

MENTORS STRENGTHEN STUDENT COMMUNITY SERVICE

by Cynthia Parsons

This monograph is a publication of SerVermont, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Chester, Vermont, that encourages all students — PreK- Graduate School — to do voluntary community service integrated with academic coursework.

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FOREWORD

This monograph is addressed to all educators, private and public, at every level of schooling, and to those volunteers who serve in such splendid community organizations as:

- * Local Parent-Teacher Associations
- * Co'mmunity-wide United Way Memberships
- * Regional Retired Senior Volunteer Programs
- * Regional offices of the National Education Association-Retired
- * Regional offices of the American Federation of Teachers-Retired
- * Regional offices of the American Association of University Women
- * Regional offices of the American Association of Retired Persons
- * Local School Booster Clubs
- * Local Ministerial Alliances

It would be ungrateful in the extreme for me not to acknowledge here the debt I owe so many of the mentors who have provided me with wise counsel during my fifty years teaching school, writing about schooling, and, for the past twelve years, coordinating the work of SerVermont, an initiative that encourages all students — kindergarten through graduate school —to become small “d” democrats through service learning

activities. The governing board of SerVermont is particularly grateful to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the C.S. Mott Foundation for their generous support of research for and the publication of this monograph.

Six of the finest believers in student community service — mentors all — read early drafts of this monograph and offered compelling suggestions for improving the medium as well as the message: Pat Barnicle, Jean Gibran, Lee Griffin, Chelsea Kesselheim, Dorothy (Lonewolf) Miller, and Jack Ragle.

Pat, based at the Lincoln Filene Center at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, has been providing training in service learning throughout the United States. Thinking of what to say to emphasize her expertise and enthusiasm, I can think of no more telling miracle than the fact that when she offers training in student community service on a Saturday, hundreds of classroom teachers and building administrators attend. Jean, co-author with her husband, Kahlil, of *Kahlil Gibran: His Life and World*, serves as a community mentor for teachers and administrators in the Boston City Schools.

Lee is the former editor of the “Vermont Quarterly,” the alumni magazine for the University of Vermont, and is a mentor to a host of novice writers. Chelsea, now retired, is a poet and a teacher of English composition,

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working as a volunteer in conflict resolution with troubled teens, and has served as a mentor to the author of this monograph since our high school days together.

Dorothy, my Blackfeet big sister, is a mentor extraordinaire for graduate students in the social sciences, researchers involved with the Scientific Analysis Corporation, and her fellow Native Americans. She writes with precision. She has demanded that this monograph answer the question: "Why would I want to be a mentor for student community service?" Jack, like the other five, is both an educator and an author. Under his leadership, the private independent school, Governor Dummer Academy, became coeducational and placed among the top academic preparatory schools in the nation.

I am equally grateful for years of thoughtful companionship from SerVermont's officers: Lianne Hegman, president, Shelly McSweeney, vice-president and secretary, and Tom Hark, treasurer. Also to those SerVermont advisors who provided expertise and encouragement a dozen years ago and have remained constant supporters ever since: Bill Cirone, Jack Coleman, T.J. Coolidge, Alice Halsted, Madeleine M. Kunin, Joanna Lennon, Margaret E. Mahoney, Tory

Spatar, Carol and Russ Todd, Alan Weiss, Sally Warren, and Hal Woods.

For those who want to learn more about student community service, I recommend three books I have written. *Seeds: Some Good Ways to Improve our Schools*, published by Woodbridge Press; *The Co-op Bridge*, also published by Woodbridge; and *Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve: Civics and Service from A to Z*, published by Corwin Press. The research and early distribution of the last book were generously supported by the Edwin Gould Foundation for Children and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Cynthia Parsons
Chester, Vermont

INTRODUCTION

The Questions

- * What is a mentor?
- * Why would anyone want to be one?
- * What is student community service or service learning?
- * How does mentoring strengthen student community service?

The Answers

A mentor is a wise elder or peer, a caring counselor, a trusted guide. Couple such guidance with student community service and the mentor we speak of in this monograph is one who knows and loves the local community, is deeply involved in volunteer activities locally, and is willing to help a novice educator provide students with community service opportunities. Why? Why would someone be willing to mentor an adult educator or a student?

