

Executive Summary
Service Learning Study
ABC Technology Academy
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This report provides an analysis of ABC Technology Academy's ("ABC Academy") service learning program in relationship to its social studies curriculum.

Issue

New Jersey Town Public Schools requires 60 total service learning hours for students to graduate with an expressed goal to "promote social awareness, social responsibility and career development." Teachers and students at ABC Academy have voiced concern over whether the goal of raising social awareness and social responsibility are being met through the service learning program in its current form. In other words, how is service learning preparing students to become active and engaged citizens?

Methods and Analysis (Focusing the Questions)

To determine the relationship between service learning, teaching citizenship, and ABC Academy's social studies curriculum, we created and administered two rounds of surveys (See attached, "Survey 1" and "Survey 2").

In Survey 1, we asked the students when and where they did their service learning. Through a series of questions, we also asked the students to rate how well they understood the concept of citizenship and to rate how much their service learning affected their understanding of what it means to be a citizen. After analyzing the initial responses of 75 of students, it became apparent that the Survey 1 questions needed to be modified to solicit more precise data on these issues.

For Survey 2, which was administered to 110 students, we presented our questions in both Spanish and English. We shortened the number of questions from ten to six with only two of those questions answered on a rating scale. We specifically asked the students to respond in writing to the following two questions: 1. What does citizenship mean to you; and 2. How has your service learning project helped you understand the citizenry?

Findings (Investigate)

Over half of service learning assignments occurred within ABC Academy's classrooms assisting teachers. The remainder of students met their service learning requirements either through a local organization, helping friends or family, or by some "other" means. The majority of students surveyed did their service learning during their junior year at ABC Academy. The students appeared socially aware of the challenges of citizenship, they understood in theory the difference between civic rights and civic responsibilities, and the need to balance these rights and responsibilities. However, they could not articulate specific or practical examples of these rights and responsibilities. While nearly all the students said they saw a connection between their community service and issues discussed and studied in their social studies classes, very few students could articulate how their service learning helped their understanding of citizenship. We also found that this population of students largely felt disconnected and marginalized within the greater community in which they lived. Finally, many students seem to approach service learning superficially, as one more requirement to check off in order to graduate.

Analysis & Conclusions (Refining the Problem)

The concepts of citizenship are dynamic and often reflect the continual changes and challenges presented by an equally dynamic society. In addition to understanding one's civic rights and responsibilities within our own system of government, our students also need to be prepared to participate in an increasingly globalized society. They need to be prepared to participate in a global economy, work with and manage people from cultures different from their own, and address problems that know no borders, like Ebola, climate change, and terrorism. Through accelerated international migration, their own communities are also becoming increasingly diverse. Students will need cross-cultural, linguistic, and technological competencies to fully participate in this society.

The service learning program as it now stands, does little to help meet the demands of preparing students to become active and engaged citizens. While classroom instruction has been effective in teaching concepts and theories of citizenship, service learning has provided little opportunity for the students to witness, practice, or connect these concepts at a practical level. They rarely leave the confines of the school and when they do, it is within the comfort and familiarity of their own community. Rarely do our students get to work in communities culturally different from their own, nor do they get a chance to work alongside peers who are culturally diverse. Finally, while service learning seems well suited and intended to provide practical experience in the above expressed learning goals, there appears to be little or no authenticity to their work. (See attached "Data Graph")

Recommendations (Plan & Action)

To integrate the service learning program more fully into the social studies curriculum and prepare ABC Academy students to be active and engaged citizens we make the following recommendations:

- Form a service learning advisory committee made up of the assistant principal, social studies department head, at least one additional social studies teacher, representatives from two other departments (i.e. science, history, etc.), a parent association member active in community relations, and a member of the student council. This committee will meet twice per month to:
 - Research and explore service learning opportunities outside of the school building and its immediate surrounding community (Report to principal in three months).
 - Investigate local municipal internships.
 - Non-profit community organizations demographically different from ABC Academy.

Committee Goals:

- Work toward having half of all service learning opportunities away from school and its immediate surrounding community (Goal: two years).
- Form partnerships with schools that are demographically different from ABC Academy to have students from each school work side-by-side on a common service learning project (Goal: one year).
- Develop cross discipline project-based curriculum where service learning is an integral part of the project (Goal: one year).
- Through use of technology, develop a service learning project with a school or community in another country (e.g., partner with a school in the UK to raise money for micro-loans to a farming community in India.)