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A Concern About...

Connecting School-to-Work and Service Learning

by Council of Chief State School Officers

Introduction

As interest has grown in school-to-work transition programs and service learning, the commonalities between the two have become increasingly clear. Service learning and school-to-work are forms of experiential education that extend student learning into the community and the worksite. Both provide students with contextualized learning opportunities. Through service learning and school-to-work programs, students engage in learning experiences that help develop organizational, team, and problem-solving skills as well as the competencies and foundation skills identified as important for employability and responsible citizenship (SCANS, 1992; W.T. Grant Commission, 1988).

Educators and researchers in vocational education and career development fields often include community service and service learning in the array of work-based learning opportunities that should be available to students in every community. In their report *Opening Career Paths for Youth: What Can be Done? Who Can Do It?*, Stephen and Mary Agnes Hamilton write, "Community service gives young people experience that is like work even though it is unpaid. They can learn planning, teamwork, responsibility, and specific work-related skills." The Council of Chief State School Officers includes service learning in its policy reference document *Youth Preparation for Employment* as one of the strategies to help students transition from school to employment. For children, service learning offers exposure to the world of work and community and provides a context for building academic and work-readiness skills. For youth, it offers valuable exploration into and experience with real-world needs that can be addressed through action and initiative, while further solidifying their work-readiness, academic, and technical skills. Service learning represents a holistic approach to youth development and the building of multiple competencies. It is not limited to unpaid experiences or internships in nonprofit or public sectors; many programs offer stipends or other benefits and can be found in numerous sectors. (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1995)

Making the Connection in a School Improvement Context and Through National Initiatives

Service learning is playing a more central role in helping students develop academic competencies. Schools and school districts have begun to integrate applied learning experiences such as service learning into core academic curriculum to provide students real-world opportunities to develop skills and knowledge. Service-learning as a pedagogy, philosophy, and process brings together important elements necessary for educational and social reform. As a pedagogy, service learning changes the way in which the curriculum is organized and delivered--students are workers responsible for their own learning and teachers are coaches and facilitators of that learning. As a philosophy, service learning helps communities view youth in a new light; youth become resources to help solve problems in the school or greater community. As a process, service learning contextualizes learning and facilitates community-wide partnerships for lifelong learning.

School-to-work initiatives focus on improving and expanding the range school-based and work-based programs that prepare students for employment. The thrust of school-to-work initiatives is to combine academic courses and vocational courses in ways that both meet the needs of employers and provide one comprehensive system that serves all youth.

States and school districts are currently engaged in various phases of planning for and/or implementing three pieces of national legislation that have major implications for promoting service learning and school-to-work: the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and the National and Community Service Trust Act. Each of these have the potential to forge stronger connections between service learning and school-to-work within the context of school improvement.

- *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* calls for the development of comprehensive state education strategies that result in the attainment of the national education goals and lifelong learning systems. Under Goals 2000, categorical programs that address specific

phases in youth education and development must now be viewed as part of a system with many reinforcing and essential elements. Under Goals 2000, diverse programs dealing with early childhood, elementary, middle and secondary education as well as education for employment preparation must begin to function as part of a coordinated continuum of positive development and preparation for life.

- The *School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994* establishes a national framework within which all states can create high quality, statewide school-to-work opportunity systems designed to help youth identify and select paths to productive and progressively more rewarding employment. The Act requires that these systems be part of comprehensive efforts for education reform and be coordinated with recent reforms in vocational education.
- The *National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993* supports the creation and expansion of a continuum of national service, which includes school and community-based service-learning initiatives. The centerpiece of this legislation is AmeriCorps, which allows adult participants to earn education and training benefits in exchange for community service in areas of education, health, and public safety. Learn and Serve America makes funds available to state education agencies specifically for the design and implementation of service-learning programs in elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as community-based organizations, and higher education institutions. The Act encourages and supports the integration of service-learning into education reform and youth development programs such as school-to-work programs.