Perhaps the following is a compelling reason. Our United States of America is the strongest democracy

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on earth, not because we universally accept the responsibility to vote (we don't do as well as citizens in several other democratic nations), but because so many of us are citizen servants. Because hundreds of thousands of us volunteer time, energy, and expertise in order to meet important civic and social needs.

In order to function well, hospitals, libraries, museums, safety patrols, fire departments, parks, and a host of groups devoted to wise use of the land, the environment, natural resources, and community health all depend on volunteer service and philanthropic giving by caring citizens.

It is up to our schools to prepare all children to become small "d" democrats. Because the requirements of citizenship and civic service are best done by integrating the doing of civic service with the study of civics and history, all school officials need to understand their local communities in considerable depth.

This need to know one's community isn't some peripheral task for teachers and administrators; it's a critical requirement. Who better to guide those who are strangers to the local school district than those community elders already involved in community service. Incentive for the mentors is the knowledge that their places will be taken, in time, by those who have learned

— because of their having been mentored — how to love and serve their communities.

We are an enormously mobile citizenry. At the start of every school year, a large number of key school officials are beginning employment in a community that is new to them. It is the rare exception when a newly-hired teacher takes a position in a school district in which he/she grew up. More than half of all newly-hired principals never lived in the community before taking the job. The same with the chief officer, the district superintendent. And, of course, every year families with school-age children move into new-to-them communities.

They are all strangers to the community, and the community is strange for them.

Eleven years ago I visited all of the secondary schools in Vermont to determine: (a) how much student community service was already being done, and (b) how willing school officials were to integrate some community service with academic coursework. Time and again I was told about the difficulty of making such arrangements — particularly with the non-profit sector — because key school officials were either new to the area or were both new to the area and did not live in any of the communities served by the school.

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Again and again the school teachers and administrators asked what I meant by service learning and admitted they were more accustomed to considering community service assigned as punishment for misbehaving students than as a good teaching method to be employed throughout the student body and across the curriculum. My short answer to them was: “Service learning is good teaching.”

Service learning is just a phrase to describe an excellent teaching method. The teacher starts with an academic need and links that need to an age-appropriate community service. For example, at the Court House in a large California city is a supervised area for the preschool children of those required to be in court. Many of the infants and toddlers speak and understand only Spanish. The need is for bilingual aides. On a rotation basis this need is filled by Spanish-language students from local secondary schools.

Besides getting speaking experience, the students are expected to write about their time in the preschool setting in both Spanish and English, thereby developing and improving their oral and written translation skills. That’s the kind of win-win we at SerVermont call good service learning.

Also, it is the kind of connection between a com-

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munity setting and an academic need we envision a mentor finding for a novice educator.

I have been a stranger-teacher in several towns. I began my formal teaching career in a tiny community in the mountains high above Palm Springs, California. My teaching mentors were the co-directors of a private, independent school; my community mentor was the woman who owned the local coffee shop (and headed the United Way campaign) and whose husband ran the lone garage. It was she who suggested that my students mark nature trails through the woods in the areas nearest the town's inns and motels. And it was she who introduced me to the forest rangers, which resulted in the formation of patrol groups who hiked or rode horseback into the high country to put out campfires left smoldering by careless campers. We used the trail work to supplement our academic work in general science, and each rescue mission into the high country was cause for map-making, journal-writing, and oral expression, as the students reported on where they had gone and what they had accomplished.

A few year later, I moved to a suburb of Boston, one I had never even driven through before my interview with the superintendent to get the job as reading/literature teacher for the two hundred sixth graders in

the district. My community mentor, suggested to me by a former teacher, was a volunteer librarian at the town's main library. She was concerned about an intersection in the center of the town, and when I came to the library to introduce myself and explain about my new teaching job, she mentioned this traffic problem, and the fact that many of my students would be crossing the street there.

She gave me the name and phone number of the police officer in town assigned to traffic control, and she made up a set of clippings from the local newspaper for my students to read.

