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# Service Learning in Christian High Schools Associated with Christian Schools International

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# Service Learning in Christian High Schools Associated with Christian Schools International

**Abstract**

This study examines the frequency of the implementation of service learning in Christian Schools International (CSI) high schools in the United States and Canada. Additionally, this study examines the perceived effectiveness of service learning programs in these schools. The researcher collected data through a survey of 78 school leaders. The survey questions utilized a Likert scale response in which the responses were coded and averaged. Of the 78 school leaders surveyed, 63.2% of the respondents indicated that their school does service learning. The study found that schools are planning their service learning opportunities in accordance with accepted standards more than occasionally and report that the effectiveness of their service learning opportunities are in accordance with accepted standards at least very frequently.

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Department of Education  
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Service learning in Christian High Schools Associated with Christian Schools International

by

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**Table of Contents**

Title Page ..... i

Approval ..... ii

Table of Contents ..... iii

List of Figures and Tables..... iv

Abstract ..... v

Introduction..... 1

Literature Review..... 3

Methods..... 9

Results..... 12

Discussion ..... 16

References ..... 22

Appendices

    Appendix A: Introductory Letter ..... 27

    Appendix B: Service Learning Survey ..... 28

Acknowledgements..... 33

Vita..... 34

List of Figures and Tables

Figure

1. Figure 1: Survey Questions about Planning and Implementation .....	10
2. Figure 2: Survey Questions about Effectiveness .....	11
3. Figure 3: Schools Implementing Service learning .....	13

Table

1. Table 1: Planning and Implementation Responses Statistics .....	14
2. Table 2: Effectiveness of Service learning Responses Statistics .....	14

## Abstract

This study examines the frequency of the implementation of service learning in Christian Schools International (CSI) high schools in the United States and Canada. Additionally, this study examines the perceived effectiveness of service learning programs in these schools. The researcher collected data through a survey of 78 school leaders. The survey questions utilized a Likert scale response in which the responses were coded and averaged. Of the 78 school leaders surveyed, 63.2% of the respondents indicated that their school does service learning. The study found that schools are planning their service learning opportunities in accordance with accepted standards more than occasionally and report that the effectiveness of their service learning opportunities are in accordance with accepted standards at least very frequently.

The life of a Christian is a life of service. One need to look no further than the life of Jesus to see that service is essential. In Matthew 20:26-28, Jesus told his disciples that “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Christian schools have a responsibility to teach the importance of service to their students. Doherty (1969) noted that service programs “provide experiences that lead to a sense of responsibility; for bringing the Christ within...to others, especially the poor and neglected” (p. 69).

Fulfilling the mission of a school is the fundamental goal of every classroom teacher. Regardless of the foundational purpose of that school, everything that happens in any part of the curriculum should be ultimately grounded in the goal of fulfillment of the mission. Many Christian high schools include service to God and to others as a goal for their students. In a sample of 20 Christian high schools associated with Christian Schools International, 13 included “service,” or a variant thereof (service, servant, serving) in their mission statement. An additional four schools identified discipleship or becoming disciples as part of their mission. Only two did not imply or clearly state preparation for a life of service after high school. If preparation for a life of service to God and others is the goal of the majority of Christian schools, then schools should be seeking out the best practices in their curriculum and instruction to fulfill that mission.

In the past, many Christian schools have attempted to meet service expectations through some form of community service, either voluntary or required (Smies, 2004; VanOtterloo, 2004; Visser, 2004). Community service does often meet a real and immediate need in the community



and can have a positive effect on students (Visser, 2004). However, community service activities are not designed to be an integral part of the school's curriculum. As a school, the curriculum should be unified so that all parts work together to reinforce each other and to demonstrate in a meaningful way the unity of creation (Van Brummelen, 2002). Since many Christian schools count it among their goals to reflect the unity of creation in their curriculum, service learning seems to be a better option compared to community service.

Christian schools that implement service learning in their curriculum are not beginning with a blank slate. Service learning has been a part of American education since the time of John Dewey, but has gained in popularity since the passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, & Brahler, 2004). Service learning has gained much attention as an instructional method with great potential to have a positive impact on increased student engagement, improved academic achievement, improved character and social behavior, exposure to new careers, and stronger ties to schools, communities, and society (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2002).