These initiatives are designed to serve distinct, yet compatible educational purposes. To achieve their goals, they rely on key stakeholders to form and strengthen partnerships between schools and surrounding communities and develop comprehensive plans. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act and Learn and Serve America both promote powerful educational programs that engage students in relevant and exciting learning experiences. Through Goals 2000, states,

schools, and communities can connect and coordinate school-to-work and service learning initiatives in a system that meets the educational and career development needs all children and youth. Combining service learning and school-to-work in a continuum of learning within a context of educational reform would result in a wider range of experiential learning opportunities available to students, educators, communities, and employers. It would allow for sharing of research and evaluation findings of best practices for improved learning and career development. It would provide an effective vehicle by which all students could develop personal and social responsibility skills while applying and further developing academic skills. And it would provide opportunities for students--in elementary, middle, and high school--to develop knowledge and to explore a wide variety of careers and prepare them to make more informed employment and college decisions. This type of coordination between these national initiatives is how systemic education reform will become a reality in schools across the country and benefit all students and communities.

State Action to Help Make the Connection

Vocational educators have used community-based and experiential learning strategies such as service learning for decades. It is not uncommon for a group of carpentry shop students to build park benches for the municipal park or the nurses aide students to help in a nursing home working with elderly as part of their studies. These are examples of the type of connections of which Stephen and Mary Agnes Hamilton write.

In recent years there have been efforts to combine service learning and school-to-work at the state policy and school district levels through a variety of initiatives. In 1993, the Minnesota state legislature passed the *Youth Works Act*, through which the state education agency embarked on a "study to combine community service activities and service-learning with work-based learning programs." (Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service, 1994) study resulted in a set of recommendations to encourage service learning/school-to-work linkages in state programs. Since that time Minnesota has included linkages to school-to-work in its Learn and Serve America applications for subgrantees and has integrated school-to-work activities in

its state administered AmeriCops programs. In 1995, South Carolina passed its state funded school-to-work legislation. In that legislation service learning was included as a strategy for helping students develop work readiness skills and competencies.

In 1994, as part of its on going service learning initiative, the Council of Chief State School Officers convened two meetings entitled, "Connecting Service Learning and School-to-Work." CCSSO brought together national experts and practitioners in service learning and school-to-work transition, state service learning coordinators, and program officers from the U.S. Department of Education and the Corporation for National Service to discuss the commonalities and differences between service learning and school-to-work and to develop strategies to encourage greater coordination and of the two program areas at the local level. Both meetings were useful in bringing more clarity to the connections between service learning and school-to-work in relation to the following specific areas: state implementation of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act; state school improvement efforts; and youth and community development initiatives.

State Implementation of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA). Service learning can help address issues of scale and access in implementation of the STWOA. The STWOA programs are intended to be for all students. School districts are faced with identifying and securing large numbers of work-site placements for their school-to-work program. Through well organized and planned service learning experiences *all* students in a school district can have the opportunity for a broad spectrum of exposures to the community and world of work. Service learning experiences can also provide non-paid career development and educational experiences to students as part of the whole system.

Combining service learning and school-to-work in a learning continuum provides students in the primary grades the opportunity to develop generic employment skills such as working in teams and responsibility at an early age. These skills--academic and personal--are those identified by employers as most desirable in employees.

Service learning can help address issues related to building greater public interest and support for school-to-work programs. State and school district STWO coordinators are frequently challenged by gaining support of the community and business leaders for education programs that place students in the community and/or worksite. The service learning process helps to build school/community partnerships as students work in their community meeting needs as part of their service (work). Service learning can help facilitate the development necessary partnerships with the community for school-to-work opportunities.

School Improvement Efforts. Most states and school districts are concerned with comprehensive systemic educational reform, either through Goals 2000 or other state or local education reform initiative. School-to-work programs and service learning are key learning strategies that can help build that comprehensive system. Service learning and school-to-work programs have the potential to address several critical weaknesses in the educational systems by making the curriculum and school experience more relevant--helping to keep students in school and motivating students to want to learn. They also help build meaningful community partnerships. Both methodologies focus on results for students, using acquired skills and knowledge as their measure of success. Service learning can also help to foster the development of an integrated academic and skills training integrated curriculum, as well as motivate academic and vocational education teachers to plan and work together.

