

# COMMUNITY SERVICE AND SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

AN ISSUE BRIEF FROM LEGISLATIVE BUDGET BOARD STAFF

ID: 363

APRIL 2013

## OBJECTIVE

Community service and service-learning programs seek to promote volunteerism and civic responsibility among high school students.

## KEY FACTS

- ◆ Texas does not have a statute addressing student volunteerism. However, many school districts have programs that promote volunteer work.
- ◆ Texas Administrative Code, Section 74.27 permits districts to offer innovative courses.
- ◆ There is currently only one state-approved community service innovative course. This course is entitled Service Learning.
- ◆ Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have statutes that promote community service and service learning among their students.

## BUDGETARY IMPACT

School districts may fund approved innovative courses through Foundation School Program funds for regular school operations at local discretion.

## STATUTORY REFERENCES

Texas Education Code, Section 28.002

Volunteerism among high school students can include participation in community service and service learning. Community service provides students with the opportunity to perform volunteer work that is focused on improving their communities. Service learning, however, integrates service into the education curriculum and ties volunteer projects to learning objectives. No Texas statute addresses student volunteerism in schools or establishes a standard for recognizing students who perform volunteer work. However, a variety of programs exist that allow and encourage high school students to participate in service.

## INNOVATIVE COURSES

Texas Education Agency (TEA) rules permit school districts and charter schools to offer innovative courses. These courses allow students to gain knowledge and skills that are not included in the required curriculum. The State Board of Education (SBOE) or the commissioner of education (commissioner) may approve innovative courses. To receive approval for a course, a district or organization must submit an application to TEA. The application must describe the course, list its essential knowledge and skills, and provide a justification for the request based on student need. It must also include resources and instructional materials to be used, methods for evaluating student outcomes, necessary teacher qualifications, and the amount of credit requested. Once approved, these courses may be offered by districts for state elective credit. Districts may also offer any of the currently approved innovative courses with the consent of the local board of trustees.

Innovative courses cover a wide range of topics. However, the innovative course entitled Service Learning was specifically designed to provide students with opportunities to participate in service work. This course was developed by American YouthWorks, a charitable organization that operates a service-based charter school in Austin. Service Learning is an enrichment course that allows students to identify a problem in their community and develop a service project that addresses that problem.

Since Service Learning is a state-approved innovative course, districts may offer the class with the consent of their board of trustees. From school years 2007–08 to 2011–12, eight districts or charter schools have offered Service Learning and 565 students have completed the course.

## LOCAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

A number of school districts and charter schools across the state have local programs and policies promoting community service among their students. How they address community service varies. Some require students to complete a specific number of service hours to graduate. Texas Education Code, Section 28.002 authorizes school districts and charter schools to offer courses for local credit in addition to those in the required curriculum and encourages them to develop local instructional plans that exceed minimum requirements. Locally developed courses do not have to be approved by the SBOE or the commissioner. However, students do not receive state credit toward graduation for completing locally developed courses. Duncanville ISD requires students to complete 40 service hours to be eligible for graduation. This requirement is adjusted at a rate of five hours per semester

for students who enroll after the beginning of grade nine. Students at Duncanville High School receive 0.5 local credits in “Community Service” for completing the requirement. Midlothian ISD has a community service graduation requirement of 10 hours. At Midlothian High School, however, students do not earn local credit for performing service hours.

Specialized schools may also include community service hours as a requisite for graduation. The Ann Richards School for Young Women Leaders requires students to complete a specified number of community service hours each school year. The service requirement increases from 6 hours in grade 6 to 30 hours in grade 12. The Irma Rangel Young Women’s Leadership School in Dallas ISD requires students in grade 6 to complete 5 hours of community service. The service requirement increases by 5 hours each grade level so that students in grade 12 are required to perform 35 service hours. In Corpus Christi ISD, students attending the Collegiate High School are required to participate in a minimum of 100 hours of community service. New Tech High School in Coppell ISD requires students to perform 10 hours of community service each year to graduate. At Manor New Tech High School in Manor ISD, it is expected that students complete at least 50 hours of community service by the end of their senior year.

Some districts within the state promote community service by recognizing students who have performed a specified number of service hours. For example, students at Dripping Springs High School in Dripping Springs ISD can earn the Principal’s Volunteer Service Award for completing 100 hours of community service. Students who earn this award receive a special cord to wear during graduation ceremonies. In Frisco ISD, students who complete 100 service hours earn a special cord and are recognized in the graduation program. Lancaster ISD bestows community service honors upon graduation to students who have completed 100 hours of service.

### **REPORTING SERVICE HOURS TO COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

Community service hours are occasionally included on student transcripts; however, high schools are not required to record or report this information. The primary method for sharing a student’s community service history is through the admissions application. Students may apply to public colleges and universities using the ApplyTexas common application for admissions. This application is also accepted by participating private institutions. The ApplyTexas application consists of two parts: Part I, in which students supply biographical information, and Part II, in which they list their personal achievements. All institutions require students to complete Part I. However, completion of Part II is required only by certain colleges and universities. In Part II of the application, students are given the opportunity to describe the community or volunteer service they have participated in and the amount of time they served. All service hours are self-reported. Students can also inform colleges and universities of their community service by including a résumé along with their application. They may also write about the volunteer work they have performed in their application essays. Letters of recommendation can also provide colleges and universities with information about a student’s service history.

### **OTHER STATES**

Seventeen states and the District of Columbia have statutes that promote community service and service learning among their students. Of these, 10 states have statutes that encourage districts to provide, and students to participate in, service opportunities. Five states also have statutes allowing students who perform an established number of community service hours to earn credit toward graduation. Iowa and Wisconsin statutes allow school districts to require completion of community service or service learning to earn a high school diploma. The District of Columbia requires all high school students to complete 100 community service hours to graduate.

Of the states with statutes regarding community service and service learning, five also have mechanisms for recognizing student volunteer work on transcripts or diplomas. Iowa permits districts to require students to complete a certain number of community service hours to receive a service-learning endorsement on their diplomas. In Delaware, students who complete at least 45 hours of community service per semester for two semesters receive a Delaware Volunteer credit. This credit prominently appears on their high school transcripts. The state of Virginia includes voluntary participation in community service as one criterion for receiving a diploma seal for excellence in civic education.

### **USEFUL REFERENCES**

TEA Innovative Courses (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=6079>); Colorado Revised Statutes Section 22-32-137; Delaware Code Title 14 Section 8902A; Code of Virginia Section 22.1-253.13:4; National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (<http://www.servicelearning.org>).

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