

# YOUTH HELPING AMERICA

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*Educating for Active Citizenship:  
Service-Learning, School-Based Service  
and Youth Civic Engagement*

*March 2006*

Corporation for  
NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE 

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## THE YOUTH HELPING AMERICA SERIES

**BUILDING ACTIVE CITIZENS:** The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering  
November 2005

**EDUCATING FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP** Service-Learning, School-Based Service, and Civic Engagement  
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Learn and Serve America supports service-learning programs in schools and community organizations that help nearly 1 million students from kindergarten through college meet community needs, while improving their academic skills and learning the habits of good citizenship. Learn and Serve America grants are used to create new programs or replicate existing programs, as well as to provide training and development to staff, faculty, and volunteers. For more information, please visit [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

This brief is the second in the *Youth Helping America Series*, a series of reports based on data from the Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey, a national survey of 3,178 American youth between the ages of 12 and 18 that was conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service in 2005 in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau and the nonprofit coalition Independent Sector.

The survey collected information on teen volunteering habits, experiences with school-based service-learning, and other forms of civic engagement. While the first brief in the *Youth Helping America Series* focused on youth volunteering and social institutions, this brief focuses on participation in school-based service — service opportunities made available or required by schools — among middle school and high school aged youth. We pay particular attention to the extent to which youth participate in service-learning courses, which integrate school-based service opportunities into the academic curriculum such as those programs supported by Learn and Serve America.

By approaching school-based service from the perspectives of youth, it is possible to identify: 1) who among youth participate in school-based service; 2) their perceptions of what they accomplished in the experience; and 3) the relationship between this school-based service and their attitudes and behaviors toward other forms of civic engagement.

According to the survey, 38 percent of youth — or an estimated 10.6 million students nationwide — report current or past participation in community service as part of a school activity or requirement. Of these students, 74 percent, or approximately 7.8 million, are either currently enrolled or were enrolled within the previous year in a course that contains a service component, while 26 percent participated in such a course at some time in the past. High school students are more likely than middle school students to have participated in at least one school-based service experience.

Of all school-based service experiences, more than three-quarters — or 77 percent — take place as part of a course that contains one or more of the generally accepted elements of high-quality service-learning. These elements include:

- (1) Planning the service activity (36 percent of all courses)
- (2) Participating in regular service for a semester or longer (36 percent of all courses)
- (3) Writing or reflecting on the service experience in class (51 percent of all courses)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the U.S. Census Bureau for all of its efforts in designing and implementing this survey, particularly the work of Ken Kaplan. We would like to thank our colleagues at the Corporation for National and Community Service for their intellectual contributions to the report, including Learn and Serve America staff and their director, Amy Cohen, as well as our coworkers in the Department of Research and Policy Development. We are likewise grateful to Shelley Billig, Barbara Holland, Alan Melchior, and Marybeth Neal for providing us with insightful comments in the drafting process.

This brief is the second in the *Youth Helping America Series*, a series of reports based on the 2005 Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

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To determine whether youth participated in service-learning, as opposed to simply school-based service, we developed a service-learning quality index that counts the number of high-quality elements associated with the school-based service experience. Among the students who participate in school-based service, whether currently or some time in the past, we found that 10 percent — or an estimated 1.1 million — participate in service-learning with all three of the quality elements, 26 percent with two of the elements, and 41 percent with one of the elements.

While the majority of students report that their experience with school-based service had a positive impact on them, we found that students who report current or past participation in service-learning that includes reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester, are more than twice as likely than students who participate in school-based service with none of the three quality elements to report that their experience had a very positive impact on them.

The study also found that the likelihood of a student's participation in school-based service, as well as in courses that involve one or more quality elements of service-learning, is related to several school factors:

- High school students (defined as grades 9 - 12) are more than 30 percent more likely than middle school students (defined as grades 6-8) to participate in school-based service, whether the participation occurred within the previous year or some time in the past.
- Students in private schools are more than 50 percent more likely to engage in school-based service than students in public schools. They also are more likely to engage in service-learning courses that include reflection, planning, and/or service that lasts at least one semester.
- Participation in school-based service is higher among students with grade-point averages of B+ or higher (43 percent) than among students with grade-point averages of B or lower (35 percent), as is participation in service-learning courses with one or more of the quality elements.
- Among youth who have participated in school-based service, high school students (80 percent) are more likely than middle school students (68 percent) to have participated in service that contains at least one of the three elements of quality service-learning.

In addition, the study found that youth coming from families where their parents and/or siblings volunteer are more likely to report current or past participation in school-based service, as well as service-learning courses that contain planning, reflection, and/or regular service that lasts at least one semester.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

Participation in school-based volunteer service, and especially service-learning courses with several quality elements, also was found to have a strong positive relationship with several measures of civic engagement, including their stated likelihood of future volunteering, their sense of personal efficacy, and their interest in current events and politics. Indeed, the strongest of these relationships are around future civic behaviors and attitudes. For example, we found that:

- Youth who report past participation in school-based service are more likely to have volunteered through an organization in the past twelve months than those youth who have never participated in school-based service, 59 percent to 48 percent, respectively.
- Students who report current or previous participation in a service-learning course that includes reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester are 40 percent more likely than school-based service participants to say they are very likely to volunteer in the upcoming year, and 71 percent more likely than individuals who have never engaged in school-based service.
- Youth who report current or past participation in service-learning courses that include reflection, planning and service that lasts at least one semester are 63 percent more likely than those who have never engaged in school-based service to say that they take a good deal of interest in world events.
- Participants in school-based service talk about politics with their friends and parents more often than non-participants do — and even more so when the service is part of a service-learning course that includes reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester.
- Youth who report current or past participation in service-learning courses that include reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester are almost three times as likely to believe they can make a great deal of difference in their community than youth who participated in school-based service without any of the quality elements of service-learning.
- Finally, youth from affluent families are more likely to participate in both school-based service and service-learning courses that include quality elements. However, youth from low-income families who participate in school-based service and service-learning demonstrate many positive relationships to civic attitudes and behaviors, highlighting the importance of making school-based service and service-learning courses accessible to students of all backgrounds.

# INTRODUCTION

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In an effort to better understand the attitudes and behaviors of young people in America around volunteering, service-learning, and other forms of community involvement, the Corporation for National and Community Service, in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau and Independent Sector, conducted the Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey (the Youth Volunteering Survey), a national survey of American youth. Between January and March of 2005, 3,178 Americans between the ages of 12 and 18 were asked about their volunteering habits and experiences with service-learning projects, as well as their attitudes and behaviors related to other forms of civic engagement.

Previous research has demonstrated that youth involvement in school-based service and service-learning can produce valuable benefits to local communities and enable young people to become proactive members of society. While research in this field has measured the extent to which schools provide opportunities for youth to participate in these activities and assessed the impact of community service and service-learning on youth academic and personal development, we have lacked national level data on the self-reported participation rates among American youth.<sup>1</sup> By approaching school-based service from the perspectives of youth, it is possible to identify youth perceptions of their service experiences and the relationship between this school-based service and their attitudes and behaviors toward other forms of civic engagement.

The following report, the second in the *Youth Helping America Series*, explores youth engagement in school-based service and the connections between these experiences and other forms of civic engagement. This brief focuses on participation in school-based service — service opportunities made available or required by schools — among middle-school and high-school aged youth.

We pay particular attention to the extent to which youth participate in service-learning courses, which integrate school-based service opportunities into the course curriculum, such as those programs that are supported by Learn and Serve America. We show that those who participate in school-based service and service-learning courses tend to score higher on several indicators of civic engagement.

**MAJOR FINDING:** 38 percent of youth, or approximately 10.6 million youth nationwide, report current or past participation in school-based service.

The first report of the *Youth Helping America Series*, “Building Active Citizens: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering,” demonstrated the important role that schools play in engaging students in volunteering and service.<sup>2</sup> The report maintained that schools, as the site where youth begin to develop a sense of a larger community to which they belong, can play a valuable role in providing opportunities for youth to interact with adults outside of their family, develop their own voice and connections to their community, and feel empowered to make a difference.

### School-based Service

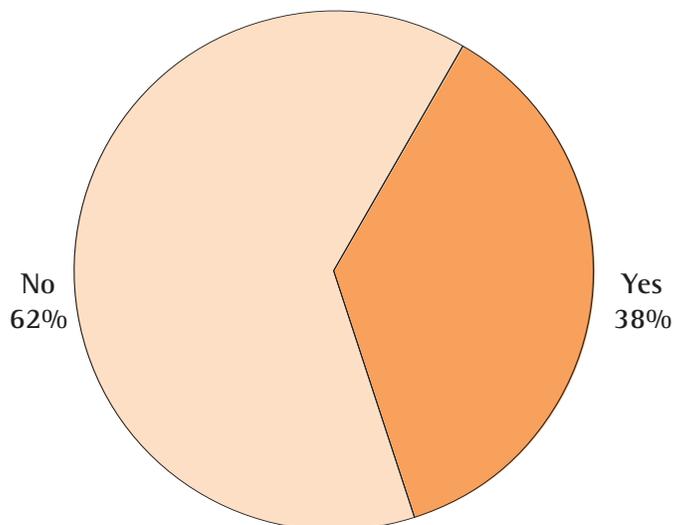
One of the primary ways that schools provide opportunities for youth to engage in their community is through school-based service, which can be mandatory or voluntary and takes place through community service or service-learning. In 1992, Learn and Serve America, the federal program that provides grants in support of service-learning programs, made its first round of awards to state education agencies in an effort to provide young people the opportunities to participate in quality service-learning programs. Over the past twenty years, there has been a growing trend in the inclusion of community service and service-learning in America's schools as educators and school administrators realize the value of service for youth academic and personal development.<sup>3</sup> A national survey of school principals by the U.S. Department of Education in 1999 found that 46 percent of public high schools and 38 percent of public middle schools offer service-learning activities for their students, while 83 percent of high schools and 77 percent of middle schools organize community service opportunities. This compares to only 9 percent for service-learning activities and 27 percent for community service opportunities among public high schools in 1984, an indication that the majority of America's schools today place an emphasis on the value of service.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even as schools may offer service opportunities to teens, not all youth take part in these activities.

