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This report by Civic Enterprises details how service-learning projects—an important part of many leadership classes and student activity programs—address the root causes of dropouts and engage students of all backgrounds to learn and achieve.

Service Learning Engages Students and Addresses Root Causes of the Dropout Crisis

A 2008 report by Civic Enterprises offers new hope and inspiration for reducing dropouts and creating a generation of engaged, responsible young people prepared to succeed in college and career and improve their communities. *Engaged for Success*, a report released last year at the National Service-Learning Conference, details how service-learning projects address the root causes of dropouts and engage students of all backgrounds to learn and achieve. The report was commissioned by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Case Foundation for the National Conference on Citizenship.

When high school dropouts were asked what schools could have done to help them graduate, 81 percent said that more hands-on learning opportunities such as internships and service learning would have improved their chances of staying in school. This report finds that service learning can help address students' poor attendance and lack of motivation, and help them see the connection between classroom learning and real-world applications. Students most at risk for dropping out express the most interest in service learning, yet too few have access to it.

"This is exciting news for our nation's economic and civic vitality," said John Bridgeland, president and CEO of Civic Enterprises, a Washington, D.C.-based public policy development firm dedicated to informing discussions on issues of importance to the nation, and the report's lead author. "We are not only learning how to reduce dropouts, we have the prospect of creating a new generation of voters, problem solvers, innovators, and leaders."

For the report, Peter D. Hart Research Associates surveyed a diverse group of more than 800 current high school students between the ages of 14 and 18 from across the country. Eighty-two percent of students surveyed who participate in service-learning projects said their feelings about attending

school have become more positive as a direct result. Eighty-three percent of all students surveyed said they would enroll in service-learning classes if they were offered at their school. Sixty-five percent of all students and 70 percent of African American students find the idea of service-learning appealing, but only 16 percent of all students, and only eight percent of students at low-performing schools, said their school offers service-learning.

"We need students who graduate from high school prepared to succeed in today's global economy," said Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass. "We also need students who understand the value of service and helping others. This report asks us to think creatively about using service learning to help students stay in school and graduate, and become the well-educated, engaged citizens we know we'll need in the years to come."

Engaged for Success builds on two groundbreaking 2006 reports— *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* and *America's Civic Health Index*. *The Silent Epidemic* uncovered important insights from students about why they drop out. The survey found that dropouts sought more challenge, relevance and support in school. *America's Civic Health Index* showed that high school dropouts were completely missing from the civic lives of their communities, failing to vote, volunteer, or advocate for reforming schools that were failing them.

Engaged for Success profiles Washington, D.C., ninth grade students at Cesar Chavez Public Charter School for Public Policy, who became actively engaged in the debate over whether a dilapidated central library should be renovated or replaced. The students met with local community leaders, visited other libraries throughout the city, and ultimately selected three students to testify at a City Council hearing on the issue. Student participants said it motivated them to show up and work hard in school

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because they were involved in something that they felt was relevant to themselves and their communities.

Cost-Effective Solution

As school districts, states and the federal government debate how to best address our dropout crisis, service learning offers a cost-effective solution.

For example, Learn and Serve America, a federal program that annually provides \$34–\$43 million in grants to K–12 schools, could use these resources to reduce dropouts and produce students prepared for success in college, career, and life. *Engaged for Success* provides recommendations for incorporating effective service-learning projects in schools and communities:

- Make service-learning programs available to more students.
- Use service learning as a preventative tool for

students who show early warning signs that may put them at risk for dropping out.

- Encourage teachers to incorporate service learning into their lesson plans.
- Build strong partnerships between school districts, colleges and universities, youth organizations, local governments, and community groups.
- Channel federal resources to encourage more service learning.
- Foster a national dialogue on service learning to increase awareness among policymakers and educators on the role it can play in addressing the dropout crisis.

To download the full report, visit www.casefoundation.org/pressroom/publications/engaged-for-success-service-learning-as-tool-for-high-school-dropout-prevention

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