



## SERVICE-LEARNING DELIVERS WHAT AMERICANS WANT FROM SCHOOLS (Poll shows a way to improve public education<sup>1</sup>)

It is not news that Americans are deeply concerned about the quality of public education,<sup>2</sup> nor that almost half of them believe that improving schools should be our nation's highest priority.<sup>3</sup> What is news is that Americans believe that service-learning can deliver what they expect from schools.

A poll conducted in 2000 asked more than 1000 Americans<sup>4</sup> about their views of K-12 education and service-learning. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of Americans expect schools to provide students with the academic skills they need for success in life.<sup>5</sup> But Americans also believe that success requires more than mastering basic academic subjects.<sup>6</sup> They agree that schools have a clear responsibility to link what children study in school to the skills they will need at work and in their communities.<sup>7</sup>

This responsibility includes helping students develop a sense of excitement about learning,<sup>8</sup> skills they will need for success in the workplace,<sup>9</sup> habits of good citizenship,<sup>10</sup> leadership qualities,<sup>11</sup> and the ability to work with people different from themselves.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the public believes that schools should teach in a variety of ways to reach different kinds of students.<sup>13</sup>

Service-learning helps schools make this vision a reality. Although many people are not familiar with the term "service-learning,"<sup>14</sup> they support this teaching method when they learn more about it<sup>15</sup> and the many positive effects it potentially can have on students. For example, Americans recognize immediate and concrete benefits from specific service-learning projects like designing a neighborhood playground<sup>16</sup> or helping a community test and analyze its water supply.<sup>17</sup> They are more likely to support service-learning in their local public schools if it can strengthen students' interest in school<sup>18</sup> and improve their grasp of academic subjects such as math and science.<sup>19</sup>

Americans understand that service-learning projects also support students' long-term social and civic development. They agree that service-learning helps build the skills that students need to be successful later in life.<sup>20</sup> They want service-learning in schools if it promotes self-confidence<sup>21</sup> and active citizenship.<sup>22</sup> And finally, they value the role of service-learning in fostering partnerships between schools and communities.<sup>23</sup>

Through service-learning experiences, students develop the kind of values and skills that meet Americans' high expectation of public education.

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<sup>1</sup> All figures cited in endnotes come from Roper Starch Worldwide, Inc., Public Attitudes Toward Education and Service-Learning, November 2000 (available at [http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/roper\\_report](http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/roper_report)).

<sup>2</sup> 94% of poll respondents say that people not having the education or skills they need to succeed is a serious problem.

<sup>3</sup> 89% say that improving public education is a very high priority (compared to 81% for healthcare and 70% for social security) and 49% believe it should be the highest priority (compared to 22% for healthcare and 7% for social security).

<sup>4</sup> including 537 parents of children under 18

<sup>5</sup> 78% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students the academic skills they need.

<sup>6</sup> 94% agree that a good education is much more than just learning to read, write and do math.

<sup>7</sup> 66% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students how to use what they learn in the classroom for real-world projects and problems.

<sup>8</sup> 70% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students in ways that will get them excited about learning.

<sup>9</sup> 68% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students the skills they need to succeed in the workplace.

<sup>10</sup> 54% say that schools have a definite responsibility to encourage good citizenship.

<sup>11</sup> 56% say that schools have a definite responsibility to help students develop their leadership skills.

<sup>12</sup> 55% say that schools have a definite responsibility to teach students how to work with people who are different from themselves.

<sup>13</sup> 89% agree that schools need to teach in different ways to reach different types of students.

<sup>14</sup> 37% say they know either a great deal or something about service-learning.

<sup>15</sup> When they hear a definition of service-learning, 90% say they are likely to support it in their local public schools.

<sup>16</sup> 89% say they are likely to support service-learning in their local public schools if students engage in projects using their math and geometry skills to design and lay out a playground for a local neighborhood.

<sup>17</sup> 90% say they are likely to support service-learning in their local public schools if students engage in projects that improve their science skills by testing the water quality of a lake and reporting what they find to local officials.

<sup>18</sup> 62% are much more supportive of including service-learning in their local public schools upon learning that service-learning can make many students more interested in school and learning.

<sup>19</sup> 85% agree that service-learning improves students' grasp of academic basics.

<sup>20</sup> 90% agree that service-learning helps students build the skills they need to be successful later in life.

<sup>21</sup> 65 % are much more supportive of including service-learning in their local public schools upon learning that service-learning can help students develop self-confidence.

<sup>22</sup> 89% agree that service-learning encourages active citizenship and community involvement.

<sup>23</sup> 90% support including service-learning in their local public schools if service-learning helps to create a partnership between schools and their communities.