The Youth Volunteering Survey included a series of questions intended to gauge the level of involvement among youth in these school-based service activities.<sup>5</sup> Respondents were asked whether they have ever performed any community service as part of a school activity or requirement. We found that 38 percent of youth, or approximately 10.6 million youth nationwide, have taken part in community service through their school at some time in their educational career. We label these activities as school-based service. [See Chart 1]

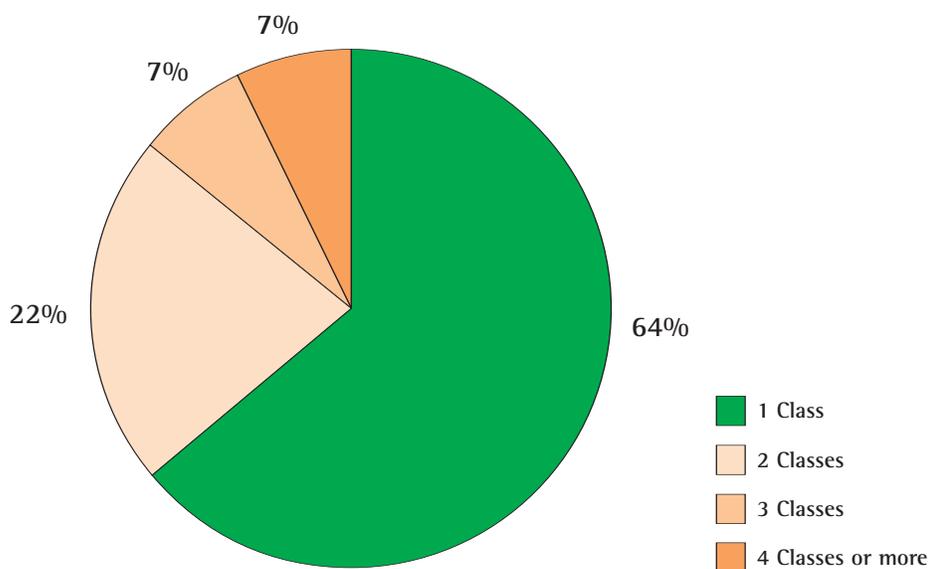
According to the survey, the majority of these students, 64 percent, an estimated 6.8 million nationwide, report that their current or past participation in school-based service has occurred in one class, while an additional 22 percent have taken part in school-based service in two classes.<sup>6</sup> [See Chart 2]

# WHERE SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE IS TAKING PLACE

**CHART 1:** Percentage of Youth Who Reported Current or Past Participation in School-Based Service



**CHART 2:** Number of Classes That Youth Have Taken That Include School-Based Service



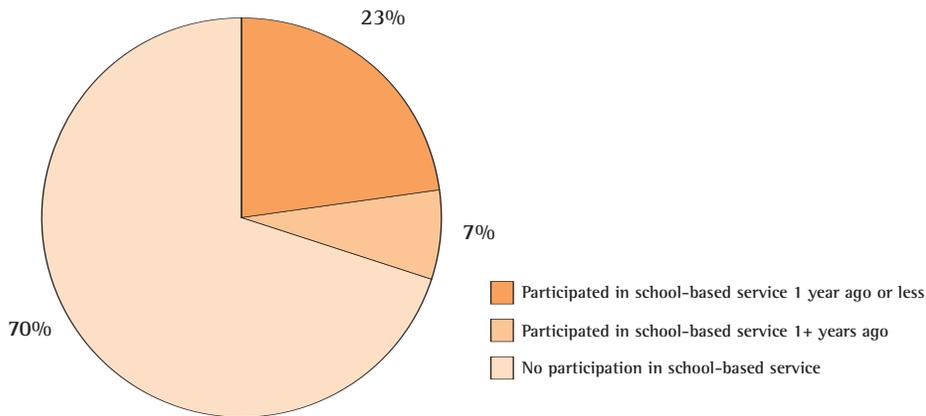
# WHERE SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE IS TAKING PLACE

**MAJOR FINDING:** High school students are 37 percent more likely than middle school students to participate in school-based service, whether in the previous year or some time in the past — 41 percent to 30 percent respectively.

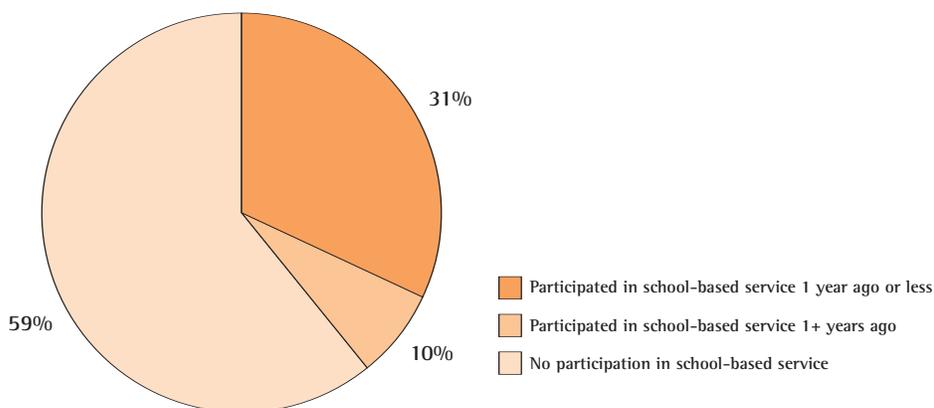
High school students have had a longer opportunity to engage in school-based service than those students in middle school, so it is not surprising to find that more high school students (defined as grades 9-12) than middle school students (defined as grades 6-8) report participation in school-based service at some time in their educational career, 41 percent to 30 percent respectively. However, even when looking at participation within the previous year, we still find that high school students are 35 percent more likely to have participated in school-based service, with a participation rate of 31 percent of high school students compared to 23 percent of middle school students. [See Chart 3]

**CHART 3:** Participation in School-Based Service in Previous Year or Earlier by Grade Level

Middle School Students (Grades 6-8)



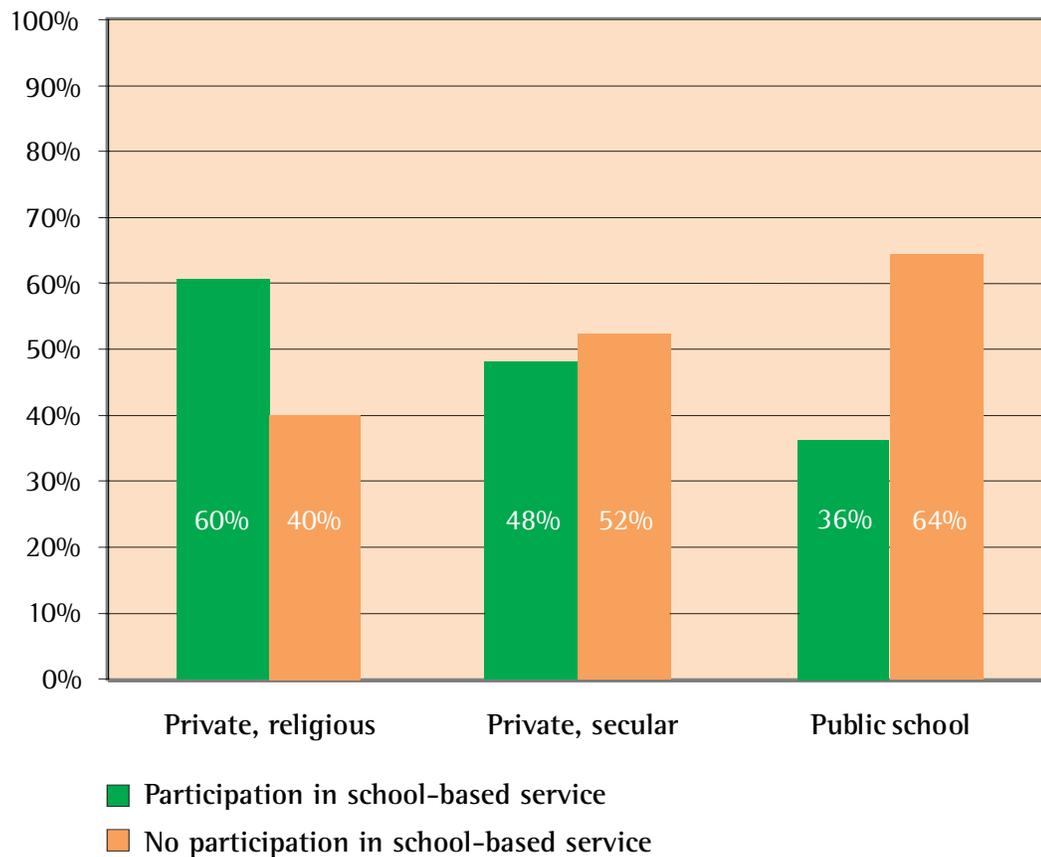
High School Students (Grades 9-12)



# WHERE SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE IS TAKING PLACE

The survey also found that students that attend private schools are more than 50 percent more likely to have ever engaged in school-based service than students in public schools, with students attending private religious schools most likely to participate in school-based service. [See Chart 4]

**CHART 4:** Participation in School-Based Service (Current or Past) by School Type



# A PICTURE OF SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

In asking youth about their experiences with school-based service, we were particularly interested in identifying the extent to which this school-based service experience included elements of service-learning. While our definition of school-based service connects community service with a school course, service-learning is distinguished from broader school-based service as an educational practice that involves the active participation of students in activities that address community needs, is integrated into the academic curriculum, has structured time for reflection, and provides opportunities for the direct application of the knowledge and skills acquired. Service-learning is distinct from other experiential education methods in its intentional aim to give equal weight to both service and learning.

A list of the Essential Elements of Service-Learning was first developed by the Alliance for Service-Learning in Educational Reform in 1995 and later updated in 1998 by the National Service-Learning Cooperative.<sup>7</sup> Testing of these elements has shown that among the eleven essential elements of service-learning, three elements are fundamental to positive impacts of service-learning: student reflection on the service-learning activities, the involvement of students in the planning and implementation of projects, and regular service activities that last at least one semester.<sup>8</sup>