A leading service learning organization, The Corporation for National and Community Service (2011) has defined service learning as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.” For schools that have clearly identified service to God and to others as a priority, properly implemented service learning should receive attention as an instructional method that will help educators fulfill the school's mission statement. The purpose of this study is to determine if Christian schools are implementing service learning and if service learning is being implemented in accordance with accepted standards of excellence.

## **Research Questions**

The intent of this study is to answer two questions:

1. How many Christian high schools are implementing service learning programs?
2. Are the schools that are implementing service learning doing so in accord with recognized standards of effective service learning?

## **Definition of Terms**

Service learning: “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2011)

## **Literature Review**

During the 1970s, the theoretical foundations behind service learning became fully developed and by the 1990s, the concept began to spread to schools and college campuses around the country. Today, there are several states that have passed laws requiring schools to include service learning in their curriculum. The National Center for Education Statistics recently estimated that during the 2000-01 school year, over 13 million students were involved with service learning activities. (Fiske, 2002) Although the name, “service learning,” is still foreign to many community members, once it is explained, upwards of 90% of those asked said they would support service learning programs in their schools.

As service learning has been implemented in more locations and more research has been done on the best practices for effective service learning, a set of standards has been developed to help guide leaders and practitioners of service learning. As the body of research on effective service learning has increased, the list of standards for effective service learning has been refined. The National Service learning Cooperative (1998) published a list of 11 essential

elements of effective service learning. These 11 elements were organized into three “clusters” focusing on learning, service, and critical components that support learning and service.

Since 1998, leading service learning practitioners associated with the National Youth Leadership Council and the National Service learning Cooperative continued to revisit the published standards and over the next ten years revised the accepted list to eight “Standards and Indicators for Effective Service learning Practice.” (Weah, 2007) In 2008, the National Youth Leadership Council published these standards and in doing so, provided clear guidelines for successful service learning experiences. These eight standards are 1) meaningful service, 2) links to the curriculum, 3) reflection, 4) diversity, 5) youth voice, 6) partnerships, 7) progress monitoring, and 8) duration and intensity. (RMC Research Corporation, 2008)

### **Meaningful Service**

The first standard for service learning is that students are applying problem-solving and critical thinking skills to their community in a real-world environment. (Weah, Byers, & Malone, 2006) Indicators here include service-learning experiences that are appropriate for students’ ages and that address issues the students believe are important, (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005).

Additional considerations here are that the service opportunities are interesting and engaging for the participants (Furco, 2002)

### **Links to the Curriculum**

This next standard checks that the service learning is integrated into the curriculum so that it helps students to meet learning objectives and/or content standards. According to Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005), one of the strongest predictors of positive academic outcomes was the presence of strong connections to the goals of the curriculum. In addition, when service learning

is connected to the curriculum, teachers report that students master more knowledge and skills than without the use of service learning. (Potts, Kirkham, Monsour, Grinde, & Planner, 2001)

### **Reflection**

For service learning to be effective for students, practitioners must provide several opportunities for students to meaningfully reflect on what they have learned and how they have served their community. The first challenge is for the students to be cognitively challenged in their reflection practices. According to Billig, Root, and Jesse, (2005) more civic knowledge was gained by students who were challenged in their reflection activities. Students' reflections about their service learning activities should also include "a variety of verbal, written, artistic, and nonverbal activities to demonstrate understandings and changes in participants' knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes" (Billig & Weah, 2008, p. 11) such as the multiple intelligences proposed by Howard Gardner.

According to Eyler and Giles, (1999) reflection is not a one-time event, but rather is a practice that should be done before, during, and after the time of service. Certainly, this is not a simple task that can be lightly glossed over by the teacher who might assume students are able to "take a step back" from their actions and find meaning in them. Pritchard and Whitehead (2004, p. 203) recommended that the following considerations be kept in mind:

1. Reflection unites information and experience in meaning
2. Reflection is a process that can be learned and enhanced by practice.
3. Pushing students to reflect can be difficult and frustrating for them and for team members who work with them.
4. When the reflection process works, the benefits in deeper learning are truly worthwhile.

