

## **PRINCIPALS SURVEY: COMMUNITY SERVICE, SERVICE-LEARNING THRIVING IN SPITE OF BUDGET CUTS AND “NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND” FOCUS ON BASICS**

### *About a Third of Schools Offer Students Chance to Serve Community While Actively Learning*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.//March 25, 2004//**Community service and the more rigorous service-learning projects in American schools have held their own over the last years in the face of budget cuts and the new teaching-to-the-test focus of “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) school reforms, according to a major national survey of 1,799 elementary, middle and high school principals conducted for the nonprofit National Youth Leadership Council and released today (NYLC). A total of 55,000 out of America’s 84,000 public schools offer 15 million students the opportunity to get credit for community service programs, while 23,000 public schools provide service-learning projects that see 4.5 million U.S. students participate in more rigorous curriculum-based service to their community.

When compared to data from a comparable 1999 federal survey, the new NYLC survey shows that schools offering community service programs are up over the last five years from 64 percent to 69 percent. The percentage of schools offering service-learning programs was essentially unchanged – 32 percent in 1999 versus 30 percent in 2004, with serious declines seen in only one major school category: middle schools (down from 38 percent to 30 percent). Researchers also noted that fewer schools serving lower-income communities offer service learning programs (29 percent versus 36 percent of all other schools), even though principals at the lower-income schools place a higher value on the benefits of service-learning projects.

James Kielsmeier, president of the National Youth Leadership Council said: **“The new numbers show that community service and -service-learning have become widespread practices in American schools. We see a solid base of schools and educators committed to using these important tools for improving their students and the communities in which they live.”**

“The staying power of service-learning can be seen in that it has survived and continued over these past five years, despite considerable pressures such as school budget cuts, focus on meeting state mandates, and concerns with implications of ‘No Child Left Behind,’” said Ellen Tenenbaum, researcher at Westat, the firm responsible for conducting the survey. “The survey suggests that principals see a real value in service-learning’s ability to underscore and enhance such key things as students’ civic engagement and school-community relationships.”

Sharon Buddin, a principal at Ridge View High School in Columbia, S.C. said: **“Principals support service-learning as an educational tool because we see the evidence everyday that it works. It means students have a more strongly rooted sense of their civic duties. It means that the personal and social development of our children is boosted in positive ways. And there are other benefits, too. Teachers who are engaged in service-learning tend to be more positive about the work they do, and we also see a higher level of parental involvement, which is a key to academic achievement.”**

To qualify as service-learning, programs for students must be organized in relation to a specific academic course or curriculum, have clearly stated learning objectives and address real community

needs in a sustained manner over a period of time. By contrast, community service credit is typically granted to students for non-curriculum based efforts to meet community needs. Rather than simply cleaning up a shoreline for community-service credit, students in a service-learning program might go to a lake or river, draw samples, analyze them and then publicly present their findings about pollution levels. For the purposes of this survey, service-learning is defined as curriculum-based community service done through the schools that integrates classroom instruction with community service activities.

The NYLC research project was carried out in conjunction with Brandeis University, the Search Institute and Westat, a survey analysis firm. Sponsored by State Farm Companies Foundation®, the NYLC principal survey revisits questions posed in a 1999 U.S. Department of Education study of service-learning programs.

In January 2004, Westat polled a nationally-representative sample of 2,002 high school, middle school and elementary school principals. The NYLC survey data were released today during a phone-based news conference sponsored by the Civil Society Institute's Results for America campaign.

Other key findings of the survey included:

\* Nine out of 10 principals in schools that offer service-learning say that it has a positive impact on students' civic engagement, personal and social development, and school-community partnerships.

\* Eight out of 10 principals in schools that offer service-learning say that it has a positive impact on academic achievement, teacher satisfaction, school climate, school engagement and the community's view of youth as resources.

\* Funding and infrastructure in schools for service-learning programs is extremely limited. Only 34 percent of schools with service-learning programs have sponsored related in-service training for teachers in the last three years. Only about half (51 percent) of schools with service-learning offer some kind of financial help, such as mini-grants, to offset the costs involved in such programs.

“State Farm® supports service-learning as a teaching methodology because it strengthens student achievement by helping connect academics with real-world experience,” said Sharon Tallon, State Farm public affairs staff assistant. “This teaching approach prepares students to be more active citizens, better educated consumers and more qualified to enter the work force.”

The survey of U.S. school principals is part of a fuller report that will be released by NYLC during its National Service-Learning Conference taking place at the Caribe Royale Resort and Convention Center in Orlando, Florida, from March 28-31, 2004. For more information, go to <http://www.nylc.org/conference/index.htm> on the Web.

## **STUDY METHODOLOGY**

The sample for the NYLC survey was selected from the 2001-2002 Common Core of Data (CCD) public school universe file, the most up-to-date resource available. A total of 83,842 regular schools are included in the CCD universe file, of which 50,782 are elementary schools, 15,752 are middle schools and 17,308 are high schools or schools with combined elementary/secondary grades. Other schools, such as special education, vocational and alternative/other schools, schools with a high grade of kindergarten or lower, ungraded schools, and schools in the outlying U.S. territories, were not included in the survey. A stratified sample design was used to select a sample of 2,000 public schools for the survey. Because of random variation, the actual number of schools selected for the sample was slightly different from the allocated target. A total of 2,002 schools -- 933 elementary schools, 523 middle schools and 546 secondary/combined schools -- was included in the final survey. A remarkable 91 percent response rate, and similar sample size and questions make it possible to compare the 2004 survey to the 1999 U.S. Department of Education survey of K-12 principals.

### **ABOUT THE GROUPS**

The National Youth Leadership Council (<http://www.nylc.org>), a national nonprofit located in Minnesota, is a leading advocate of service-learning since 1983, and works with young people, educators, administrators and community leaders to integrate service-learning practices into elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools.

Results for America (<http://www.ResultsForAmerica.org>) is a project of the nonprofit Civil Society Institute (CSI), which is based in Newton, Massachusetts. The mission of the Institute is to serve as a catalyst for change by creating problem-solving interactions among people, and between communities, government and business, that can help to improve society. A key goal of Results for America is to shape and tap the tremendous amount of community-level knowledge, experience and innovative action that could solve America's problems in education under its "Great Kids, Great Schools, Great Communities" initiative.

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**EDITOR'S NOTE:** High school principals are available for interviews from across the United States. For the full text of the NYLC survey data, a related news release and a streaming audio replay of the news event, go to <http://www.ResultsForAmerica.org> on the Web.