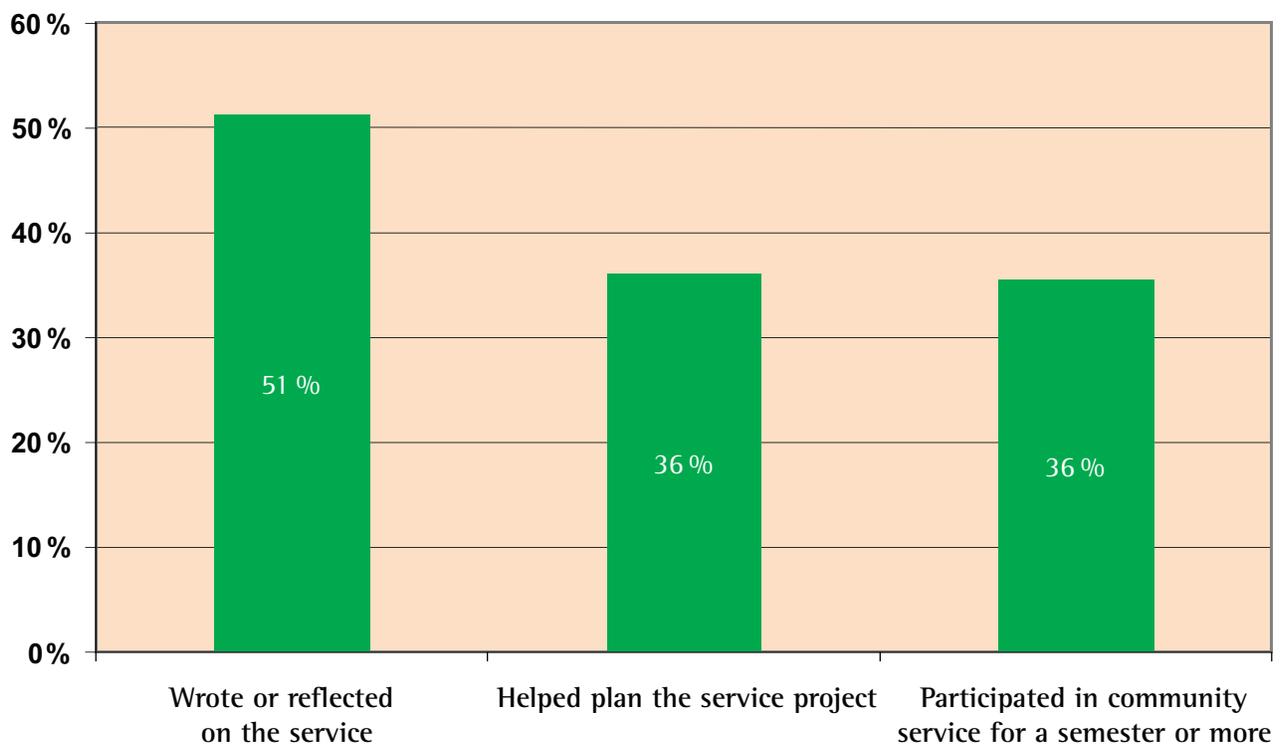
While research on service-learning participation tends to measure the inclusion of these elements and others in service-learning activities based on the perspective of the educators, the Youth Volunteering Survey gathered information on the quality of the service-learning experience from the perspective of the youth themselves. This approach means that we are not able to assess the intention of educators in implementing the service projects; however, research also has shown that youth perceptions of their service experience may differ from the intention of educators, and that this difference is important to understanding the impact of the experience.<sup>9</sup> For example, while a teacher may intend for students to help plan a service project, the students themselves may not feel that they have had an active voice in planning, thus affecting their experience of the service-learning project.

In order to assess the quality of the service-learning experience for youth, the survey asked those teens who indicated that they had engaged in school-based service whether they had helped to plan the service project, whether they were required to write about or reflect on their service experience for the class, and how long they regularly participated in service activities.

# A PICTURE OF SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

**MAJOR FINDING:** Of those youth who have engaged in current or past school-based experience, 77 percent, or an estimated 8.1 million, also experienced one or more of the generally accepted elements of high-quality service-learning.

**CHART 5:** Elements of Service-Learning Activities for Youth Who Reported Current or Past Participation in School-Based Service



We found that 77 percent of those who have engaged in school-based service at any time in the past took part in at least one of these activities, with 36 percent, or 3.8 million participants, participating in the planning of their service project, 51 percent, or 5.4 million, writing about or reflecting on their service experience in class, and 36 percent, or 3.8 million, having participated in regular service activities that lasted at least one semester. [See Chart 5]

# ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE

## Quality Index

Based on the hypothesis that the more quality elements incorporated into school-based service, the greater the impact on the youth participants, we created a quality index for school-based service [See Figure 1]. With this quality index, we are able to explore the likelihood of participation in quality service-learning activities for different youth populations as well as the likelihood with which they will participate in volunteer activities and other forms of civic behaviors. [Note: All findings are statistically significant unless otherwise indicated].

### FIGURE 1: Construction of a Quality Index for School-Based Service

The quality index is based on whether youth have participated in community service as part of a school activity or requirement, what we refer to as school-based service. If a teen indicates that he or she has participated in school-based service, we then considered whether his or her latest experience with school-based service included any of the following quality elements:

- (1) Planning the service activity;
- (2) Writing or reflecting on the service experience; and
- (3) Participating in community service for at least one semester.

When teens participate in class activities with community service that includes one or more of the quality elements, we view their school-based service as participation in service-learning activities. The more quality elements included in their activities, the higher the quality of their service-learning experience. In this way, we were able to construct five categories for the Index:

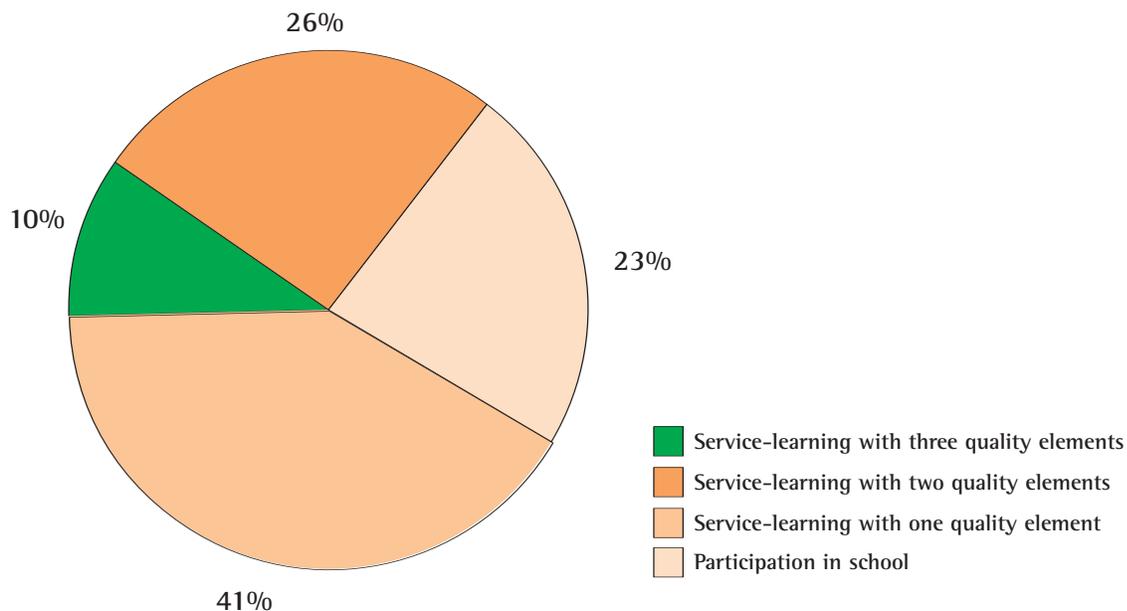
- (1) No participation in school-based service
- (2) Participation in school-based service
- (3) Participation in service-learning with one quality element
- (4) Participation in service-learning with two quality elements
- (5) Participation in service-learning with three quality elements

# ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE

**MAJOR FINDING:** Among students who report current or past participation in school-based service, 10 percent, or an estimated 1.1 million youth nationwide, also report participation in service-learning that included all three of the quality elements of service learning: planning the activity, reflecting on the service experience in class, and participating in regular service that lasts at least one semester.

By utilizing this Index, we found that among the students who report current or past participation in school-based service, 10 percent have participated in service-learning with all three of the quality elements, 26 percent with two of the elements, and 41 percent with one of the elements. [See Chart 6]

**CHART 6:** The Quality of Youth School-Based Service and Service-Learning



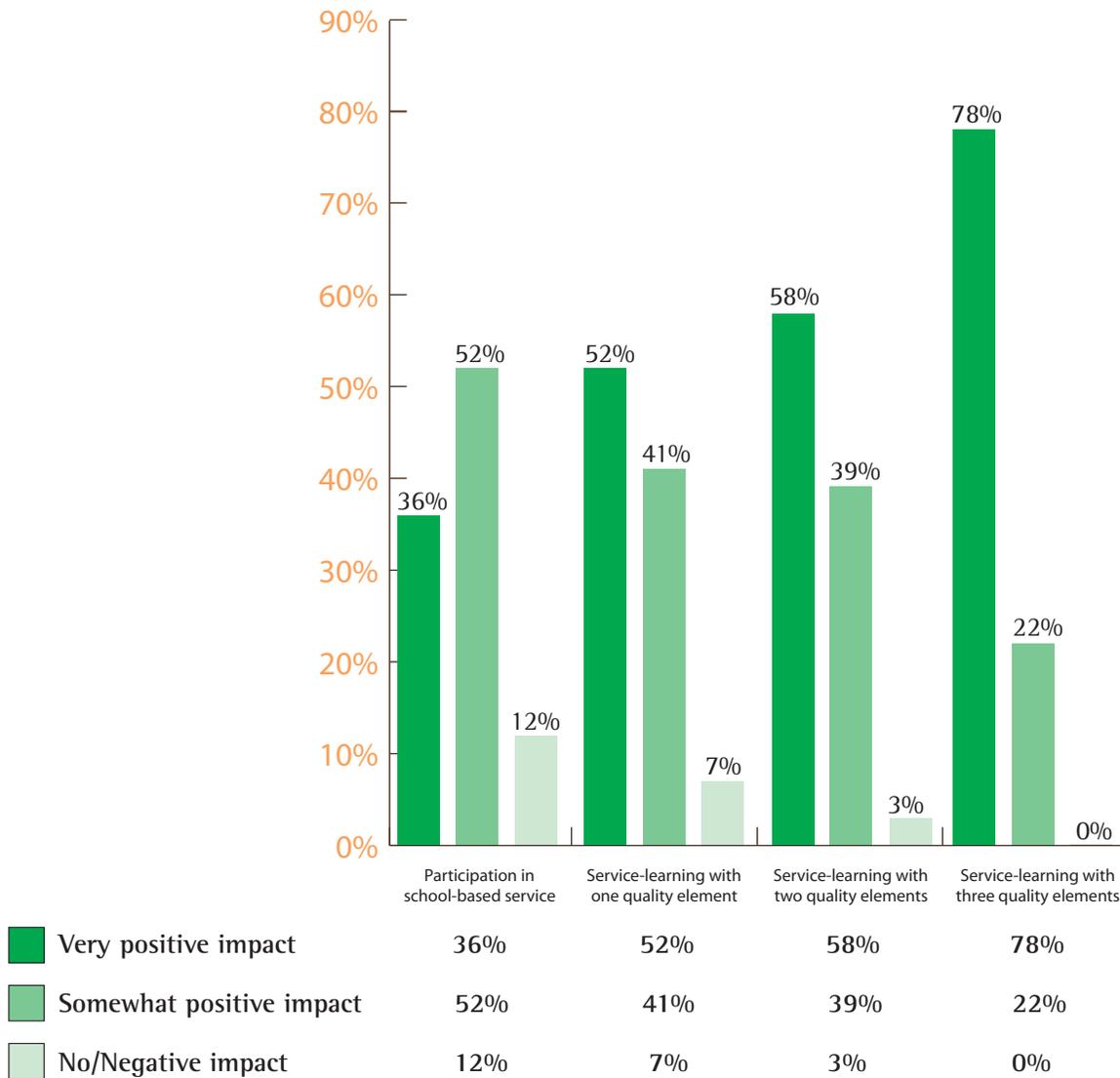
While the majority of students report that their experience with school-based service had a positive impact on them, we found that the greater the number of quality elements included in the service-learning activities, the more likely youth are to find that the experience had a very positive impact. [See Chart 7]

# ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE

**MAJOR FINDING:** Youth who report current or past participation in service-learning with all three quality elements are more than twice as likely to report that their experience had a very positive impact on them than those youth who only participate in school-based service, 78 percent to 36 percent, respectively.