5. Time is essential for effective reflection.

### **Diversity**

Effective service learning experiences advance an understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all involved. Through service learning, participants come into contact with those who come from backgrounds different than their own. Service learning should help participants identify and analyze different points of view that will help them understand perspectives other than their own and challenge their preconceived ideas about various cultural issues (Wong, 2008). In a study of pre-service teachers, it was found that service learning had a positive effect on their attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions regarding multiculturalism. (Wade, Boyle-Baise, & O'Grady, 2001)

### **Youth Voice**

As schools continue to strive to prepare students for service after graduation, giving students opportunities to plan, practice, and evaluate their service learning experiences is a goal that schools should strive for. Students who were able to make their own decisions in service learning have been shown to display higher levels of academic engagement (Hart, 2007). Self-confidence, interpersonal communication, and critical thinking skills all increased in students who took ownership of the development and presentation of their service learning projects (Bradley, et al., 2007). When students involved in service learning had opportunities to express themselves, they were found to have made greater gains in political knowledge, were less cynical, and were more likely to be politically active (Morgan & Streb, 2003).

### **Partnerships**

For service learning to be effective, the partnerships that the school and students establish with community members and agencies must be collaborative, mutually beneficial, and must

address community needs (RMC Research Corporation, 2008). According to Wade (1997), teachers, students, and community members gained skills, met real needs of the community, and gained greater understandings of their communities when they were part of a strong service learning partnership. In order for service learning situations to be lasting, it is critically important that the partnerships be reciprocal (Ammon, Furco, Chi, & Middaugh, 2002; Billig, 2000). A reciprocal service learning opportunity is one in which both the student and the community are challenged and rewarded. If either the student or the community is only receiving a benefit and not contributing (or vice versa), the partnership will not likely last very long. According to Bailis (2000, p. 12), the most important thing to do to develop a sustainable and long-term service learning partnership is to make sure that partnership is “long-term, well-designed, and mutually beneficial, characterized by collaborative communication and interaction between stakeholders and using efficient leveraging of community assets.” Clearly, an effective service learning experience will not be a unilateral relationship. Both the student and the community must have something to give to and gain from the other.

### **Progress Monitoring**

As an effective service learning experience typically progresses over several weeks or months, it is important that the progress the participants are making is being monitored by a teacher consistently. As service learning must target specific learning objectives, these goals should be held up and measured as the goal of the experience. According to Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005), students reported enjoyment of subject matters and increased value in their experiences when their service learning was monitored and assessed. This effective monitoring of service learning can include written feedback on students’ written reflections (Greene & Diehm, 1995). According to Shumer (1997), reflection and feedback were not just helpful, but

necessary for service learning practitioners to keep track of what the students were doing and to identify if the goals were being met.

### **Duration and Intensity**

Effective service learning experiences must be of an appropriate amount of time. Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) found that service learning projects that lasted longer were slightly more beneficial, but semester-length efforts were only slightly less beneficial than those that lasted a year. Students in a 15-week service learning course reported that they experienced a change in their personal views, and were able to facilitate changes in the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of others (Colby, Bercaw, Clark, & Galiardi, 2009). The duration of service learning has been shown to have a positive effect on students' commitment to learning and their value of school, social responsibility, and locus of control (Billig & Brodersen, 2007; Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeir, & Benson, 2006) A study done by Eylar and Giles (1997) showed that as service learning experiences were more intense, students were given more opportunities to make contributions to the community, perform more challenging tasks, and develop a greater sense of ownership over their project. A marker of an effective service learning experience was less the quantity of hours of contact time than the quality of that time spent performing meaningful service (Blyth, Saito, & Berkas, 1997).

### **Summary**

Clearly, there are very well defined standards for effective service learning. These are high standards with a great deal of research and study supporting them. There seems to be little unturned ground in the area of study regarding what defines effective service learning. With this in mind, the purpose of this study is to determine how many high schools within CSI are

implementing service learning and if those schools are implementing service learning according to these widely accepted standards.

### **Methods**

The participants of this study included school leaders from Christian high schools associated with Christian Schools International (CSI). Schools outside of the United States or Canada were not included in this study. The researcher utilized the online CSI school directory (Christian Schools International, 2011) to assemble the most up-to-date list of CSI high schools. A master list of 153 schools met the qualifications of being included in the CSI directory, offering classes in 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grades, being located in the United States or Canada, and having a valid contact email listed either on the CSI online school directory or their school's webpage.