The sixth graders and I studied safety concerns about automobile and pedestrian traffic control, met with appropriate officials, suggested workable solutions, and achieved some high-quality results. We invited the chief of police to come talk with us about how we should proceed to change how some intersections were marked and learned from him that no study had been done about the frequency of traffic "incidents" at the busiest intersections. With help from the library staff, the students learned how to research traffic police reports.

My next teaching job, again in a community I had never visited before meeting with the superintendent,

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was in a New York City suburb. My two community service mentors were the wife of the owner of the Greek deli, whose son was in my fourth grade class, and the wife of the owner of a local car agency — a contact both through a ministerial alliance and the PTA. I did not live in town; I commuted some twenty miles each way. What I needed from my mentors were suggestions of age-appropriate activities in safe environments for the students to offer their services.

My twenty-five children — aged eight, nine, and ten -all chose a non- profit agency in the area in which to volunteer and to provide errand-like services. Before they took on their assignments, I checked suitability with my mentors. Each student's volunteer work was the subject of a monthly essay, graded for correct use of language and understanding of civic responsibility.

One lad discovered that, on Saturday mornings, many parents tried to park near the library to return the books read by their children the previous week only to find the few spots filled. He stationed himself at the curb, took the books from the driver, and brought them inside and gave them to the “return” library volunteer — another fourth grader. When he couldn't be there, he recruited a classmate. And, as he explained when

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he first took on this community service, “Me, I have to be the one outside since I don't read so good, and that's why the ‘return’ person has to be a good reader.”

The official librarian discovered that this lad had a special interest in myths, and each Saturday she gave him a simply-written book for him to share with the class during the school week. By the end of the year, he was reading fluently. Also, he had found a mentor.

Each of my mentors in these locations was already a community volunteer; a leader, if you will. Time and again they expressed their appreciation for the student involvement. To answer Dorothy Miller's question, what was in it for them was fulfillment.

As to how one finds a mentor, Jack Ragle insists, “A mentoring relationship evolves naturally, a key word in my view of successful mentoring.” This, too, has been my experience, both for myself and during my eleven years of research into the subject for SerVermont. But there is a key ingredient: the novice must want a mentor. The following chapters explore just how mentors and educators can strengthen service learning.

I MENTORS FOR STUDENTS

All the mentors needed for new students are available within the school district. For every new student, there is a wise, trusted counselor close at hand.

Peer 'counseling works. Test after test shows the overwhelming success that comes to both the counselor (tutor/mentor) and the one being tutored, mentored, counseled.

The buddy system for swimming is not only a safety measure but a sure-fire way to swimming success. If the senior high chemistry class is going to spend three Saturday mornings volunteering to clean a local beach while identifying shell deposits for a class assignment, and three students in the class have just moved into town who have never had a local beach to clean or study, a buddy-mentor will, of course, make the difference between a happy, successful time and a confused, uncomfortable, out-of-school project.

A high school full of old students who have been doing service in the community for up to a decade is chock full of mentors for all new students. This is true for those moving up within the system, and those strangers who have recently moved into the area or chosen to change schools. In fact, with the recent emphasis

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on allowing students to cross attendance zones to go to the school of their choice, undoubtedly the providing of student mentors for new students should become standard procedure.

Our research on peer mentoring tells us that asking a student to help another does not weaken the learning curve for the mentor. In fact, almost every peer-support evaluation finds that what the mentor learns is strengthened by his interaction as a tutor/mentor.

And this is true down through the grades.

We know unequivocally that the children who enter first grade who have had little or no exposure to books and reading, puppetry, and story telling will — unless we provide them with these missed experiences — fail year after year, never catching up to what is considered "standard" reading ability.

Every such entering pupil should have a mentor, one especially equipped to share books, story telling, dramatization, and art work. Let me interject again the fact that time taken by a "good" student to help a "poor" student does not penalize the learning ability of the tutor. Even though the tutor/mentor is presenting material already familiar (for example, vocabulary and story comprehension), he/she improves his/her own skills while assisting the less skilled.

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What would happen if every high school student taking a Spanish course were to spend some time each week (if not daily) with a bilingual primary pupil helping him/her with beginning reading comprehension in Spanish? Or French? Or Russian? Or German? Or Chinese? Again, sorry to repeat, the older mature student would learn more about translation work, and test scores of such work would improve. And what about the bilingual child being given instruction in both languages? Improvement. Better and better reading and comprehension ability, along with better and better scores.