When compared to students who participate in school-based service without any of the three elements of service learning, students who report current or past participation in service-learning that includes reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester are more than twice as likely to report that their experience had a very positive impact on them, 78 percent to 36 percent, respectively.

**CHART 7:** Students’ Perception of the Impact of Current or Past Participation in School-Based Service and Service-Learning



# ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE

**MAJOR FINDING:** High school students, youth who attend private school, and students with higher academic achievement are all more likely to report current or past participation in school-based service and high quality service-learning.

Existing research has shown that the inclusion of school-based service and service-learning varies by school type, so it is not surprising that we found that the characteristics of teens' school experience are related to the likelihood that they will engage in school-based service and service-learning activities.<sup>10</sup>

For example, as we found for overall participation in school-based service, high school students are more likely to engage in quality service-learning opportunities than middle school students. Whereas 80 percent of high school students' experience with service as part of a class includes reflection, planning, and/or service that lasts at least one semester, only 68 percent of middle school students report such service-learning experiences.

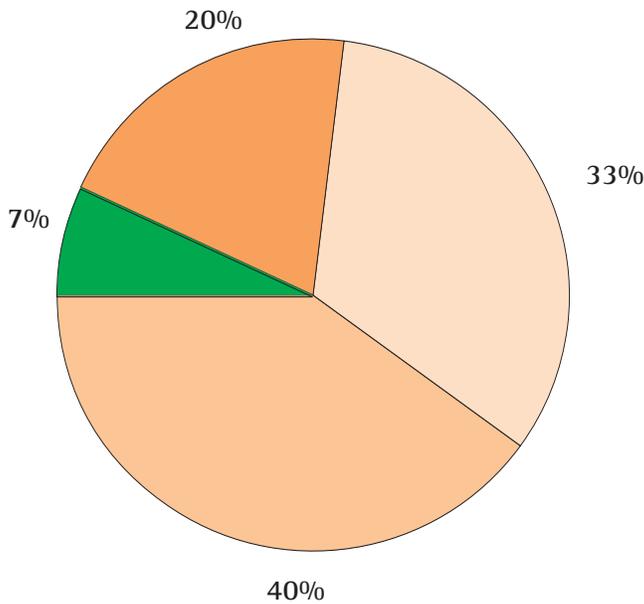
When we consider only those youth who have participated in school-based service within the previous year, we again find that high school students are more likely to participate in high quality service-learning than middle school students, indicating that high schools are more likely to provide service-learning opportunities. [See Chart 8]

In the same vein, private schools are more likely to include school-based service and service-learning in their programs. The study found that students in private schools are more than 50 percent more likely than public school students to report current or past participation in school-based service, and students in private schools also are more likely to engage in service-learning that includes reflection, participation in planning, and regular service that lasts a semester or longer. [See Chart 9]

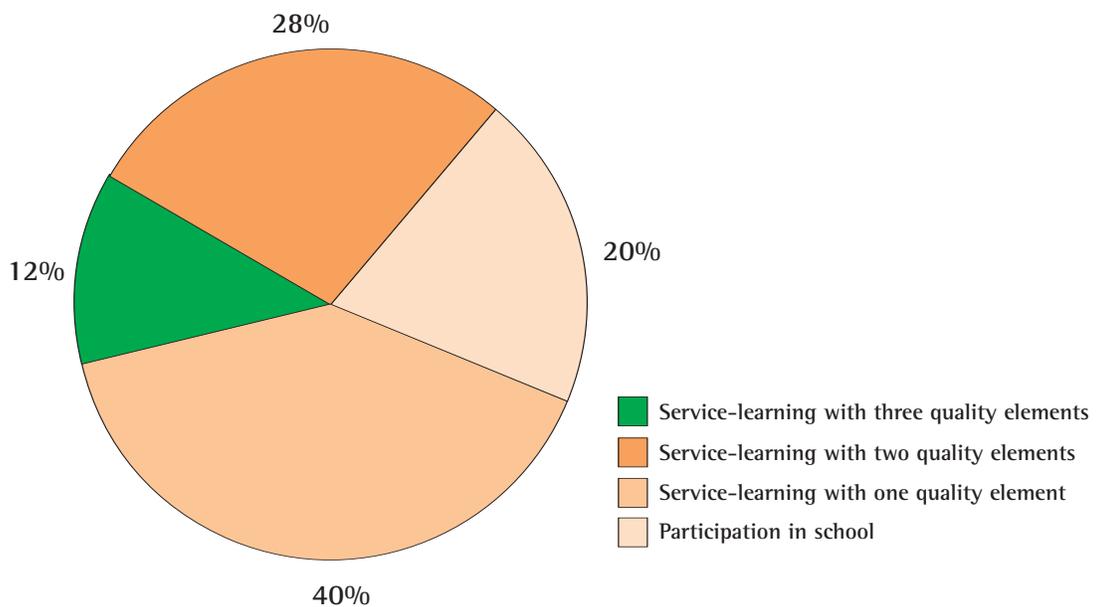
# SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND SERVICE-LEARNING

**CHART 8:** Participation in School-Based Service and Service-Learning In the Previous Year by Grade Level

## Middle School Students (Grades 6-8)

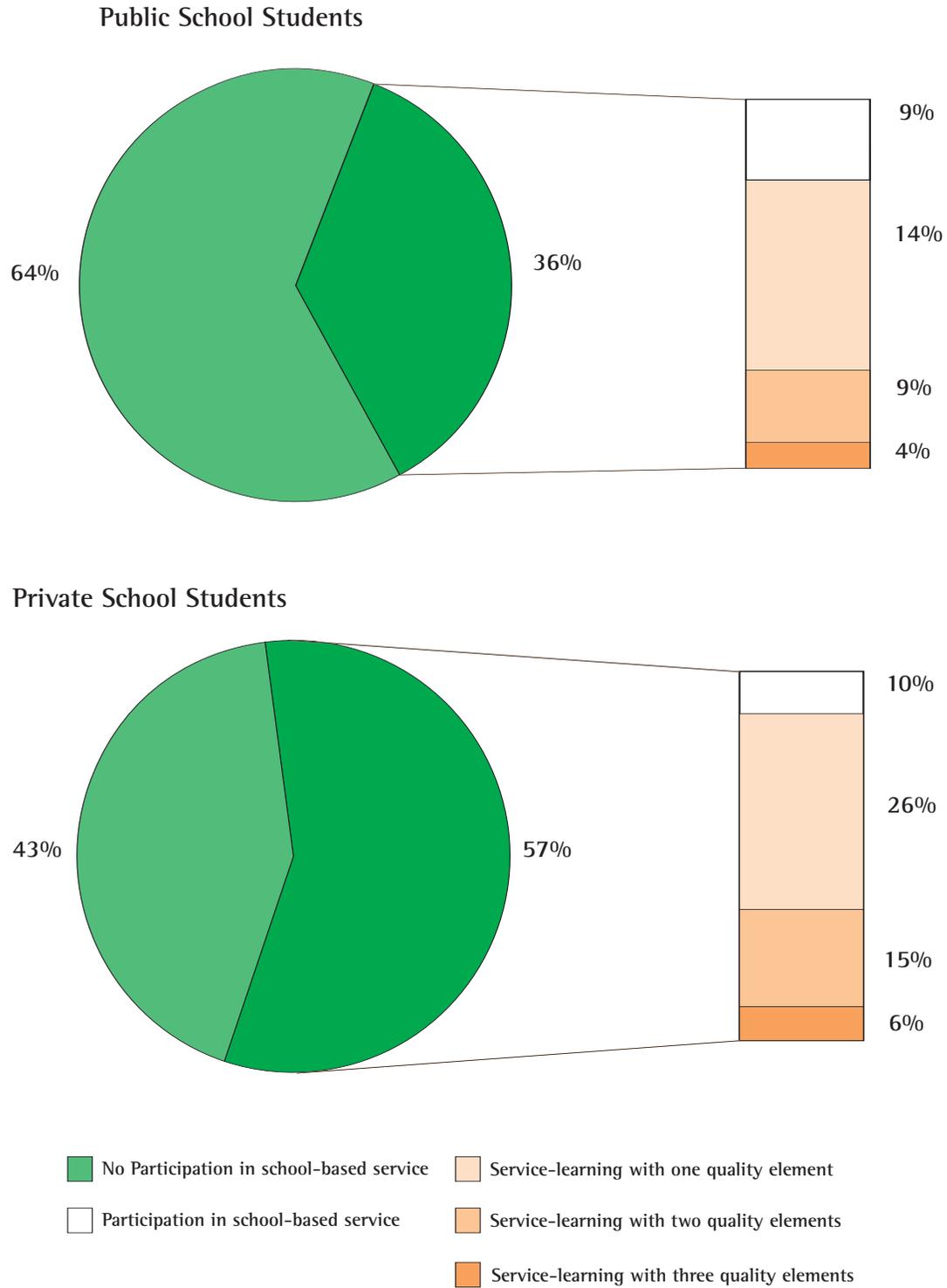


## High School Students (Grades 9-12)



# ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE

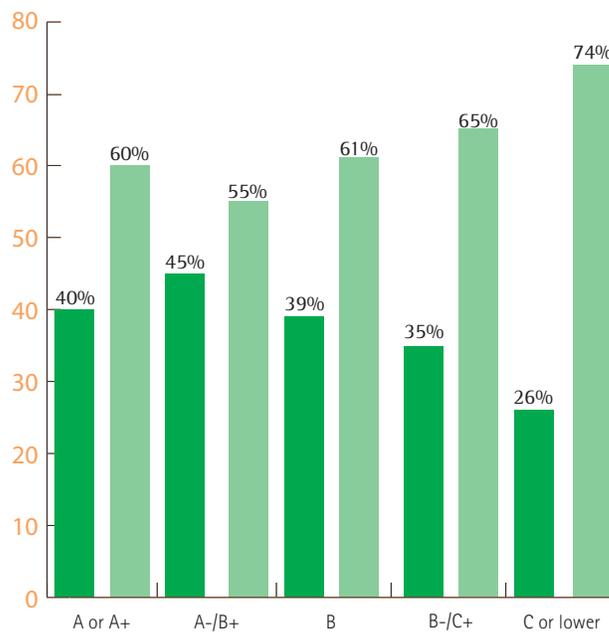
**CHART 9:** Current or Past Participation in School-Based Service and Service-Learning, by School Type



# SCHOOL EXPERIENCES AND SERVICE-LEARNING

The level of teens' academic achievement also is related to participation in school-based service and service-learning. We found that students who report a grade point average (GPA) of B+ or higher are more likely to report current or past participation in school-based service than those who report a GPA of B or lower, 43 percent to 35 percent, respectively.<sup>11</sup> In addition, students who do less well in school, reporting a GPA of C or lower, are the least likely to report participation in school-based service, and when they do, the service activities are less likely to have one or more quality elements of service-learning. [See Chart 10]

**CHART 10:** Current or Past Participation in Any Type of School-Based Service, by GPA



|  |     |     |     |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
|  Participation in school-based service and service learning | 40% | 45% | 39% | 35% | 26% |
|  No participation in school-based service                   | 60% | 55% | 61% | 65% | 74% |

| Current or Past Participation in School-Based Service and Service-Learning by GPA (based on total youth population) |                                       |   |  |  |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|
|   | Participation in school-based service | Service-learning with 1 quality element | Service-learning with 2 quality elements | Service-learning with 3 quality elements |
| A or A+   | 11%                                   | 13%                                     | 13%                                      | 4%                                       |
| A- / B+   | 10%                                   | 19%                                     | 12%                                      | 5%                                       |
| B   | 6%                                    | 17%                                     | 9%                                       | 6%                                       |
| B- / C+   | 13%                                   | 14%                                     | 7%                                       | 2%                                       |
| C or lower  | 7%                                    | 11%                                     | 6%                                       | 2%                                       |

[Note: Figures in the table may not add up to the percentages in the chart due to rounding].