A survey was designed and distributed using SurveyMonkey.com. (Appendix B) The first questions asked which types of service were a part of their school's activities and were structured in a yes/no format. Respondents that indicated they did service learning were then directed to the next portion of the survey that asked how frequently their service learning opportunities met various markers of high-quality service learning. These questions focused on how frequently the school was providing opportunities for highly effective service learning experiences. Responses to these questions were structured in a Likert scale. The five potential responses in this section were labeled and coded as follows: Never (1), Rarely (2), Occasionally (3), Very frequently (4), and Always (5). Figure 1 summarizes the statements found in this section.



Figure 1: Survey Questions about Planning and Implementation

*Please tell us a little more about what service learning opportunities look like at your school.*

*Are your service learning opportunities:*

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Very Frequently	Always
Coded Value ( <i>not seen in the survey</i> )	1	2	3	4	5
Providing students with opportunities to problem solve?					
Intentionally matched to stated learning goals?					
An integral part of course assignments?					
Providing opportunities for student reflection?					
Providing student contact with diverse members of the community?					
Planned with the help of a teacher or knowledgeable adults?					
Allowing students a strong voice in planning the experience?					
Assessed during the experience? (formative)					
Assessed after the experience? (summative)					

The first Likert scale section was followed by another similarly structured collection of statements about service learning in which respondents indicated how frequently the statements were true for the experiences of their students. In this second collection of questions, which focused on the perceived impact of service learning on the students, the five potential responses were labeled and coded as follows: Not Applicable (1), Sometime Applicable (2), Often Applicable (3), Usually Applicable (4), and Always Applicable (5). Figure 2 summarizes the statements found in this section.

Figure 2: Survey Questions about Effectiveness

*As you evaluate your service learning program and its impact on the students and the community, how would you rank the following statements?*

	Not applicable	Sometimes applicable	Often applicable	Usually applicable	Always applicable
Coded Value ( <i>not seen in the survey</i> )	1	2	3	4	5
"The service learning experience is personally meaningful for the students."					
"After participating in a service learning experience, the students have developed a greater respect for members of the community."					
"The service learning experience is equally beneficial to the students and the community."					

The remainder of the survey was made up of question about the duration of students' service learning opportunities. The final questions of the survey gave respondents opportunity to share contact information (Appendix B).

The introductory letter was sent to potential participating school leaders via the email address posted on the CSI website. This letter identified the researcher and the purpose of the survey, defined service learning, and thanked them for taking time to complete the survey (Appendix A). One week after the initial contact, a follow-up email was sent to all schools that had not yet completed the survey. At this time, the contact email addresses were also checked against contact information found on the individual schools' websites. When possible, the contact email was changed to that of a high school principal. After 12 days, the survey was closed.

A pilot study was constructed and assembled on Survey Monkey. Several accredited school counselors from across the US who work in CSI high schools were asked to take the survey and offer feedback. These school counselors were selected with the understanding that they would not complete the actual survey when it was sent out. Rather, their principal would complete the survey on behalf of their school. The responses indicated that the survey was easy to understand, took approximately 10 minutes to complete, and provided opportunity to accurately describe their schools' varying approaches to service, including service learning.

## **Results**

### **Data Analysis**

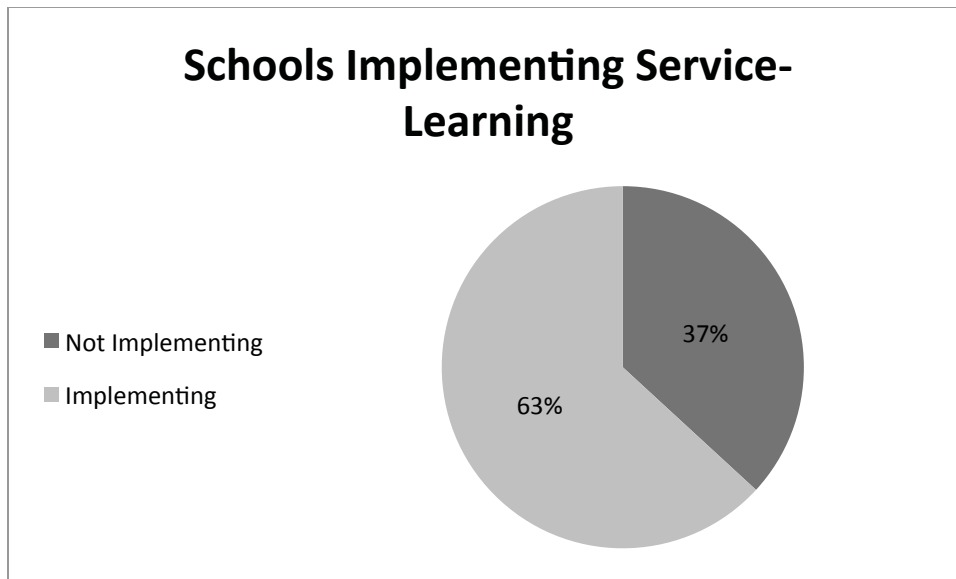
To address the first research question of “Are Christian schools implementing service learning programs?” responses were collected from 76 different schools, an initial response rate of 50%. Of the 76 responding schools, 48 (63.2%) indicated that they provide service-learning opportunities that are integrated into courses. Thus, these 48 schools became the population for the second research question of “Are these schools implementing service learning programs in accord with recognized standards?”