What if every high school science student taught at least one science lesson a week in one of the middle grades? What if every high school math student taught at least one arithmetic lesson each week in one of the elementary grades? What if every group of elementary pupils working on a math/science/arts project had a mentor from the high school to assist it? What if every time students in the elementary grades wanted to put on a puppet show, there were two junior or senior high school mentors to assist them both in the technical aspects of puppetry and in making the message clear to the audience? What if a Native American student told of his family's clan or tribe?

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The use of computers in the schools has created an enormous need for mentors across the ages. In this area, it is not uncommon to discover that a school official's mentor is a student; a youngster with a knack for computer know-how able to train adults with gentle grace.

It was a visiting nurse who suggested to a teacher of troubled teens that her students might put together a booklet for youngsters in trouble about where in the local area to get help for hunger, abandonment, and abuse. One of her students suggested an older friend teach the class members how to do word processing, and the teacher, ignorant of such computer use, found her mentor among the members of the school's computer club.

The typing teacher in a large city high school stopped teaching pupils how to make "pretend" mailing lists on a computer when the director of a new social service agency in town asked if the typing teacher's students could learn how to make such lists by preparing mailing labels for her new brochure.

And in several high schools, high schoolers with a particular interest in math and science help elementary pupils put on science fairs, preparing them for competition at the high school level. High school students

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in a district welcoming middle school pupils from three different areas, prepare a booklet of welcoming materials, arrange for each new pupil to have two "buddies" to cover early transition concerns about the geography of the new, larger building and to provide tutoring in academic subjects.

We know that the younger, less mature pupils will learn important academic skills by being mentored by more mature students; and we know that the older pupils will gain skills and understanding by being mentors. Yes, that's not in question.

So, what's to keep this mentoring from being universal throughout every school district?

Someone has to want mentoring to take place. Someone has to want every new pupil to be given every possible assistance to be a school success. Who is that someone?

- * The superintendent.
- * The principal.
- * The teacher.

In some districts, mentoring won't happen unless the bus schedule provides for it. In some, it won't happen if the class and athletic schedules won't allow for it. In some, it won't happen if the budget doesn't reflect the need for it. In some, it won't happen unless

the mentoring relationships are thoughtfully arranged.

In a school district where all fourth graders move to a new building, a different schedule, and a new set of school officials, every "new" pupil should have an "old" pupil mentor. In fact, each incoming class needs a mentor, whether the members of the class are "old" or "new" to the school system.

To get back to that most basic of academic skills, reading. It doesn't take a sophisticated test to discover whether an eighth grader can read fluently. You can, of course, ask each student, just as the swimming teacher might ask each newcomer to the pool whether he/she can swim in deep water. Every child knows the answer. And every good teacher listens to each child read, and knows, just as the swimming teacher knows by watching the child swim, what lessons are required to make a better reader — a better swimmer.

Providing a buddy for the nonswimmer requires some sensitivity on the part of the teacher. It would not do to have a bully or careless, indifferent swimmer coupled with a fearful but compliant non-swimmer. So, too, the eighth grader who has struggled to learn to read for all those years needs a buddy who will be sensitive about his ignorance, encouraging about his abilities, and positive about success.

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Maybe the nonreading eighth grader loves building models, acting in plays, forming figures with clay, and marching along with the school band. Probably an ideal mentor could come from one of those contacts, rather than asking a literacy-keen student to serve as a counselor to what is undoubtedly a kinetic learner. Some older student who also is a kinetic learner and has mastered vocabulary and comprehension would be a better match. And for the mentor, every opportunity to hone kinetic learning skills is positive reinforcement — so needed in our schools, which tend more toward satisfying oral and visual learners.

Superintendents, principals, teachers: Take a look at your seventh graders. How many are weak readers? List them. Then research how many of them have had mentoring by school-age peers? And continue the research about the qualities each mentor brought to the peer tutoring. How close were their learning styles? How much time was given monthly to the tutoring? How compatible were their language skills?