Youth and Community Development Initiatives. Quality service learning and school-to-work experiences help young people develop a wide range of desirable skills and competencies. Through well-structured service learning and school-to-work activities, students can develop a sense of identity and self-awareness, based on the mastery of specific tasks or jobs. They can also develop a sense of purpose and direction that leads to setting educational and employment goals for the future. Communities receive valuable services to meet human, educational, health, and environmental needs. Schools and students become resources to solve problems, infusing new or different approaches for addressing needs in the community. Through service learning and school-to-work programs, students perform work (service)--e.g., construction and

remodeling housing, child care, or food service for the elderly--becoming active stakeholders and contributors to improving their community.

Making the Connection in Schools and Communities

In the spring of 1995, the Council launched an eighteen-month project aimed at identifying, examining, and documenting innovative school, school district, and community-based models that connect or combine service learning and school-to-work programs in a coherent educational system. From October 1995 to February 1996, the CCSSO Service Learning Project staff visited fifteen school, school district, and community-based models across the country and collected information about how school-to-work and service learning activities were being combined. The following examples illustrate how three communities are dealing with the challenges of developing coordinated curriculums that include a range of experiences to help prepare children and youth for careers, college, or immediate employment and responsible citizenship.

Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical High School. In 1986, then mayor Richard Neal, launched a district wide initiative in Springfield, Massachusetts to make service learning a part of the education of every student. The objectives of the district-wide service learning initiative included: integrating service learning into academic and vocational education; developing opportunities for students to demonstrate responsible citizenship; and providing students opportunities to contribute their time and talents to others, in school, in the neighborhood, and in the community. At Roger L. Putnam Vocational Technical High School this was an opportunity to combine many of the projects the students had already been involved in with service learning. Students were already providing service in their school and community through the various technical and vocational shops, as well as through extra-curricular clubs and activities. For example, students in the culinary arts shop prepared and served dinners for school-sponsored banquets and after school meetings. The print shop printed the school newspaper and sheet metal students manufactured duct work for the auto body shop. Carpentry shop students constructed bookcases for the guidance department. Students had also provided needed service

in the community. The health assistants students helped organize and conduct blood pressure clinics in one the shopping malls. Print shop students printed brochures, tickets and flyers for the Boy Scouts, Springfield Police Department, the municipal hospital and other civic associations. Carpentry students constructed rails and stairs for the physical therapy department at a local hospital and the auto mechanics and auto body students helped to keep city vehicles in repair.

Since 1986, the principal and faculty at Putnam have worked to develop the service projects into service learning experiences for all the students. Service learning is now broadly recognized as experiential, active learning that can be content specific or interdisciplinary. Although often project-based, service learning is being integrated comprehensively across the academic and vocational curriculum. Most of the school's 1400 students participate in service learning as part of their educational experience.

To meet the health needs of its students, the school district is partnering with the Health Department, Baystate Medical Center, the State Department of Public Health, and the University of Massachusetts Graduate School of Education and Nursing to build a school-based health center at Putnam. For the past four years, students from all of the school's shops have been working on this health center, which is one of the largest and most comprehensive school-based health centers in the country. The center is being built with financial help and support from private business partners, federal grants, and the local share of the state cigarette tax. Students have been involved in all aspects of the design and construction of the center. A Health Center steering committee, largely comprised of students, meets weekly and oversees the project.

The partnerships that have evolved through this project have had a direct impact on school curriculum. One example is the nursing program. According to the principal at Putnam, the partnership with the University of Massachusetts and Bay State Medical Center has been an a driving force in changing the nurses' aide training curriculum to a nurse practitioner training

curriculum. In addition Bay State Medical Center is an official partner in Putnam's school-to-work plan. Students in the school's health program will also do internships as part of their learning.

Through another project to restore a historic carriage house, Putnam students are learning about local history as they develop vocational and technical skills. The carriage house, built in 1885, was once part of a large estate owned by a prominent Springfield businessman. Several acres of the estate were donated to the city's Parks Department including the building. The cost for restoring the carriage house through private contractors was prohibitive for the Parks Department. Three years ago, Putnam students began work to restore the building as part of their carpentry training. Since then other shops such as electrical, heating, ventilation and air conditioning, and drafting have been involved in all aspects of the restoration. Eventually, the landscaping shop will beautify the grounds around the building. According to the teachers, it is not uncommon for graduates, who are now employed in a specific trade, to return and volunteer their time to work on the project along with current Putnam students. In another two years the restoration will be complete. The carriage house will be used for public meetings, receptions, and special events and will be a source of revenue for the Parks Department. By then hundreds of Putnam students will have worked in the project and contributed to restoring a historic landmark and to the development of the community.