The number of responses to each question was multiplied by its coded value. These five products were summed and divided by 48, the number of total responses, yielding the mean values of all the responses. Median and standard deviation were also calculated for each question in the survey.

## Findings

In response to the first research question, “How many Christian high schools are implementing service learning programs?” the findings of this study showed that nearly 2 out of 3 (63.2%) CSI high schools are implementing service learning programs.

Figure 3: Schools Implementing Service learning



Since the remainder of the survey was organized around two sets of questions exploring how these schools implemented service learning, the following description of the findings will likewise be represented in two sets of tables and charts.

Basic calculations of the survey data revealed the mean, median, and standard deviation for the responses to each of the questions in the first section of the survey and are shared in Table

1.

Table 1: Planning and Implementation Responses Statistics

<i>Are your service learning opportunities:</i>	<i>Range: 1 to 5</i>	<i>Range: 1 to 5</i>	
	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.
Providing students with opportunities to problem solve?	3.56	3	0.769
Intentionally matched to stated learning goals?	3.31	3	0.829
An integral part of course assignments?	3.25	3	0.838
Providing opportunities for student reflection?	3.71	4	0.713
Providing student contact with diverse members of the community?	3.67	4	0.781
Planned with the help of a teacher or other knowledgeable adults?	4.33	4	0.753
Allowing students a strong voice in planning the experience?	3.63	4	0.815
Assessed during the experience? (formative)	3.21	3	1.031
Assessed after the experience? (summative)	3.60	4	0.917
<b>Average</b>	<b>3.59</b>		

Basic calculations of the survey data revealed the mean, median, and standard deviation for the responses to each of the questions in the second section of the survey and are shared in Table 2.

Table 2: Effectiveness of Service learning Responses Statistics

<i>As you evaluate your service learning program and its impact on the students and the community, how would you rank the following statements:</i>	<i>Range: 1 to 5</i>	<i>Range: 1 to 5</i>	
	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.
The service learning experience is personally meaningful for the students.	3.96	4	0.874
After participating in a service learning experience, the students have developed a greater respect for members of the community.	3.98	4	0.838
The service learning experience is equally beneficial to the students and the community.	4.19	4	0.704
<b>Average</b>	<b>4.04</b>		

CSI high schools that are offering service learning are implementing it in a way that meets the accepted standards more often than not. Each measurement of frequency for markers of effective service learning opportunities was at least occasional or better (3.59 average). The question with the lowest score (3.21) and highest measure of standard deviation (1.031) was “Are your service learning opportunities assessed during the experience (formative)?”

The survey question with the second lowest score in the markers of effective service learning opportunities section was “Are your service learning opportunities an integral part of course assignments?” The average score for this question was 3.25 with a standard deviation of 0.838. 17% of respondents indicated that this happened either “never” or “rarely” in their school.

The next highest scores ranged from 3.56 to 3.71. These questions included “Are your service learning opportunities providing students with opportunities to problem solve?” (3.56), “Are your service learning opportunities assessed after the experience (summative)?” (3.60), “Are your service learning opportunities allowing students a strong voice in planning the experience?” (3.63), “Are your service learning opportunities providing your students with diverse members of the community?” (3.67), and “Are your service learning opportunities providing opportunities for student reflection?” (3.71). The scored responses to these questions all were quite close to the overall average of this section, 3.59.