## FAMILY VOLUNTEERING AND PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE

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**MAJOR FINDING:** Youth with immediate family members who volunteer are more likely to report current or past participation in school-based service and high quality service-learning than those youth who do not have immediate family members that volunteer.

We found in our analysis for the first briefing report, “Building Active Citizens,” that the variable which appears to have the strongest relationship with youth volunteering rates is the extent to which the youth's family volunteers.<sup>12</sup> We just have seen that school-related characteristics, such as school type and level of academic achievement, are related to the likelihood of participation in school-based service; however, we were interested in exploring whether external factors might also have a relationship with youth participation in school-based service. While previous research supports our findings around the correlations between participation in school-based service and school factors, we have lacked data on the significance of such external factors as family civic engagement. We had found in our analysis for the first briefing report that the variable that has the strongest relationship with youth volunteering habits is the extent to which the youth's family volunteers. Therefore, we were interested in exploring whether family volunteering habits might also have a significant relationship to participation in school-based service.

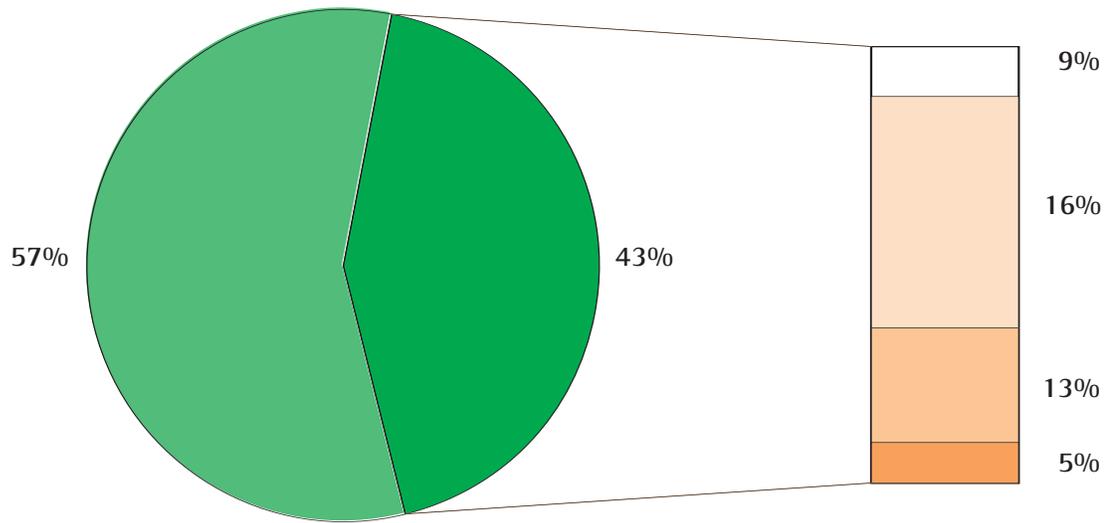
When we considered the relationship between family volunteering and the likelihood that youth will participate in school-based service, we found that this relationship does not prove to have as strong of a relationship as we found with youth volunteering; however, we did find the relationship between the likelihood that youth participate in school-based service and the volunteering habits of their immediate family (defined as parents and siblings) to be both significant and positive: youth with family members who volunteer are more likely to participate in school-based service, and are more likely to participate in quality service-learning activities. [See Chart 11]

These findings indicate that, while teens' decision to participate in service-learning are influenced by opportunities made available by the school, outside factors also may influence the likelihood that youth will engage in school-based service. When family members volunteer, they may create an environment that encourages youth to participate in classes that include service, or it may be that youth who come from families that volunteer may be more cognizant of their participation in service-learning activities. While the scope of this study does not allow us to identify the reason behind this significant relationship between participation in school-based service and family volunteering habits, we believe that this finding warrants investigation through further research.

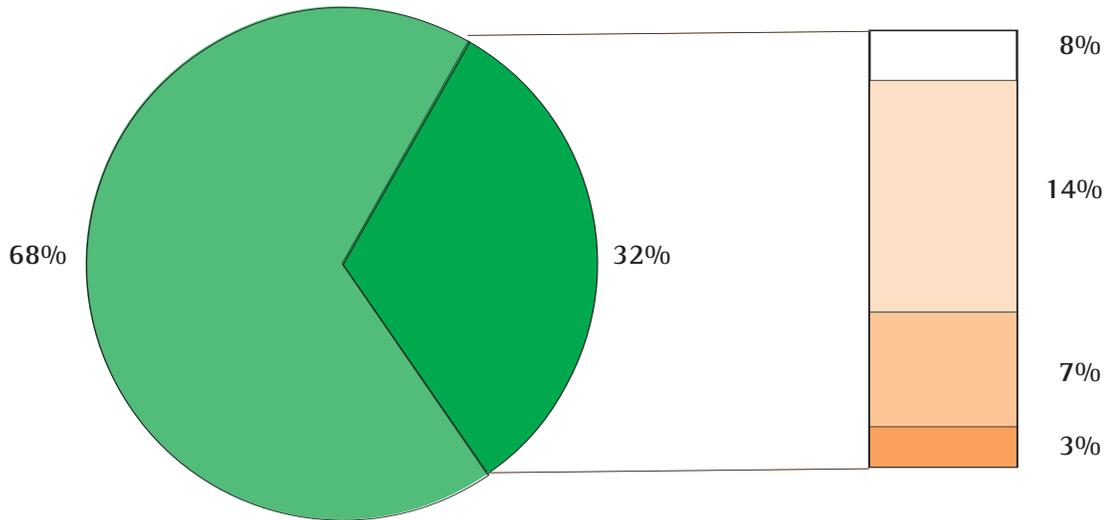
# FAMILY VOLUNTEERING AND PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL-BASED SERVICE

**CHART 11:** Current or Past Participation in School-Based Service and Service-Learning by Volunteering in the Immediate Family

## Participation in School-Based Service When One or More Immediate Family Members Volunteer



## Participation in School-Based Service When Immediate Family Does Not Volunteer



- No Participation in school-based service
- Service-learning with one quality element
- Participation in school-based service
- Service-learning with two quality elements
- Service-learning with three quality elements

## SERVICE-LEARNING AND YOUTH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Thus far in the report, we have looked at those factors that have a strong relationship with the likelihood that youth will participate in school-based service and service-learning. The remainder of this report will focus on the relationship between participation in school-based service and other forms of youth civic engagement.

Previous research has indicated that service-learning can have a positive impact on your civic engagement.<sup>13</sup> When youth plan an activity, they are able to feel empowered to identify a community problem and decide on ways in which to address that problem. In reflecting on the activity, they are able to share their experience with others and make connections between the activity and the larger community context. When youth engage in long-term community service, typically identified as a semester or longer, they are able to see the longer-term effects of the service and make deeper connections within the community.

Through our analysis, we were able to examine the relationship between youth engagement in service-learning activities and their likelihood of future volunteering, their sense of personal efficacy, and their interest in current events and politics. While the nature of the data does not allow us to establish a causal relationship between participation in school-based service and other forms of civic engagement, we asked: Does participation in school-based service have a connection with the likelihood that youth are or will be active citizens?

## SERVICE-LEARNING AND YOUTH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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**MAJOR FINDING:** Youth who report past participation in school-based service are more likely to have volunteered through an organization in the past twelve months than those youth who have never participated in school-based service, 59 percent to 48 percent, respectively.

In order to assess whether past participation in school-based service is related to future volunteering, we looked at those youth who report involvement in school-based service that took place more than a year ago. We compared their volunteering habits to those youth who indicate that they have never participated in school-based service. We found that students who participated in school-based service more than a year ago are more likely to have volunteered through an organization in the past twelve months, 59 percent to 48 percent, respectively.

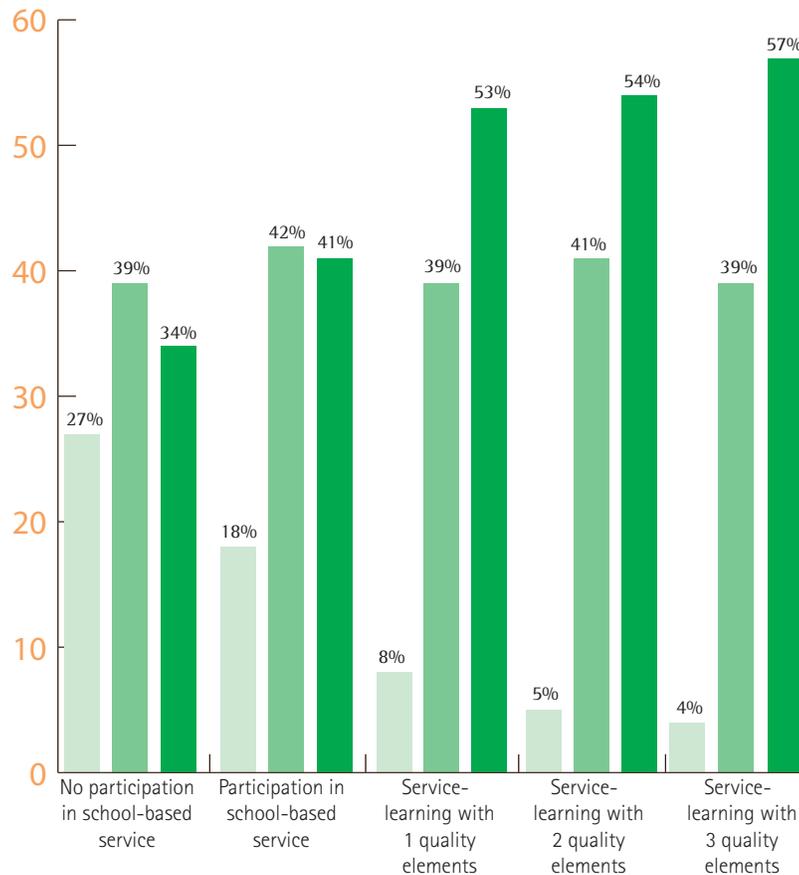
We also considered attitudes toward volunteering and service among youth who report current or past participation in school-based service and service-learning. The study asked teens who are 16 years or older about the likelihood that they would volunteer in the next twelve months. By analyzing their attitudes toward future volunteering and their current or past participation in school-based service, we found that

the higher the quality of service-learning, the more likely youth are to report that they will volunteer in the future. [See Chart 12]

In addition, the study indicates that engagement in service-learning has a positive relationship with teens' attitudes toward devoting a year to national and community service, such as participating in an AmeriCorps program. More than 90 percent of youth who are 16 years and older and report current or past participation in service-learning that included reflection, participation in planning, and service that lasts at least one semester indicate that they would be interested in serving a community for a year, compared to 75 percent of those who have never participated in school-based service.