Turner Middle School. The University of Pennsylvania and the West Philadelphia community are transforming a conventional inner-city school into a "cosmopolitan community school." The entire academic curriculum at Turner Middle School is linked to overcoming the problems of its catchment area, resulting in the development of a holistic, action-oriented curriculum; a school-based primary health care facility; and a school-based job training center for catchment area residents. For students, job training is viewed as a "strategic, psychological, and pedagogical means" to help them overcome alienation, develop higher order thinking and problem-solving skills, and build social and interpersonal skills. A teacher works as a community-school coordinator to liaison with university faculty, community representatives,

and school staff and to facilitate "sustained, long-term, face-to-face, communal participatory action research" to bring about this transformation.

This effort began as a summer institute for at-risk students and will eventually progress through various developmental phases--a school-within-a-school, a schoolwide, and district and community-wide model. Students learn math, English, science, and social studies through the exploration of health issues, including nutrition, AIDS, hypertension, substance abuse, cancer prevention, injuries, cholesterol, and ophthalmology. For example, under the leadership of a Penn Anthropology professor, the Community Health Watch program involves students in conducting a neighborhood health survey to explore local health habits. Results are compiled for a community health data base and community brochure and newsletter. In addition, students are trained and supervised by Penn Medical School students and staff to host health screenings for community residents on hypertension, ophthalmology, and cardiovascular risk.

Turner's Neighborhood Disease Prevention Program involves students in providing full and detailed prevention assessments for 150 adults per year. In addition, students become familiar with health care professions through volunteer work, visits, and discussions with hospital, health care, and day care center staff in the West Philadelphia community. To support this focus on community wellness, the Turner school also hosts free adult and community education classes for catchment area residents, taught by teachers, residents, specialists, and university students.

Bluebonnet Applied Learning Academy. Students at Bluebonnet Applied Learning Academy in Fort Worth, Texas learn through a method of instruction that helps them understand the connections between in-school learning and out-of-school problems. Students create a variety of products that others can use, which helps them relate their class work to the world outside. Students routinely make decisions about projects and their related work, while teachers guide, monitor, and assess the progress of students working independently and in groups.

The Applied Learning Academy grew out of the C3 Project, a district wide effort to bring together community, corporations, and classrooms to create a new education system. Through the C3 Project, the school district, the community, and over 300 Fort Worth companies developed a list of competencies and skills that are critical to success in the work world. The C3 Project participants found that the writing competencies and skills needed in the workplace differed significantly from those taught in the classroom. In addition, the C3 data suggested that business values people's ability to solve problems and to work productively as members of groups, two competencies not always addressed in traditional academic settings.

In the summer of 1991, the school district brought together teachers from across grade levels and content areas to design classroom projects that would address the competencies and skills in the C3 report that had been identified as critical to success in the work world. The teachers made several important discoveries as they worked on these projects, learning what research has long suggested. Their conclusion was that students learn best when they: use interdisciplinary concepts and process to solve ill-defined problems; function as members of multiple groups; use documents and sources of information other than textbooks; create a variety of products that others can use; relate the work of the classroom to the world outside of school; influence and shape the course of their own learning; and model their performance upon that of competent adults. As a result of the work done by the original group of teachers, today all Applied Learning Academy teachers work to foster student independence and responsibility through project-based instruction.

All the projects require students to use skills drawn from various content areas, although writing is of fundamental importance to all the work in this program. All the projects relate the work of the classroom to life outside of school--either in the community or in the business world. For example, health students studying muscular development and physical fitness design, develop, and distribute work-out equipment kits and video instructions for children at homeless shelters who have limited opportunities for outdoor play. History students use research to develop video vignette of historical events for the Texas Highway Department's Visitor Centers. Some

students have planned and produced the district's Parent Volunteer Program manual and the New Teacher Handbook. Other projects have included coordinating the district's annual Young Author's Conference, advocating for the homeless and troubled teenagers, and publishing a community newsletter.