The question with the highest average score of 4.33 was “Are your service learning opportunities planned with the help of a teacher or other knowledgeable adults?” Forty-eight percent of all respondents indicated that this always happens in their service learning opportunities.

In the second set of questions that explored the effectiveness of service learning for students by asking how applicable each of three statements was, the average score for these three measures of applicability was reported to be “usually applicable” or greater (4.04 average). The first of these applicability statements, “The service learning experience is personally meaningful for the students,” was calculated out to an average coded response of 3.96, with 50% of respondents indicating this statement was “usually applicable” for their school.

The response to the second of these statements, “After participating in a service learning experience, the students have developed a greater respect for members of the community,” was very similar to the prior statement. Here too, 50% of the responses were that this was a “usually applicable” statement with an average coded response of 3.98.

The final statement of this applicability section was the most agreeable to respondent with 54% indicating “usually applicable” and 33% indicating “always applicable” to this statement: “The service learning experience is equally beneficial to students and the community.”

## **Discussion**

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was two-fold. The first research question was “Are Christian Schools International’s high schools implementing service learning?” The second research question was “Are the schools that are doing service learning doing so in accordance with accepted standards?”

According to the survey responses, the answer to the first research question is that nearly two out of three (63.2%) high schools are implementing service learning. Considering that there has not been an organized or concerted effort by Christian Schools International to encourage its member schools to implement service learning, this seems to be a strong showing and suggests that CSI high schools are actively engaging their students in service learning.. Service learning is a widely implemented teaching strategy in CSI high schools across the United States and Canada.

The answer to the second research question is more nuanced. Two areas in which CSI high schools are doing quite well are 1) teachers helping students plan their service learning experiences and 2) finding service learning opportunities that are beneficial to the student and the community. Nearly half (48%) of the schools with service learning indicated that a teacher or other knowledgeable adult always helped with the planning of the experience. With high-quality planning beforehand, there is a higher likelihood of a high-quality experience later.

One of the great strengths of service learning is that the community and the student come away from the experience with a benefit of some sort. Eighty-seven percent of respondents in this study indicated that their service learning events usually or always benefit the student and the community. This is an exciting finding and suggests that CSI high schools are in fact making a difference in their communities and in the lives of their students through their service learning experiences.

Overall, the results of the study suggest that there are no glaring weaknesses or problem areas in how CSI high schools are implementing service learning. The two areas with the lowest scores were the frequency of formative assessments and how often the service learning



experiences were an integral part of course assignment. Admittedly, formative assessment of a service learning experience can be a daunting task. It is not a discreet event that can be isolated from its ongoing context. Still, this is an area in which there is evidently room for improvement.

Another area of concern regarding the findings of the study is how often it was reported that the service learning experiences were an integral part of course assignments. Given that a key distinctive of service learning especially compared to community service is that it “integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2011), there some concern that CSI high schools could do better at establishing the connection between the activities in class and the community.

## **Conclusions**

### **Implications**

Effective service learning is clearly a part of education at most of the CSI high schools that participated in the study. Since the positive educational implications of service learning compare favorably to community service, this is exciting to see. With this strong base of schools practicing service learning in CSI schools, if school leaders and practitioners could pool their knowledge and resources to support each other, more positive results could happen and positive service learning could more effectively be brought to schools not yet integrating service learning into their courses. Some schools are doing service learning well, but there might be an opportunity for CSI to share this information with its member schools. A CSI-sponsored blog or convention speakers may be effective ways to share information and success stories.

Not all CSI schools are doing service learning very well. With a coded average of 3.59, according to school leaders, schools are meeting the recognized indicators of quality service

learning more than “occasionally,” but on average, they are not yet meeting them “very frequently.” School leaders and teachers should be encouraged to continually assess and evaluate their service learning practices. There is always room for improvement and this study identifies several areas for it.

There is much to be celebrated about how service learning is being done, but there is nearly just as much room for improvement. Ideally, if schools were doing an excellent job of providing effective service learning, respondents would have selected “always” in response to each question. According to the survey, “always” was selected just 16% of the time. There is much room for improvement here.

Three specific areas that should be focused on for improvement are increasing the frequency of formative assessment, better integrating the service activities into the classroom learning, and making certain that the service learning opportunities are intentionally related to the stated learning goals.