It would be astounding if you discovered that any one of these weak readers had had regular tutoring during the past seven years by wise and caring fellow students.

Now, please take that list of seventh graders, begin

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finding mentors for them, and keep track of the progress (or lack of it). If, as peer tutoring statistics regularly reveal, both are becoming more skilled at reading and comprehension, do look at how you can provide mentors for every student.

Remember when you were a stranger to the community, how your mentor removed that label and assured you of comfort and success as a teacher as well as a welcome community member.

If every pupil in every U.S. school has the opportunity to be a wise mentor, and all pupils receive conscientious mentoring, we will have used one of the most accurate and productive learning methods to insure success in both the 3 Rs and civic understanding for all our children. We'll have a nation full of small "d" democrats who achieve Thomas Jefferson's goal: "That [all men] are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights: That among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

Read for "happiness," the pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

If mentors can make a difference between failure and success, discouragement and happiness, then let us use mentors for all our pupils and all our school officials.

II MENTORS FOR TEACHERS

In Westport, Connecticut, and in many other school districts, retired teachers are hired to mentor new teachers in the special ways of the school to which the novices' are assigned. This mentoring generally stops at the school door. I interviewed a couple, both getting \$25/day for mentoring, who explained they helped new teachers mostly with the school schedule and with personal out-of-school needs such as where to shop. They had never considered helping their teachers locate service learning placements in the community.

Too bad. It really is next to impossible for strangers in the community to feel comfortable placing young children in out-of-school service sites when they know nothing about the management of the sites or appropriateness of the neighborhood. Take the new high school bookkeeping teacher. Ideally, this teacher would like to have each student do an internship in the bookkeeping office of, perhaps, a local nursing home, hospital, park district, town clerk's office, arts center, museum, library, or other facility. How does this teacher evaluate these organizations?

Then there is the new high school history teacher who wants each student in a European history course

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to interview an immigrant citizen. Or the new science teacher who wants every student to carry out some service sponsored by an environment-concerned nonprofit agency and/or the town's parks and recreation department.

Visiting all possible work sites and meeting with all the relevant volunteer supervisors would have to take place after the regular school day and compete with class-preparation time — to say nothing of personal family time for each teacher.

As mentor, a former teacher, a former volunteer supervisor, or a trustee of a local nonprofit can serve to initiate and sustain the service learning projects as the new teacher adjusts to the job. Gradually, the teacher can, along with the mentor, visit each site and become familiar enough with the organizations to be able to — possibly — sustain the service learning project alone the next year. Although, it is only fair to state that when the mentoring is natural, it lasts generally far beyond what might be called the “acute” period.

A new teacher taking over a class or course that always has carried out some special community service, also needs help. For example, the fifth graders always have gone to a local nursing home on Halloween, sent greeting cards to residents of the nursing home

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at Christmas, and paid a once-a-year visit bearing a gift of an original drawing. That new teacher should shout — “Help!” — and ask for a mentor to help with all the necessary scheduling, transporting, chaperoning, and supervising. This would allow the teacher to concentrate on how to use the service time to reinforce skill-practice during academic work time.

Even more needed is a mentor for the new fifth grade teacher who has always involved his/her pupils in community service and discovers on the first day in his/her new school that the previous teacher, there for twenty years, had never had his pupils do any service work at all. This new teacher is seriously concerned with civic service and the making of small “d” democrats. He/she wants to start working with compatible nonprofit agencies and find age-appropriate service learning opportunities. Cases like this emphasize that a wise, trusted counselor isn’t a luxury but a necessity.

What applies to that fifth grade teacher applies to teachers at every grade level. It is nearly impossible for new teachers to break new ground during their first year. However, with strong mentors — respected community members — the new teachers at every grade level, kindergarten through high school, have a goal, a chance of making an important educational impact

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through service learning.