# FUTURE VOLUNTEERING

**CHART 12:** The Likelihood of Volunteering in the Next Year by Youth Participation In School-Based Service and Service-Learning (Currently or in the Past)



|  |     |     |     |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#d9ead3;"></span> Not At All or Not Very Likely | 27% | 18% | 8%  | 5%  | 4%  |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#a6c9ec;"></span> Somewhat Likely               | 39% | 42% | 39% | 41% | 39% |
| <span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:#42b72a;"></span> Very Likely                   | 34% | 41% | 53% | 54% | 57% |

# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

If service-learning is an effective way of actively engaging youth in their community while also providing an environment in which youth can make connections between their service activities and broader community issues, then we should see a relationship between participation in service-learning and other forms of civic engagement, such as interest in political and current events, a sense of youth efficacy, levels of trust, and a sense of optimism for the future. While we were unable to establish correlations with trust and optimism for the future, we did find that participation in service-learning has a positive relationship to interest in political and current events and youth efficacy.

The study indicates that there is a correlation between participation in service-learning and interest in political and current events, and that this interest increases as the quality of the service-learning experience increases. For example, 52 percent of youth who report current or past participation in service-learning activities that included reflection, participation in planning, and regular service that lasts at least one semester say that they take a good deal of interest in world events, while only 32 percent of those who have never engaged in school-based service report the same level of interest. [See Chart 13]

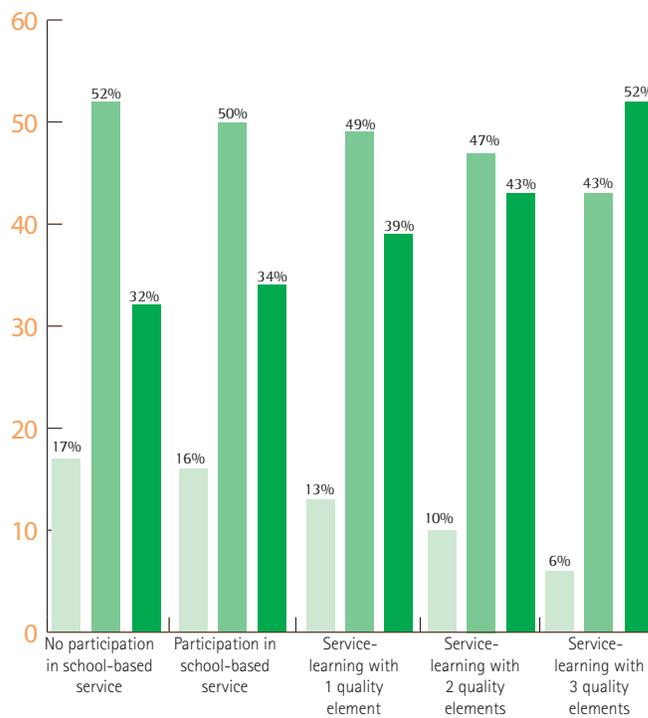
In addition, we asked youth about the extent to which they discuss politics with their family and friends. We found that youth who report current or past participation in quality service-learning are more likely to discuss politics with their friends, as well as with their parents and other adults, than those youth who have never participated in school-based service. [See Charts 14 and 15]

We found a moderate but significant relationship between participation in service-learning and youth attitudes toward political participation through voting. We found that youth who are 16 years or older and report current or past participation in service-learning activities that included reflection, participation in planning, and regular service that lasts at least one semester are more likely to indicate that it is very likely that they will vote regularly once they are eligible than those who have never participated in school-based service, 84 percent to 72 percent, respectively.

# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**MAJOR FINDING:** Youth who report current or past participation in service-learning are more likely to report interest in current events and to discuss politics with adults and friends than those who have never participated in school-based service.

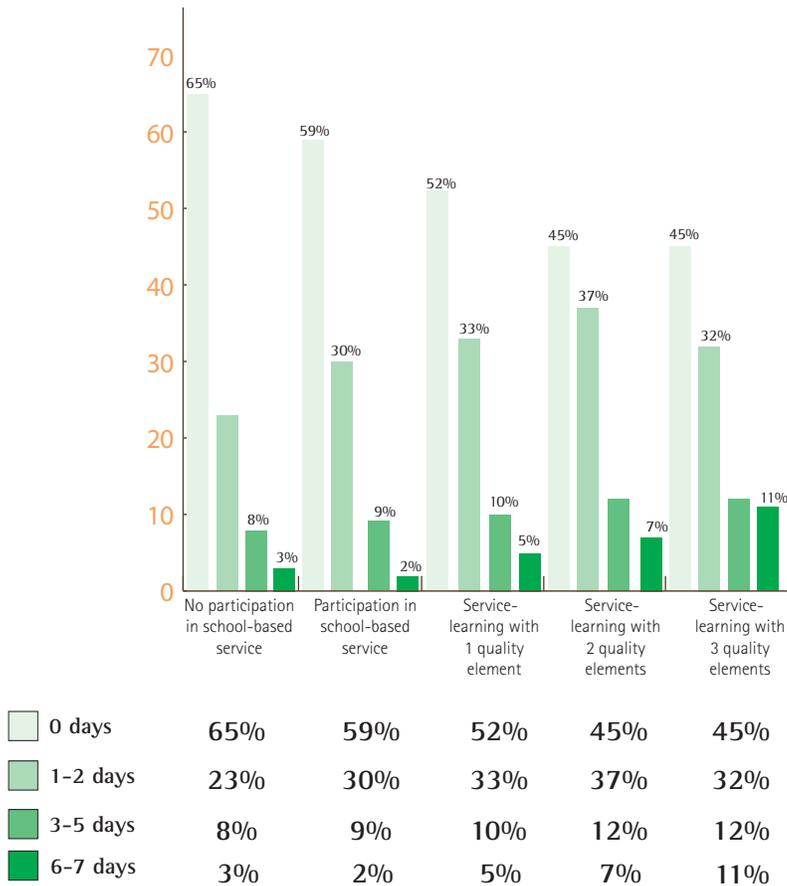
**CHART 13:** Interest in Current Events by Youth Participation in School-Based Service and Service-Learning (Currently or in the Past)



|                         |     |     |     |     |     |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Not very much interest  | 17% | 16% | 13% | 10% | 6%  |
| Some interest           | 52% | 50% | 49% | 47% | 43% |
| A good deal of interest | 32% | 34% | 39% | 43% | 52% |

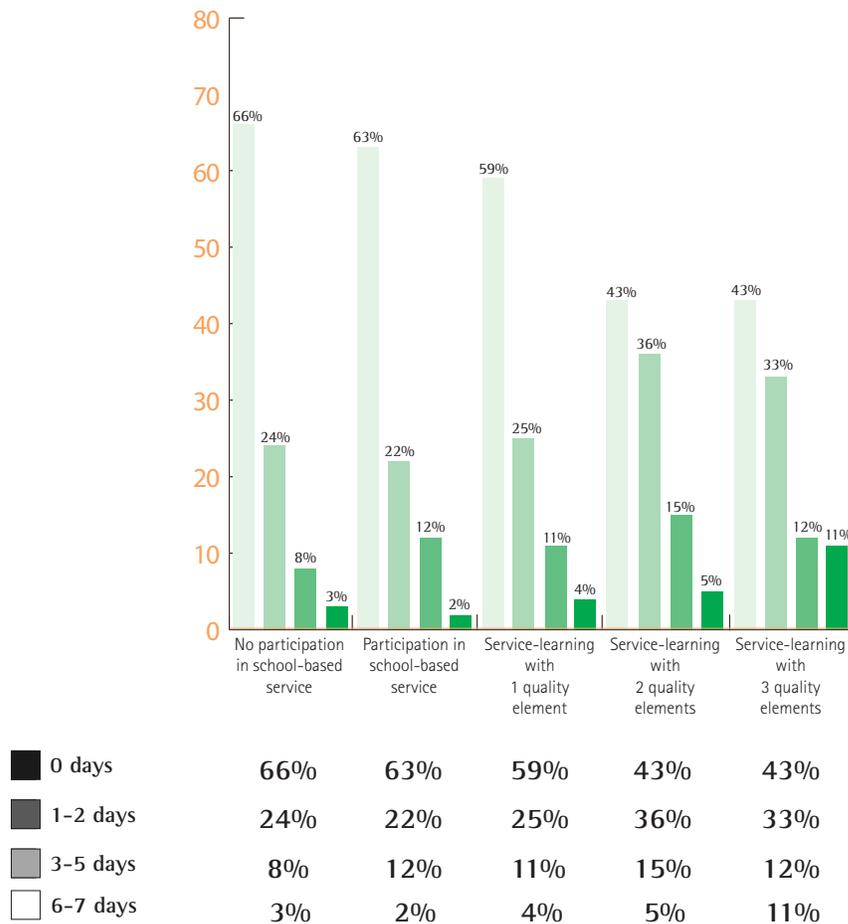
# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**CHART 14:** The Number of Days per Week Youth Discuss Politics With Parents Or Other Adults, by Participation in School-Based Service and Service-Learning (Currently or in the Past)



# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**CHART 15:** The Number of Days per Week Youth Discuss Politics With Friends, by Participation in School-Based Service and Service-Learning (Currently or in the Past)



Finally, the study indicates that there is a strong correlation between youth efficacy, defined as the personal ability to make a difference in solving problems in their community, and participation in school-based service. [See Chart 16]