### **Limitations**

While the findings of study are encouraging, there are also a few limitations to be considered. When conducting a survey like this, it is difficult to quantify the stories and narratives behind the numbers. Each teacher, course, school, and community is so unique that constructing a broad survey intended for the entire population can be quite difficult. While conducting phone interviews that were requested by the respondents, it became evident that the schools had very different ways of including service in their curriculum. Some of these different approaches did not cleanly fit into the survey questions.

Each respondent may have a different understanding what type of service was taking place in their setting. These different understandings may have impacted how the survey was completed. While the definition of service learning was included in the survey, for some school leaders, there may have been a temptation to indicate that the service taking place in their school setting met the given definition of service learning.

### **Further Study**

Upon the conclusion of this survey, it seems that there are several opportunities for further study. While the focus of his survey was on CSI high schools within the US and Canada, it would be insightful to have data comparing these schools with comparable non-CSI schools. Of particular interest would be information about other faith-based high schools as these would potentially have a similar theological foundation for teaching service within the curriculum.

While conducting follow-up phone interviews and reviewing survey responses, it seemed that the high schools that were established in the more recent past, roughly in the last 10-15 years, tended to have service opportunities that were more integrated into the school curriculum and school calendar than the older high schools. Perhaps those schools whose curriculum does not include service learning could examine the process by which the newer schools identified how to make service learning an integral part of their curriculum.

As the fundamental purpose of all education is to advance student learning towards meeting the mission statement of the school, a different research approach to exploring how effectively schools are doing service learning would be to modify the survey so it might be completed by students in the schools who are participating in the service learning. While the teachers and school leaders may have a very good idea of what is taking place, it might be

revealing to explore student perceptions about service learning. If the students do not see any benefit or significance to the service learning activities, that may lead to a helpful discussion about what defines effective service learning.

Similarly, one principal suggested a follow-up longitudinal study on the impact that service learning or school-sponsored service projects has had on alumni as they become adults. This study would revisit alumni 10/20/30 years beyond high school graduation and check if they are showing an increased commitment to service beyond what those who did not participate in service projects in high school are demonstrating.

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## Appendix A

### Introductory Letter

Dear CSI Principal, Administrator, or Service Coordinator,

My name is Russell Smies and I have been teaching social studies in Christian high schools for over ten years. Currently, as part of the completion of a Master's of Education degree from Dordt College, I am conducting a survey on the role of service in Christian high schools that are members of Christian Schools International (CSI). I believe your school matches the profile I am looking for.

As a leader in your school, I am hoping that you, or another knowledgeable member of your school, will be willing to take 10 minutes from your very busy schedule to share some information about how service is being implemented in your school. Nearly all of the questions ask for a simple multiple choice or scale response. This link will get you started: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/J6WQH5D> The survey will be concluded on Friday, March 9.

Thank you for your very valuable help!

Russell Smies

(920) 324-4233

Central Wisconsin Christian School

Waupun, WI, USA

## Appendix B

Page 1

**Welcome!**

Dear Principal, Administrator, or Service learning Coordinator,

My name is Russell Smies and I have been teaching social studies in Christian high schools for over ten years. Currently, as part of the completion of a Master's of Education degree from Dordt College, I am conducting a survey on the role of service learning in Christian high schools that are members of Christian Schools International. For the past several years, there has been a growing movement to include an instructional technique known as "service learning" at nearly all grade levels. Many educational leaders, such as you, likely are familiar with service learning.

There are many variations of the definition of service learning. For the purposes of this survey, service learning has been defined as "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities."

As a leader in your school, I am hoping that you will be willing to take 10 minutes from your very busy schedule to share some information with me about if and how service learning is being implemented in your school. All of the questions ask for a simple multiple choice or scale response.

Names of schools or of individuals will not be included in the final report without the expressed permission of the administration or of the individual, respectively. If you would like to receive a copy of the findings of this survey, please indicate so at the end of the survey.

Thank you very much for taking some time to read this letter and complete the following brief survey. If you have any questions about the survey, please do not hesitate to give me a call or email. Thanks again for your help!

Russell Smies

(920)3244233

[rsmies@centralwisconsinchristian.org](mailto:rsmies@centralwisconsinchristian.org)

Page 2

**Getting Started**

What is the name of your school?

Page 3

**Service at your school**

Does your high school require service hours for graduation?

Yes

No

Page 4

**Service at your school**

Does your high school provide recognition for voluntary service hours?

