



TO: Lily Rothman, Simeon Talley, and David Burd – Presidential Transition Team
FROM: Michael L. Benjamin, Executive Director
SUBJECT: FCCLA Response to Civic Engagement Post-Inauguration
DATE: January 13, 2009

Thank you for the opportunity for us to give input and share our experiences with involving youth in civic engagement and service learning.

As you know, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) provides Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) teachers with the tools necessary to integrate community service into their curriculum. FCCLA has provided real-world learning through service since 1945. Community Service is one of FCCLA's strongest national programs that guide students to develop, plan, carry out, and evaluate projects to improve the quality of life in their communities. Through their projects members experience character development and improve their critical and creative thinking, interpersonal communications, practical knowledge, and career preparation.

FCCLA's Community Service projects range from simple, one time efforts to multi-faceted, ongoing programs. We work with FACS teachers to integrate the basic principles of the program and to promote FCCLA student member service projects in their communities. State and national recognition has been developed to award those FCCLA chapters that make a difference in their communities.

FCCLA's Community Service publication was updated two years ago to include NCLB information and service learning integration, so that our FACS teachers continue utilizing it and integrating it into their curriculum. Attached is a copy of the relevant information from the publication that may assist you in the process of collecting information.

We forwarded your request to members of the FCCLA Board of Directors including FCCLA staff, youth members, alumni, classroom teachers and college professors. The responses below cover the breath of thinking about civic engagement, community service and service learning.

- a) How do we connect incremental volunteerism to the larger narrative arc of change?
- We need to reconnect Americans to service and service-oriented living, while constantly showing how this relates to self-advancement. The benefits of strong social capital created through volunteerism strengthens the community, but also strengthens the self by creating new networks and establishing a name, title, and reputation within the respective community (Putnam, *Bowling Alone*). We need to look to connecting American need to promote individualism with the Obama "change" narrative of communal engagement.
 - That is, promote the pride of being an American and helping others. For students, pointing out that volunteerism will be a part of the rest of their lives is essential and needs to begin as early as possible in a student's educational life. We believe that creating an understanding of and commitment to the concepts of community service and civic engagement should begin before high school.

- Middle school students can become very excited about service, especially when they can see immediate results of their commitment and work. Developing opportunities for middle school students to be involved is already in place in many Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) – especially in FCCLA. This is one of our “arenas” – the large number of middle school chapters and FACS programs that exist in many of our states.
- In addition, some basic civic education at middle school and creating actual service learning opportunities at both middle school and high school as well as at the university level is crucial. Service learning has a much greater likelihood of becoming a lifetime commitment or a consistent part of a person’s lifestyle the earlier it is practiced. Again, this is our arena.
- Also, many associations and nonprofits in our country were founded by volunteers that wanted to work for a greater cause or a common interest. In order for change to occur, we must model the behavior by promoting volunteerism to the public through media and by involving Hollywood.

b) How do we better engage young people/students who have never been engaged before?

- This generation of youth needs to feel that their change matters and they are listened to. Youth are excited and want to serve. High schools and colleges across the country are teaming with students who want, more than anything, to participate.
- This level of participation can be achieved by creating Facebook applications, having an American Service TWITTER group, creating blogs for interacting with TOP service officials in the administration, and by publicizing outstanding efforts. Mobilize a “street campaign for American progress” by having committed supporters going into their community to promote volunteerism door-to-door (like the Obama campaign strategy).
- Utilize the CTSO networks of students, specifically FCCLA with our heavy focus on Community Service, to act as a vehicle for this movement. There is nothing like a face-to-face contact with a peer. Consider tying FCCLA Alumni to this movement, by asking them to go into their local schools to promote volunteerism.
- In a scenario created by one of our FCCLA Board members and a group of teachers, they developed the following story board:
 1. A continuum of involvement should be identified created. Like adults, students have varied motivation and volunteer experiences and some have none. Some students know how to pitch in and others think that just by showing up and putting in their time, are volunteering. Example: a student comes to help with the FCCLA garage sale. She spends most of the time talking with other students and text messaging. At the end, she expects to get volunteer credit because she put in her "time" for the sale. Students like this obviously need more direction and perhaps a buy-in as to why what they are doing and why. You also have a generation of affluent students to whom "working" means picking their clothes off the floor before the cleaning lady comes.
 2. There needs to be an education piece in place for each step on the involvement continuum. A student who has candy striped at a hospital is probably going to be better skilled than a person who is going to have their first volunteer experience. That education could be on the task itself as well as why we volunteer. An entry level volunteer might not fully grasp the concept of "giving back to the community" or enriching yourself and others through volunteering.
 3. An interest survey could be helpful in establishing where a student's talents, interests and services could be best utilized in terms of their volunteer involvement - this could better help with the "buy-in" piece. If a person actually works during the time

