the sampling frame along with schools with a high grade of kindergarten or lower, ungraded schools, and schools outside of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

A sample of 2,002 schools was drawn with stratification by instruction level, poverty level (based on the percentage of students enrolled in the school who are eligible for free or reduced priced lunch) and school size (based on student total enrollment) in rough proportion to the aggregate square roots of the enrollment of the schools in the substrata. The sampling strata was formed by three instructional levels (elementary, middle, and secondary); three poverty levels (less than 25%, 25-54%, and 55% or more); and four

school enrollment sizes (less than 300, 300-499, 500-999, and 1,000 or more). Schools within each sampling stratum were stratified further in the selection by an implicit stratification of locale (urban, suburban, town, and rural) and region (northeast, southeast, central and west). The sample included an oversample of larger schools to ensure adequate representation of middle and secondary schools.

The survey instrument was designed by the Corporation for National and Community Service and Westat and utilized certain questions from the 1999 National Student Service-Learning and Community Service Survey in order to allow for comparison between surveys.

In March 2008, pre-notification letters were mailed to selected schools' district superintendents to inform them of the study. Survey packets were sent to the principals of selected schools one week after the superintendent letter; the packets included an introductory letter from Learn and Serve America, the questionnaire, frequently asked questions, and a letter of endorsement from the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). The principal was asked to complete the survey or forward it to the person in the school most

knowledgeable about service-learning activities. Principals were allowed to complete the paper version of the survey and return the completed survey by Fed-Ex, or complete the survey by phone with a trained interviewer at Westat. A receipt control system, using a unique 8-digit identification number, was used to track the completion of surveys. Telephone follow-up was conducted between late March and late April for nonrespondents as well as for submitted surveys that were incomplete or contained unclear or incongruous responses.

A total of 1,847 school principals completed the survey, and 16 other schools were found to be outside the scope of the survey. The unweighted response rate was 93% (1,847 out of 1,986 eligible schools).

Survey responses were weighted to produce national estimates. Sampling weights were attached to every eligible school record with a completed interview. The weights account for differential probabilities of selection and nonreponse. The findings in this report are weighted national estimates.

SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

Institutional Levels: Elementary schools include schools with a low grade of 3 or lower and a high grade of 8 or lower. Middle schools include schools with a low grade of 4 or higher and a high grade of 8 or lower. Secondary schools include schools with low grade of 9 or higher and combined schools with a high grade of 9 or higher.

Locale: Urbanicity is determined according to Census designations by metropolitan-core-based statistical areas. For more information on Census designations and CCD categories of urbanicity, visit http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/index.asp.

Minority enrollment is determined by the proportion of non-white and Hispanic students to the total student enrollment.

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Resources for Community Service and Service-Learning

The Corporation for National and Community Service supports the expansion of service-learning and community service through program grants, training and technical assistance, research, and promotion and recognition programs. Visit the websites below for more information.

Grants

- Learn and Serve America: As the largest national funder of service-learning, Learn and Serve America provides grants to schools, colleges, and nonprofit groups to engage more than 1 million students each year in community service linked to educational goals. www.LearnandServe.gov
- AmeriCorps: AmeriCorps provides opportunities for 75,000 Americans each year to give intensive service to their communities. Some AmeriCorps programs are designed to promote the engagement of students in community service or service-learning opportunities. www.AmeriCorps.gov
- Senior Corps: SaYES is a joint initiative of Learn and Serve America and Senior Corps to connect RSVP volunteers in supporting K-12 service activities and service-learning programs. http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/sayes/index.php

Training and Technical Assistance: The Corporation's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse is America's most comprehensive resource for service-learning. The Clearinghouse provides free a tools and resources to help you provide a quality service-learning experience including hundreds of ready-to-download teaching tools, the world's largest service-learning library; and more. www.servicelearning.org/.

Research: The Corporation's Office of Research and Policy Development has produced a number of research reports on youth service and service-learning, including the Youth Helping America series. To view these reports and issue briefs, visit www.NationalService.gov/research

Promotion and Recognition

- The President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, launched by the Corporation in 2006, recognizes colleges and universities nationwide that support innovative and effective community service and service-learning programs. www.NationalService.gov/honorroll
- "Bring Learning to Life" is a public awareness campaign to help spread the word about the benefits of service-learning and expand its practice across America. The campaign offers free materials including a program video, television PSAs, a parent's guide to service-learning, and more. http://servicelearning.org/lsa/bring_learning/

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