These examples illustrate how combining well-designed service learning and school-to-work experiences enables students to develop employment skills and academic competencies while helping to improve their communities.

Challenges and Issues

There are several challenges and issues that can hinder schools from connecting service learning and school-to-work as part of a school improvement effort. Both strategies require significant change in how schools operate--structural changes in scheduling of classes and moving students from the school into the community; organizational changes in the way the curriculum is delivered to the students; attitudinal changes on the part of teachers, parents, and students about experiential education; and changes in the relationship between schools, communities, and employers. The programs that the Council visited as part of its study are works in progress. Although most have found solutions (sometimes temporary solutions) to many of the challenges, the work involved in improving schools systemically and for all students is an on-going process. Based on observations and interviews with teachers, administrators, students, and community members, CCSSO has identified three challenges that schools and communities must address in order to successfully combine school-to-work and service learning activities within a school improvement context.

Definitions and Purposes. Service learning and school-to-work are intended to have distinct purposes and goals regarding student results--service learning is primarily intended to enhance academic learning and civic responsibility, while school-to-work programs are concerned with preparing students to be productive workers. This distinction has prevented some states and school districts from even engaging in a discussion about combining the two. Related to this is

the way in which *service* and *work* are defined by educators, service learning practitioners, and employers. For some educators the term *service* conjures up notions of altruism and selflessness. *Work*, on the other hand, brings to mind terms such as labor, difficulty, and skill-related. (Furco, 1996) Another way work or service is defined is by where the work or activity takes place. In school-to-work the center of learning is considered the workplace (e.g. business or industry). In service learning it is the school or greater community.

In addition, work usually connotes an activity for which an individual is paid. Many, though not all, youth service and service learning experts hold the opinion that service is an activity for which the student or youth is ideally not paid. These issues are further complicated by the major funding sources used in most communities for these activities. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act encourages school districts to pay students for work-based activities. Business and industry are the only employers the Act requires to be included in planning or implementation of STWO plans. Conversely, school and community-based programs funded under Learn and Serve America are prohibited from paying students for doing service. Learn and Serve America does, however, encourage states and LEAs to make linkages to school-to-work programs in their applications.

One way to address this challenge is to examine what students do when they are engaged in either activity and what the intended and unintended results are. The dictionary defines *work* as *an activity in which one exerts strength or faculties to do or perform something; a specific task, duty, function or assignment often being a part or phase of some larger activity*. *Service* is defined as *the work performed by one who serves, gives good, help, use for the benefit of others*. Both definitions connote action or the active engagement in doing or producing something of value. Based on information CCSSO gathered at several of the study sites, students involved in school-to-work and service learning activities are performing specific tasks (work and/or service) that have meaning to them and benefit others while developing important employment and technical skills. The work/service is being performed in a variety of places--the school, the worksite, the community.

For example, one of the study sites engages students as laboratory research assistants, technicians, and nurses aides in various departments of a community/teaching hospital. The hospital and school are located in the inner city of a large urban area. According to the school principal and worksite placement coordinator, the intended goal of these work experience placements is to help students learn about medical careers and develop employment readiness skills. When students were asked about their work at the hospital, they said that in addition to learning about medical careers and the world of work, they were also providing a “service” to their community through the work they were performing. They added that service to the community was part of being a productive adult. Although enhancing civic responsibility is not an explicit goal of this program or a student outcome expected by the adults, it is an unintended result that the students have identified and clearly value.

Regarding the question of paid vs. unpaid work, vocational educators and workers in youth employment have long recognized unpaid work experience as a viable way to help youth develop job readiness skills and to learn specific, job-related competencies. On the other hand, there are several outstanding service learning examples where students are paid a small stipend for the service/work they perform. In most cases, the payment is an incentive to encourage students who would not normally be able to become involved in service learning for economic or other reasons. Many times these types of initiatives operate through the summer months or during school vacations when students of working age would normally have a paying job. In addition, community-based service learning programs often involve out-of-school youth, for whom payment can be an key incentive for participation. The real challenge is helping school administrators, faculty, work site supervisors, and communities design comprehensive programs that take a holistic approach to preparing students for productive employment. This includes development of specific work and academic skills as well as competencies for responsible citizenship through activities such service learning.