they are volunteering and feels they have made contributions, they are more like to continue to volunteer.

4. The younger generation is very much into being visible to their friends and the world, hopefully in a positive way. Using social media sights or newly generated websites that acknowledge volunteers and lay out the purpose/expectations/realities of the volunteer organization would benefit everyone.
5. Lastly -- preparation and support are key. Take for example the girl who showed up to "put in her time." A person like that could have probably benefited from a very clear description of what was expected of her and what tasks needed to be completed by her. Once a volunteer opportunity has been established, a set of clear guidelines/expectations must be provided to the volunteer.

Support also needs to be there as well, particularly for long term commitments. In speaking with several parents of children who volunteered through Teach for America, and their feedback was that there was little support of the new teacher/professional. Students who have a background in education at least have had classes to prepare them for teaching as well as student teaching. However, with Teach for America, the experience of these students was that they were given a crash course in teaching and then were thrown to the wolves to fend for themselves in very tough environments. Neither of these young teachers would recommend Teach for America to their friends. There needs to be a win-win for both the volunteer and the organization.

- c) In what ways can we talk and think differently about civic engagement to make it appeal to the broader public?
 - Civic engagement is a mutually beneficial partnership between an individual and the group. In a way, civic engagement and service learning can be considered as community "protective factors." By getting civically engaged we are promoting a healthy, safe, and prosperous community that will benefit all with protection, health, and monetary prosperity through the creation of strong networks.
 - Narrow down the demographic by preparing brochures for involvement by demographics, geographic area, psychographics, etc.
 - Put the information in their hands. Door-to-door. Person-to-person.
 - Youth and the broader public are two different audiences. Youth today are receptive to technology and utilizing social mediums, such as, Facebook, to communicate their activities, events, and accomplishments. Reaching students at an earlier age would build the foundation to increase civic engagement commitments as they enter the workforce.
 - Urging people to build better and stronger communities by volunteering their time, going back to the basics of explaining to the general public what civic engagement is all about? What's in it for them? Why is it important for society and our country?
- d) Is there anything specific in the mechanism best used to address young people versus the general public? If yes, what is that difference?
 - Yes, we have the ability to integrate service learning and civic engagement into the school systems and require students to participate in service learning activities. The answer for better engaging young people in their communities is integrating their service and civic experience with their curriculum. Such activities would enable them to improve their critical and creative thinking, interpersonal communications, practical

- knowledge, career preparation, and strengthen their connection to their families and communities.
- Engage the issues that youth are interested in. (Internships, jobs, drinking age, job market, etc.)
 - The person-to-person mechanism is the best for creating involvement the issue is the content of information. One size fits all does not work.
 - Student Council, National Honor Society, CTSOs, utilize the network of organized students to promote the program. At the collegiate level, utilize the Greek organizations. Many of these organizations have community service and service learning as a significant component of their programming.
 - Utilize collegiate youth to speak to younger individuals. Use people who are 5-10 years older than the group you are trying to motivate. Each can identify with the other!

Additions and Recommendations for Possible Mechanisms:

- Promoting civic education in high schools and service learning opportunities in colleges and universities;

Not just promoting it but requiring civic education and providing the funding. Service learning has a much greater likelihood of becoming a lifetime commitment or a consistent part of a person's lifestyle the earlier it is practiced. As previously mentioned FACS educators that are FCCLA advisers integrate service learning and community service projects in their curriculum.