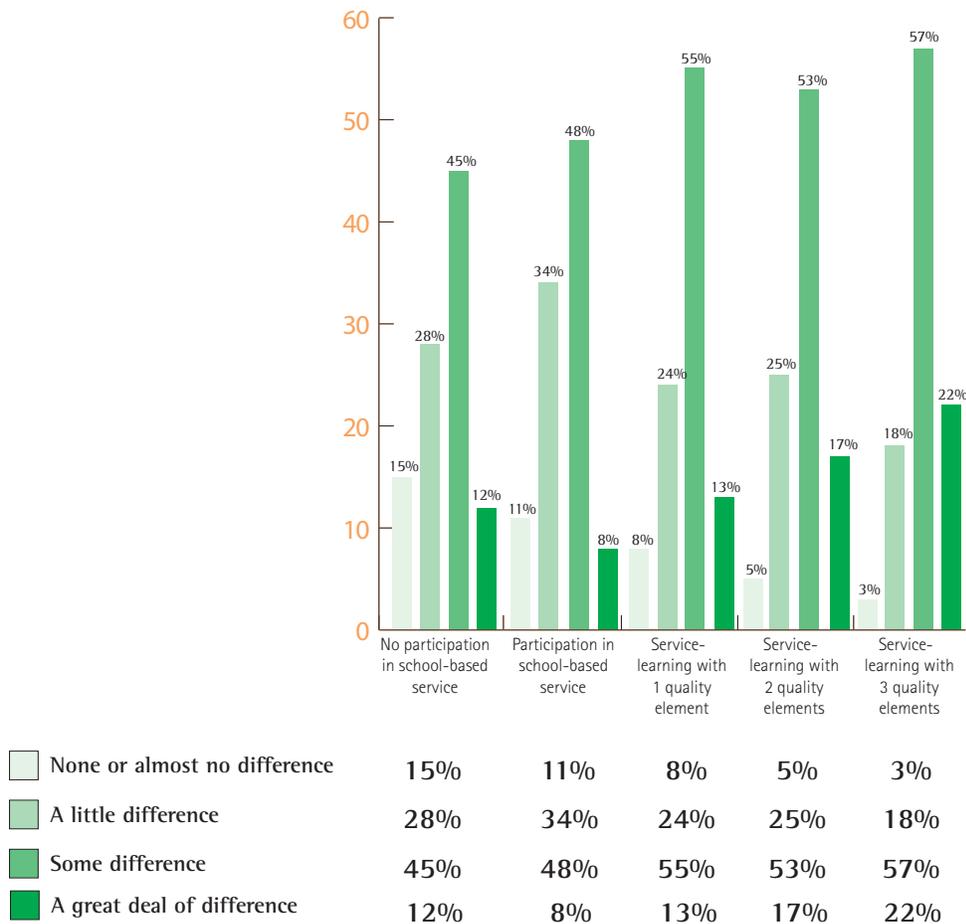
For example, youth who report current or past participation in service-learning activities that include reflection, participation in planning and regular service that lasts at least one semester are nearly three times more likely than those who engaged in service with none of these elements to say that they believe that they can personally make a great deal of difference in their community, 22 percent to 8 percent, respectively.

# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**MAJOR FINDING:** Youth who report current or past participation in high quality service-learning activities are nearly three times more likely than those who engaged in school-based service with none of these elements to say that they believe that they can personally make a great deal of difference in their community, 22 percent to 8 percent, respectively.

When we examined which of the elements of school-based service is the strongest factor in relation to these civic behaviors and attitudes, we found that while reflection can explain these differences better than either planning or regular service, it is the fact that youth participate in service that is connected to a class that has the greatest explanatory value.

**CHART 16:** Personal Ability to Make a Difference in the Community for Youth Who Participated in School-Based Service and Service-Learning (Currently or in the Past)



# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**MAJOR FINDING:** Current or past participation in school-based service has the strongest relationship with volunteering attitudes and behaviors among youth, followed by likelihood of voting regularly, interest in politics, belief in personal efficacy, and interest in current events.

We further found that school-based service has the strongest relationship with volunteering attitudes and behaviors, as well as an interest in being an active voter. There is a significant, albeit weaker, relationship between school-based service and discussions of politics, youth sense of personal efficacy and interest in current events.<sup>14</sup> [See Figure 2]

We did not find a significant relationship between school-based service and the extent to which youth report a positive attitude toward the future of the country or their level of trust toward people in general.

**FIGURE 2:** Positive Relationships between Civic Attitudes and Behaviors and Participation in School-Based Service



# YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

**MAJOR FINDING:** While youth from low-income families are less likely to report current or past participation in school-based service, there is a positive correlation between this participation and volunteering attitudes and behaviors, interest in political and current events, personal efficacy, trust, and optimism.

Previous research has indicated that school-based service provides youth with opportunities to engage with adults and individuals from other backgrounds, identify and address a community issue, and make connections between the service activities and community impacts have positive benefits for youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>15</sup> We were interested in testing whether the data shows that participation in school-based service and service-learning continues to have a positive relationship to civic engagement when we look specifically at disadvantaged youth.

We used family income to determine whether a respondent is classified as disadvantaged, and set the indicator at those youth from families with incomes of less than \$25,000.<sup>16</sup> An analysis of participation in school-based service by family income demonstrates that those youth from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to report current or past participation in school-based service, as well as service-learning that includes reflection, participation in planning or service that lasts a semester or longer.<sup>17</sup> [See Chart 17] According to the survey, 900,000 youth from disadvantaged backgrounds report current or past participation in school-based service.

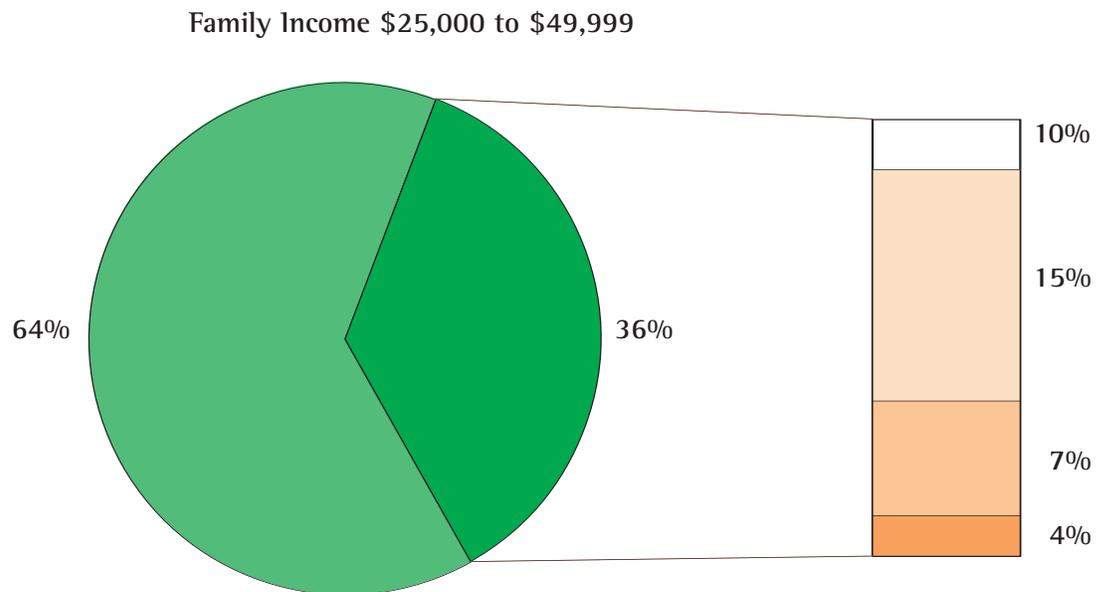
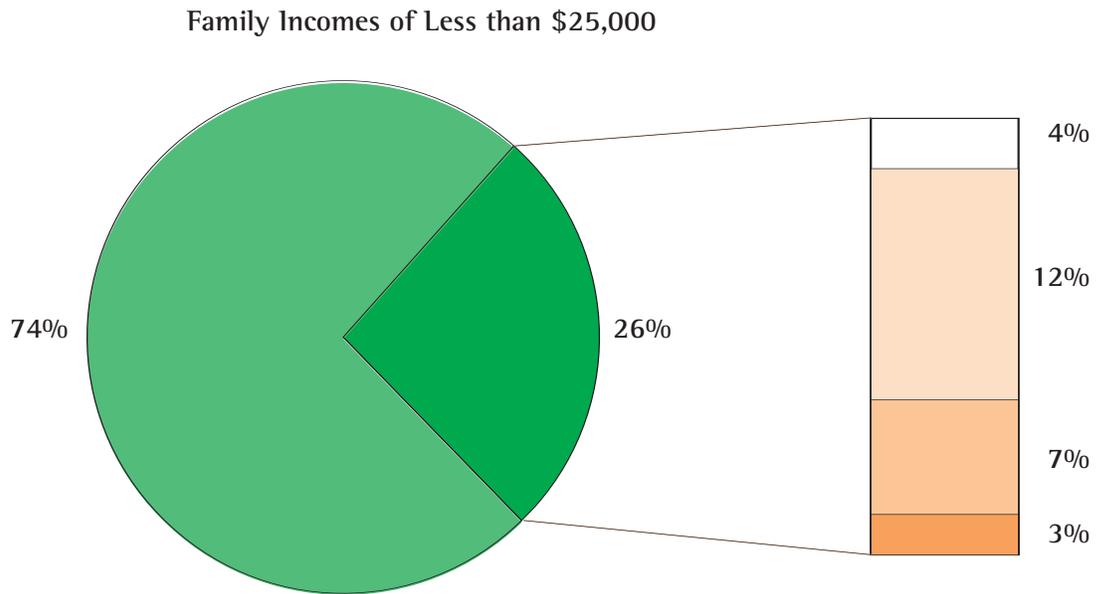
As we did for the youth population in general, we find that participation in school-based service for disadvantaged youth has a significant positive relationship with volunteering attitudes and behaviors, discussion of politics, interest in current events, and youth efficacy.<sup>18</sup> [See Figure 3]

In addition, while we did not see significant relationships between participation in school-based service and trust and optimism for the general youth population, we do find this correlation when we look at disadvantaged youth. While we are unable to state whether participation in school-based service leads to greater trust and optimism or greater trust and optimism leads disadvantaged youth to participate in school-based service, the findings, taken in the context of other research around disadvantaged youth, do suggest that there is benefit in reaching out to disadvantaged youth through school-based service.

Attitudes toward voting were the only form of civic engagement that did not maintain a significant relationship to participation in school-based service. While low-income youth are significantly less likely to report that they are very likely to be regular voters once they turn 18 than the youth population in general, 57 percent to 77 percent, respectively, we did not find any association between participation in school-based service and the likelihood that disadvantaged youth would be active voters.