Whether the mentor is an “old” teacher or just a caring community member who has done a lot of volunteering, interviews with these teacher-mentors reveal three concerns:

1. The mentor does not want to be imposed on the teacher. Instead, the mentor wants the teacher to make the choice and initiate the relationship. Several mentors stated it similarly: “Doesn’t work if someone, like the principal, assigns you to mentor a teacher. The teacher has to want you.” To quote Jack Ragle: “I feel strongly that the mentee-mentor relationship must rest heavily on compatibility and on mutual understandings.”
2. The mentor does not want the community supervisors to come to the school to meet the new teachers but wants the teachers to go to each supervisor’s setting. As one mentor stated vigorously, “This business of having the nonprofits set up tables in the gym to advertise for student volunteers and to meet the new teachers is the wrong way around. Gives the wrong message. The service needs to integrate with the academics, not be something separate from the curriculum.”
3. The mentor does not want to be the creator of

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the service-learning project; that is, not the author of a relationship built on the curriculum. The mentors want the teachers to tell the mentors what's needed to supplement or complement the academic coursework or skill building or understanding of civic responsibility. Then, knowing what the education experts want, the mentor, wise in the ways of the community, can find the service situation to complete the integration.

How does the new teacher find a compatible mentor? That's a serious and critical question. Ideally, schools would have the funding and scheduling luxury to give an "old" teacher time off to mentor a "new" teacher, not only in the peculiar ways of the school, but in student service learning activities. A good many private schools do this; they give senior faculty fewer class preparations, fewer student papers to grade, and ask them to help out the new teachers. Unfortunately, most of our public school districts work only with full case-load personnel. Yet, there is the precedent for classroom aides.

Why not give these aides the community liaison job? Why not provide each new teacher with a wise, trusted counselor who gets paid as an hourly consultant? And why not cooperate with a nonprofit agency in the area — for example, with the Junior League,

United Way, or PTA - to offer a selection of aides for each new teacher? Let the teacher choose.

There may be special requirements. For example, it is possible that the new teacher is not bilingual, yet many of the local service sites serve the minority Hispanic residents; hence, a bilingual mentor would be essential.

Just as the superintendent might, when discussing employment in a new district with the hiring committee, ask for a community-wise mentor; and the principal, when under consideration by the superintendent's office, might request the assistance of a wise counselor for the first year; so each teacher, while discussing initial employment, might ask about the services of a mentor so that he/she could begin the school year involving his/her students in age-appropriate, service learning projects.

The day may come when all school districts recognize the need for mentors for every new employee, from janitor to superintendent. Good day, that. But Jack Ragle, reading that sentence, added: "But not assigned. I think that the connection occurs in a variety of (preferably) natural ways."

III MENTORS FOR PRINCIPALS

During the past decade I was asked by the federal "Learn and Serve" office to investigate the depth of service learning in schools across the United States; that is, to do a kind of field study evaluation. I discovered what so many before me have—the building principal is the key to success, particularly of a school program that cuts across the disciplines.

As Jean Gibran notes, principals are so fixed on the need to show improvement in student's test scores they consider anything but the standard sit/write/recite curriculum to be an "extra." Proponents of community service learning have been made to show empirically that students who do high-quality service work, integrated with their academic coursework, improve in both understanding and skills and improve test scores. This is a difficult call; how does one isolate the service learning from all other methods of learning for groups of students or even individuals?

But those who engage students in the kinds of service learning written of in this monograph continue with this teaching method because it does work; it does strengthen students' academic abilities. Hence, it does

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improve scores on standardized tests. But what about principals who are hesitant to support student community service?

What showed up over and over again in my visits to schools nationwide was the dip in student community service activities each time a new-to-the-school-district principal came on board. Teachers, asking for anonymity, would complain about how the school schedule and the service learning activities they wanted to plan were too often at odds, and they would add the explanation that the principal was new and that it would probably be a year or two before the program might improve.

It was a veteran teacher in one of the larger schools who suggested to me that what the principal needed was his own personal mentor. When I asked if she had a recommendation, she came up with several — one of whom was a retired director of volunteer services at a large hospital. The connection was made, and the class schedule was adjusted to accommodate student community service activities both at the school site and in surrounding communities.

The following excerpt from the *Bulletin*, the magazine published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, appeared in the October, 1998

issue. Titled “Help Wanted: Reading Mentors”, it explores how helpful a mentor can be for just one area of the curriculum.