Regarding developing national partnerships between secondary and higher education programs- Many university presidents have affiliated with the national "Campus Compact". The Campus Compact agreement indicates a President's commitment for university participation and facilitates a national network for volunteer service and academic service learning research and resources for campuses.

Many four year universities have also become national partners in the American Democracy Project through the university Provost offices. Many university partners use "Educating Citizens- Preparing America's Undergraduates For Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility" as a key philosophical resource. Authors Colby and Ehrlich are national leaders and researchers on the topic at the university level.

- Promoting the inclusion of students on school boards and youth councils that involve a diverse cross-section of young people;

Inclusion of youth is essential. For example, one of our student members is on the Ohio Commission for Personal Finance Education dealing with the new curriculum passed by the state and the commission's recommendation is being adopted by the Ohio Dept. of Ed as well assisting schools in at the county level in developing their own strategies for implementing the new mandate. Another FCCLA member was recently appointed as a youth member on the Connecticut State Board of Education.

Related to these achievements, Senator Dodd is advocating a Semester of Service Act legislation that will offer students in their junior or senior year of high school the opportunity to spend a semester participating in community service-learning for academic credit. The legislation would create a competitive grant program that enables school districts, or nonprofits working in partnership with local school districts, to teach

civic participation skills and help young people see themselves as resources to their communities.

Another example, the DC Council's Office of Youth Programs offers juniors and seniors in high school an internship opportunity. More information available on www.dccouncil.us/officeofyouthprograms

- Designing an interactive web site with pages for each issue campaign.
This is an excellent mechanism. Tie to youth partner organizations. Utilize organizations (like FCCLA) to host their own subsidiary network of service projects linked to the national setup.
- President-elect Obama including a call to civic engagement as part of each of his speeches on various national priorities (e.g., energy, healthcare, etc) and linking the various ways to serve to drive home the connection between service and national priorities, specifically;
- Creating issue-based web pages that invite students and citizens to get involved in supporting various issues via education, service, and advocacy, including links to local organizations doing that work and opportunities for individuals to self-organize;
Divide the categories into interest groups. Sports, music, academics, religion, animal!. Sports should link to youth athletic groups and coaches. Animals/nature link to camping, Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, animal shelters, etc. Music links to performances for retirement homes, community theatres, putting on free concerts, etc.
- Working with celebrities and other pop icons to promote engagement in specific issue-oriented campaigns; and
This is ESSENTIAL! Putting these individuals in the face of youth to promote service would greatly influence the youth of the day. Creating a partnership between the organizations, like FCCLA, that are working with students already and connecting them with celebrity is essential.
- Outreach via text messaging, the iPhone application, and Facebook.
 - *Avoid over texting and over e-mailing.*
 - *Short one-liners to get people linked to service. Utilize the Facebook news feed.*
 - *MySpace is important, but seems to be a fading trend. Facebook should be focused on more heavily.*
 - *Twitter is still a trend that has not hit the middle of the country, but it is popular on the east and west coasts and in urban centers. If there are targeted demographic areas, this could be implemented well.*

Additional resources and information:

- A new Child Trends brief, ***Implementing School-Based Services: Strategies from New Mexico's School-Based Health and Extended Learning Services***, builds on initial work conceptualizing the value of school-based services; outlines the challenges and strategies for implementing school-based services that were shared in the Roundtables; and highlights suggestions made by Roundtable participants for implementing these services.
- Regarding a way to create national bridges- the last Saturday in October is a national "Make a Difference Day". The day already gets national press coverage and the press is usually looking for examples to report. <http://www.usaweekend.com/diffday/>

- Global Youth Service Day, <http://www.ysa.org/NatlGYSD/tabid/59/Default.aspx>

Again, thanks for the opportunity to respond to your request on Civic Engagement Post Inauguration. As the past Chair of our Board of Directors stated: “As students use content knowledge to provide service, they develop character and civility skills; and as students demonstrate character and civility skills, they prepare for work, family and community life.”

The FCCLA and Family and Consumer Sciences educators stand ready to assist President Obama’s Administration in carrying out its agenda for change.

Enclosure