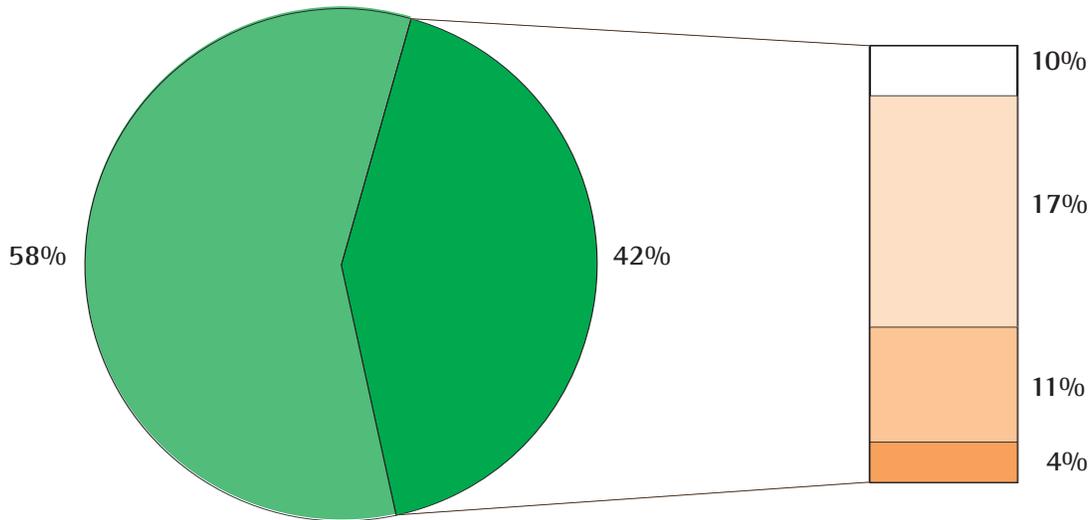
# SERVICE-LEARNING AND DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

CHART 17: Participation in School-Based Service, by Family Income



# SERVICE-LEARNING AND DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

Family Income \$50,000 or more



- No Participation in school-based service
- Participation in school-based service
- Service-learning with one quality element
- Service-learning with two quality elements
- Service-learning with three quality elements

# SERVICE-LEARNING AND DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

**FIGURE 3:** Positive Relationships between Civic Attitudes and Behaviors and Participation in School-Based Service for Disadvantaged Youth

The following civic behaviors and attitudes had significant and positive relationships to participation in service-learning for disadvantaged youth. [Note: Due to sample size, we are unable to state relative strength.]

- Likelihood of volunteering in the next year\*
- Volunteering in the past year\*\*
- Discussing politics with parents or other adults
- Discussing politics with friends
- Belief in personal ability to make a difference in solving community problems
- Interest in current events
- Belief that people can be trusted
- Positive view of the future

\*Includes only those youth 16 years of age or older.

\*\*Includes only those youth who participated in school-based service more than one year ago.

Through the Youth Volunteering Survey, we have sought to identify the role of social institutions in youth volunteering and service behaviors and attitudes. Our analysis to this point indicates that social institutions play a key role in youth engagement and that volunteering and service is a learned behavior. The majority of schools, as a central institution for this civic education, have recognized this role in providing community service and service-learning opportunities for their students. Yet, it is also crucial that schools provide students with quality service-learning experience and that youth have an environment that encourages them to take advantage of these opportunities.

The results of our analysis indicate that those youth who do participate in school-based service also are more highly engaged. While we are unable to determine the direction of this relationship — that is, whether school-based service leads to greater civic engagement or greater civic engagement increases the likelihood that youth will participate in school-based service — the consistent relationship suggests that educating youth to be active citizens requires a well-rounded approach that encompasses the various social institutions that shape youths' perspectives toward their community and their role within it.

We recommend that future research on school-based service and service-learning consider the motivations of youth in engaging in school-based service, as well as the ways in which partnerships between schools and other social institutions can help to build an environment in which youth recognize the value of civic engagement. This approach would be particularly valuable for engaging disadvantaged youth, a population shown to be less likely to participate in school-based service and maintain positive civic attitudes and behaviors.

## ENDNOTES

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- 1 For research that assesses the extent to which schools provide opportunities to engage in community service and service-learning, see Newman & Rutter (1985), Skinner & Chapman (1999), and Kielsmeier, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Neal (2004). For a summary of research that assesses the impact of service-learning on youth academic and personal development, see Billig (2000) and (2004). For research that assesses the role of school-based service on youth development, see, for example, Flanagan (2005), Keeter et al (2002), Marks & Kuss (2001), Raskoff & Sundeen (2001), Turney-Purta (2002) Yates & Youniss (1998), Youniss et al (2002).
- 2 The initial report in the Youth Helping America Series, *Building Active Citizens: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering*, focused on youth volunteering and the social institutions of family, religious organizations, and schools. The report can be downloaded at [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov).
- 3 This growing trend by schools to provide opportunities for youth to engage in community service and service-learning has been attributed to the need among schools to find effective ways to improve youth engagement in their community and their academic outcomes. See, for example, Conrad & Hedin (1991).
- 4 The percent of schools with service-learning and community service opportunities are based on the 1999 National Student Service-Learning and Community Service Survey, conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education through the Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) and the 1984 survey of high schools conducted by Newmann and Rutter. A third study conducted in 2004, the Study of Community Service and Service-Learning in Public Schools, conducted by Westat with support from the National Youth Leadership Council found that 45 percent of high schools and 20 percent of middle schools provided service-learning, while 83 percent of high schools and 70 percent of middle schools offered community service opportunities to students, indicating that the increase from 1984 has largely stabilized over the past several years.
- 5 It is valuable to note that while service-learning is most often carried out through schools, either in class or during after-school programs, service-learning also may occur outside of school, through community-based organizations that assign specific learning objectives to the service activities. The Youth Volunteering Survey, however, focused on youth engagement in school-based service.
- 6 The Youth Volunteering Survey asked respondents the subject area for their most recent class that included community service. The largest percentage of youth categorized that subject as 'Other.' We are, however, unable to clarify what the respondent intended as 'Other.' The next most common subject areas include: Elective Courses, 16 percent; Social Studies, 12 percent; Science, 10 percent; and English or Language Arts, 7 percent.
- 7 For a list of the Essential Elements of Service-Learning, see National Service-Learning Cooperative (1998).
- 8 For more information on the Essential Elements of Service-Learning and Their Relationship to Service-Learning Impacts, see Billig, et al (2005). For more detailed information on the research around service-learning and its impact on youth, see, for example, Billig, et al (2005), Furco (2002), Kim & Billig (2003), Klute & Billig (2002), Melchior & Bailis (2002).
- 9 For research on the importance of youth perceptions of school-based service activities, see Raskoff & Sundeen (1999) and (2001), and Root (1997).

- 10 See Newman & Rutter (1985), Skinner & Chapman (1999), and Kielsmeier, Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Neal (2004).
- 11 While we decided to include results based on the respondents' GPA, it is important to note that this is self-reported information. We found that the distribution of GPA scores reported through this survey to be skewed, with over 75 percent of respondents reporting a GPA of B or higher. Research has shown that secondary school grades tend to be inflated in self-reporting when compared to GPAs as reported by schools. For more on grade inflation, see Koretz & Berends (2001).
- 12 As we reported in "Building Active Citizens," youth who come from a family where at least one parent volunteers are almost two times more likely to volunteer and nearly three times more likely to volunteer regularly than youth who come from a family where no members volunteer. Family members for this analysis included immediate and extended family.
- 13 See, for example, Flanagan (2005), Keeter, et al (2002), Marks & Kuss (2001), Raskoff & Sundeen (2001), Turney-Purta (2002) Yates & Youniss (1998), Youniss, et al (2002).
- 14 The order of the civic indicators in Figure 1 reflects the relative strength of the association of each indicator with school-based service participation. We calculate measure-of-association statistics for each indicator to determine how strong each relationship is. However, because these statistics are measured with error, it is often not possible to say with confidence that one relationship is stronger than another.
- 15 For research on disadvantaged youth, school-based service, and service-learning, see Billig (2004), Flanagan (2005), Raskoff & Sundeen (2001), and Marks & Kuss (2001).
- 16 Family income was derived from the reported family income for the household in the CPS survey. Within the youth volunteering sample, 14 percent of households reported an income of less than \$25,000. The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive 14 requires the use of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. While our analysis does not take into account variations in income by family size, the threshold of \$25,000 falls within the range of income established by the OMB directive. The selection of a threshold of \$25,000 also provides us with a sufficiently large sample of respondents for analysis. For more information on household income and poverty, see the U.S. Census Bureau's Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004.
- 17 The median family income for the Youth Volunteering Survey is between \$50,000 and \$59,000. The median income for family households, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, is \$55,327.
- 18 However, due to large standard errors that result when we limit our analysis to those youth from families with income less than \$25,000, we are not able to discern whether the relationship between participation in school-based service and civic attitudes and behaviors is stronger or weaker for disadvantaged youth and the general population.

# METHODOLOGY

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## DESCRIPTION OF UNIVERSE AND SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

The universe of the 2005 Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey consisted of about 10,000 households selected from expired Current Population Survey (CPS) housing units.\* The sample units for the Youth Volunteering Survey were selected from households with at least one persons aged 12-18. The goal was to have a final completed interview sample of at least 3,000 persons age 12-18 interviewed with one person per household selected using a randomized selection function.

Two weeks prior to the beginning of the interview period, an advance letter was sent to the households selected from the CPS. This letter gave a brief description of the survey and provided a Census Bureau 1-800 telephone number that could be used to opt their teens out of the interview. The remaining households were then contacted by telephone and if the respondent did not receive the letter, it was read to them providing another opportunity to refuse the interview. A sample teen, if present, was then selected for the detailed interview. Again, we asked permission to speak to the teen.

## EFFORTS TO MAXIMIZE RESPONSE

The detailed interview with the sampled teen was also conducted over the phone. The interviews were conducted by interviewers working out of one of the Census Bureau's three centralized telephone facilities. The Census Bureau telephone center staff performed standard procedures to keep the noninterview rate as low as possible. If necessary, at least ten attempts were made to get a completed interview. Calls took place after 3 p.m. local time with at least two call attempts on weekends.

## RESPONSE RATE AND BIAS

The overall response rate for the survey was 44 percent. Census obtained a 45 percent response for the screener and a 97 percent response for the detailed interview, making the overall rate (45% times 97%) 44 percent. Due to the response rate, Census investigated the possibility of systematic differences between the interviewed and noninterviewed universes. They examined several CPS demographic characteristics of the two universes to determine if a bias may exist. They looked at the family income, size of household, urban/rural, and the race, ethnicity, sex, education, marital status, and employment status of the head of household. They did not find a statistical difference between the attributes of the two universes.

## WEIGHT ESTIMATION

The final weight for each case is the product of the inverse of the selection probability (accounting for selection to the CPS and selection into the volunteer survey), a weight adjustment to account for noninterviews, a first-stage weighting factor to reduce the variance due to the selection on non-self-representing primary sampling units (PSUs), and a second-stage weighting factor to bring sample estimates into agreement independent population controls by age, race, and sex.

\* The original samples for the CPS surveys were selected from 1990 decennial census files with coverage in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. For information about the methodology used for the Current Population Survey, visit [www.bls.census.gov/cps](http://www.bls.census.gov/cps).

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