Changing Attitudes. Changing perceptions and attitudes about teaching and learning are common challenges for both school-to-work and service learning. Although service learning

and school-to-work are both forms of experiential education, the attitudes or perceptions about the two in schools is different. Historically, experiential education has been linked with vocational education and often has been considered "non-academic" by many educators. In high schools and middle schools, vocational technical education has sometimes been viewed for "non-college bound" or "lower track" students. Although, there are efforts underway to fully integrate academic and vocational technical education and de-track programs, this attitude is still found among teachers, administrators, parents, and students. In some communities this perception has become a barrier to successful implementation of local school-to-work initiatives.

On the other hand, student service or school-based service traditionally has been linked to extra-curricular or co-curricular activities. It has been viewed, especially by teachers, as something "nice" for students to do when there is time to do it after the "real work" of school is done. Many educators, parents, community members and policy makers are not aware of the potential for service learning to enhance academic achievement and help students develop other important life skills. The challenge for those in the school-to-work and service learning fields is to raise the level of awareness and understanding about the benefits and results of both methods among all stakeholders (e.g. parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers). Building stronger public engagement and understanding about these methods of teaching and learning will help to increase the availability of service learning and school-to-work opportunities in all schools for all students.

Professional Development and Other Resources. Teachers play a critical role in determining the success of any school improvement effort. In the service learning and school-to-work fields, there is concern about the role of teachers and the type of support they need in order to effectively use these experiential learning methods. Teachers need opportunities for on-going professional development in both areas. At several of the schools visited in our study, teachers expressed a need for time to plan and to work together to develop integrated curriculum or to coordinate curriculum and activities. Even in those school districts that have comprehensive professional development programs where teachers have year-round professional development

opportunities and resources available to them, the issue of *time* remained high on the list of concerns. Other concerns frequently identified by teachers included: assistance in working with the community (employers) for establishing relationships for service or work placements and with other important logistical issues; and support and involvement from parents and community/employers.

There is not one specific solution to any of these challenges. Several of the schools and district models visited for our study have used a combination of approaches to meet these and other challenges. However, there are some solutions that are common among the models that seem to have the most promise in regards to student results. These include: a district-wide or school wide vision and plan for school improvement that includes service learning and/or school-to-work as key components; ongoing teacher training or professional development and resources for that purpose; significant parental involvement; and strong community and employer support and commitment to community development and student success.

Conclusion

Connecting service learning and school-to-work as part of a school improvement effort is not an easy task. There are challenges and issues that must be addressed and careful planning done in order for students to reap the full benefit of these similar approaches. However, it would be short sighted for schools and communities to choose not to connect, or at the very least coordinate, these two approaches as a means of realizing their vision for achievement and career and citizenship development for all children and youth. Service learning and school-to-work are important components of a comprehensive educational system that focuses on the students' total needs. Both approaches help students achieve a broader range of skills and competencies needed for success beyond school--whether in college, the workplace, or the community. States, schools, and communities are working on national initiatives--Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, the National and Community Service Trust Act, and the Improving America's Schools Act--that can help to forge stronger connections between service learning and school-to-work within the context of education reform. These initiatives

provide resources to states, schools, and communities to develop a comprehensive vision and system of education and career development. The objective is to create coherent systems that will foster the development of the desired knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes, values, and behavior to prepare students for informed citizenship, healthy lifestyles, and productive employment. The goals we want for children and youth are clear. Creating the comprehensive systems and unitizing effective strategies such as service learning and school-to-work will help us realize those goals.

This article is adapted from the final report of the *Connecting Service Learning and School-to-Work* project, to be published this summer. The project is part of the Council of Chief State School Officers Service Learning Initiative. CCSSO will also be conducting a national conference on connecting service learning and school-to-work this fall, featuring several of the school and district included in the report. For more information concerning the project, please contact Barbara Gomez, Director, Service Learning Project at (202) 336-7026.

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