Yes

No

Page 5

**Service at your school**

Does your high school schedule a school wide service day?

Yes

No

Page 6

**Service at your school**

Does your high school provide service learning opportunities that are integrated into courses?  
For the purposes of this survey, service learning has been defined as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.”

Yes

No

Page 7

**Questions about service learning at your school**

Please tell us a little more about what service learning opportunities look like at your school.

Are your service learning opportunities:

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Very Frequently	Always
Providing students with opportunities to problem solve?					
Intentionally matched to stated learning goals?					
An integral part of course assignments?					
Providing opportunities for student reflection?					
Providing student contact with diverse members of the community?					
Planned with the help of a teacher or knowledgeable adults?					
Allowing students a strong voice in planning the experience?					
Assessed during the experience? (formative)					
Assessed after the experience? (summative)					

Page 8

**Questions about service learning at your school**

As you evaluate your service learning program and its impact on the students and the community, how would you rank the following statements?

	Not applicable	Sometimes applicable	Often applicable	Usually applicable	Always applicable
"The service learning experience is personally meaningful for the students."					
"After participating in a service learning experience, the students have developed a greater respect for members of the community."					
"The service learning experience is equally beneficial to the students and the community."					

Page 9

**Duration of service learning opportunities at your school**

How many hours does a student typically spend in a single service learning experience in one course?

- 0-10 hours
- 11-20 hours
- 21-30 hours
- 31-40 hours
- 41-50 hours
- More than 51 hours

How long does a student's single service learning experience typically last?

- Up to one month
- Up to one quarter
- Up to one semester
- Up to a full school year
- Multiple years

Page 10

**Duration of service opportunities at your school**

How many hours does a student typically spend on a single service experience?

- Less than 10 hours
- 11-20 hours
- 21-30 hours
- 31-40 hours
- 41-50 hours
- More than 51 hours
- Not Applicable

How long does a student's single service experience typically last?

- Up to one day
- Up to one month
- Up to one quarter
- Up to one semester
- Up to a full school year
- Multiple years
- Not Applicable

Page 11

**Wrap-up Questions**

Thank you for sharing about your school. Just two more questions!

Would you be willing to participate in a brief follow-up interview or phone call?

Yes, I would like to share more about service learning at our school.

Yes, you may contact me if additional information is requested.

No, please do not pursue a follow-up contact.

Page 12

**Contact Information**

Please share your name and daytime phone number where you may be contacted

Name:

Phone Number:

Page 13

Would you like to receive a copy of the findings of this study?

Yes, please

No, thanks

Page 14

Please provide contact information for findings to be sent to.

Name:

Company:

Address 1:

Address 2:

City/Town:

State/Province:

ZIP/Postal Code:

Country:

Email Address:

Page 15

**You are finished!**

Thank you for your time and help with this survey. It is greatly appreciated. Have a blessed day and go make a difference!

### Acknowledgements

A project like this is never the work of an individual, but rather a collection of different individuals and groups that come together to accomplish something greater than themselves. While there have been many people who have impacted this project in different ways, there are three that deserve special recognition.

Drs. Pat Kornelis and Tim VanSoelen and the rest of the Dordt Graduate Education department were instrumental in providing guidance, encouragement, and feedback at various stages. Their display of a Christian worldview in practice and pursuit of academic excellence have been invaluable to my continuing professional development.

The basis of this study rests on the helpful responses of 76 school leaders faithfully serving in high schools associated with Christian Schools International across the United States and Canada. Without their honest self-assessments of how service is being implemented in their schools, this study would have never happened.

My wife Stacey has been a constant encourager and motivator throughout the completion of this study. Without her by my side, this would have never come to completion.



**Russell Jay Smies**

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(509) 324-2039

**Education**

M.Ed. Curriculum and Instruction, Dordt College (2013)

B.A. Secondary Education-History, Dordt College (1999)

**Academic Employment**

2009-Present: Central Wisconsin Christian School, Waupun, WI

2000-2009: Sunnyside Christian High School, Sunnyside, WA

**Presentations**

2013: *Thinking Historically in the History Classroom*, CSI District IV Spring In-service

Convention, Waupun, WI

2007: *Curriculum Mapping*, Sunnyside Christian School, Sunnyside, WA

**Professional Membership**

Wisconsin Track Coaches Association 2010-present