Educators who take over governance of today’s secondary schools, unless you happen on the rarest of rarities, will find that a significant number of your students — as many as one-fourth in the average public high school — don’t read at an eighth grade level. One of the reasons you were hired to be the new principal is the expectation that you will improve the teaching of reading at your new school; yes, reading scores will go up — not down — during your administration.

You need a mentor. You need a wise elder, one who has a long history of volunteer service in the local community to help you find mentors for your students.

Those poor readers — by and large, without my ever stepping into your school, visiting any of your classes, or reading diagnostic test results — are probably kinesthetic learners. They have been kinesthetic learners since pre-kindergarten. And for the most part all the teachers have been oral and visual learners —

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teachers who know LOOK-SAY and phonics methods for teaching reading-but who don’t really understand what it is that the kinesthetic learner needs to do to “get it.”

But we adult kinesthetic learners know how to improve our own vocabularies and summarizing abilities and how to teach children to be fluent readers through writing, visualizing, and meaningful repetition. Get your mentor to help you find tutors and mentors for all your needy students.

Is there a retired school administrator in town? A former CEO of a local nonprofit? Ask members of the school board and of your high school’s booster club to help you find a mentor who will not only introduce you to the community, but assist you and your teachers to find mentors for your students.... Is there a college or university within easy commuting distance? Ask your mentor to contact its Community Service or Community Outreach or “Whatever the Title” relevant office, and ask for students — particularly those considering teaching as a career — who are kinesthetic learners to be mentors for your students. Ask your mentor to help

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you set up these interactions.

While the article just quoted was directed at secondary school principals, the suggestion holds as well for new-to-the-community middle and elementary school principals. If you could have a wise and trusted counselor! — one well acquainted with the volunteer community—you could not only become quickly acquainted with the nonprofit sector but would have someone to help you help all of your new teaching staff.

just as it is important for the superintendent to go out to the locations to meet the CEOs, it is vital that each principal have a thorough understanding of what each volunteer work site is like, who is in charge, what training the children can be expected to get while there, and what information the pupils should have before doing any service there.

During my field studies I discovered a most interesting fact. There is a significant difference between students who do service work voluntarily and those who are assigned to do it. Not one nonprofit supervisor had a complaint about any student whose community service was voluntary or who was carrying out a service learning assignment.

For example, the CEO of a large nursing home was

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delighted to have middle-grade students help feed lunch to restricted patients. The students signed up weekly for this service and used the time to interview their patient and write a paper about what they had learned for an English class. And moreover, the CEO assured me that not one student had ever abused or been rude to even the most difficult patient.

That positive report was not the case where students were doing community service as a “so many hours” requirement, and had been “assigned” to some work site. The poor behavior complaints were not universal, but it was only service done under such a restriction that ever produced negative reports. A mentor could help a principal avoid behavior problems by being sure that the students were volunteering themselves.

This business of compulsory student service for school credit, or so many hours as a graduation requirement, or as punishment is not something espoused by SerVermont. While compulsory service might improve with strong mentors, this monograph is devoted to strengthening voluntary and academically-related student community service.

Then, too, when it is time to assess the student community service work, the mentor can act as liaison

between the professional teaching staff and the professionals at the service sites. This assessment is important because the high school students, especially, need to have both their service work and academic assignments “graded” in order to show on their college-bound reports how they have “learned to serve and served to learn.”

Nearly all selective colleges and universities ask prospective students about their service learning projects and internships. Often, evaluations by service-site supervisors weigh as much as the teachers’ grades. But there needs to be a balance, a standard, and this, of course, is the responsibility of the building principal.

Students planning to go directly from high school to a job have a strong head start if they have been active during their community service time in skill-improving work. For the principal, this means finding a mentor who knows the community’s service jobs well enough to locate placements for future construction workers, bookkeepers, parks and recreation employees, clerks, etc.,.

Let me underscore one stumbling block to good community service cited by hundreds of teachers: the school schedule. Perhaps a mentor from the business

community could provide a building principal with a fresh way to look at this all-important arrangement of school time so that on-campus as well as off-campus service learning opportunities will not be short-changed but strengthened.

And a final point: Good student community service — like good grades and good sports achievements — deserves to be recognized and celebrated. Principals, look for a community contact (a mentor) who knows how to make a celebration a joy for youngsters, their families, and the citizens whose lives their work has enhanced.

Mentors for Principals

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IV MENTORS FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

If you are moving into — for you — a new community, you probably should make your need for a mentor to acquaint you with the local service sector known to the members of the school board the moment your contract has been signed. You'll want a wise community elder to help you to become familiar with the needs and aspirations of your new school district and environs. The answer to your mentoring need might, in fact, be one of the senior members of the school board. It might even be the retiring superintendent, or a veteran teacher who has supervised student volunteer service in the area for more than a decade.

When SerVermont spoke to a superintendent in a small township about student community service, even though he had been in the area for five years, he explained that he didn't think there were enough non-profit organizations interested in having student volunteers to warrant adjusting the school schedule to make such off-campus learning activities available. SerVermont, with the help of two students — one a college junior and the other a middle school pupil —

Mentors for Superintendents

found that there were more than twenty-five public sector organizations within the school's attendance area eager to have student volunteers.

Add to those needs within the community the need for peer and cross-age tutoring activities within the school system, and it was easily determined that every student in the school district could be involved in age-appropriate service learning. Further, it was suggested that the superintendent choose a wise and trusted counselor to be his mentor who could help make the necessary connections for students' community service and to provide useful leadership in this area for the school faculty.

The superintendent who enters a system long used to involving students in community service may need to spend some quality time with a mentor, getting a feel for the "geography" and for special community concerns. The mentor then should introduce this new academic CEO to his/her counterparts in the community's commercial and service organizations. These contacts will enable the superintendent to facilitate service learning projects.

If pupils will be doing service activities under the sponsorship of the local law-enforcement agency, the superintendent will be able to talk over this program

with the chief of police or the lead supervisor for this activity. If the pupils will be serving in some capacity at a local hospital, the superintendent can discuss the operation of this program with the supervisor of volunteer programs. And so on.

There is another task for the superintendent's mentor to perform. Each new principal who comes into the district needs a community service mentor. Working with local volunteer agencies, the superintendent's mentor can help the "outsider" principals find compatible mentors.

One can easily envision a day, six-months from the start of the mentoring, when the superintendent hosts a meeting, arranged by his mentor, of all "new" principals and their mentors and all "old" principals to review the state of student community service throughout the school system.

Also, there's nothing to say that the mentor for the superintendent couldn't be a contracted service, a part of the annual budget for the superintendent's office. In fact, mentoring for the CEO, the principals, and the teachers might all come on a per diem basis from the superintendent's office account. Mentors have telephone, postage, travel, and time expenses. So that student community service does not falter each time new

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staff is hired, replacement mentors need to be located and given enough support so that they can give key assistance to the professional educators.

While student community service has tended, in a great many school districts, to be a bottom-up movement, this is, of course, not the best management method. Superintendents have several issues that are their responsibility to address, such as:

- * Safety and age-appropriate assignments
- * Integration of service with academic learning
- * Supervision and assessment
- * Transportation and scheduling

SerVermont has discovered that where student community service is wholesomely active throughout a school district, the superintendent not only has dealt with the above issues but also has provided resources for training and evaluation. And where student community service is sporadic at best, superintendents tend to have little or no knowledge of the programs and have not assessed their impact on student learning or the meeting of community needs.

SerVermont twice has been asked to look at and report on service learning programs in differently structured school districts throughout the United States. In our field work, we turned to the local volunteer com-

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munity to ask about student involvement. We learned a given: Unless the superintendent of a district takes responsibility for and supports student community service, the building principals don't make the school schedulesvolunteer-user-friendly.

We saw enormously strong programs that, we were told, would not last for another year because of the lack of interest by school administrators. The message was discouragingly repetitious: "We don't get support from the administration; in fact, they don't even come to our celebrations. And they make out the year's schedule without ever asking for our input."

Although it might not be advisable for a principal to tell a superintendent to change his mind about the importance of community service, the superintendent's mentor, that wise and trusted community member, might well be able to share with the superintendent the advantages of student community service.

Mentors for Superintendents