

**2021 Community Service Learning Implementation in Arkansas -
Collaboration, Context, and Community**

Proposal to Arkansas Department of Education



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May 10, 2021

PADM 7373: Master of Public Administration Capstone
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Executive Summary

The goal of this study is to learn about Community Service Learning [CSL] in Arkansas and to understand the policy implementation process. We collected primary data from Arkansas school districts and from selected schools that already employ CSL in their curriculum but do not meet the definition by the ADE. The data was analyzed by the Survey Team through the School of Public Affairs at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The members of the team are Amber McCuien, Cassie Jo Gehring, Faith Thomas, Sondia Ah-mu-ako, and Kelly Troillet.

The research design for this study incorporates responses from an online survey that was sent to a registered CSL program contact list along with a review of prevalent literature for CSL.

The respondents' demographics are as follows:

- A majority of respondents are female (almost 70%)
- None of the contacts were of Hispanic ethnicity
- An overwhelming majority identified as white alone or in combination (67%).
- A majority have a Master's degree
- The three most prevalent positions among CSL program contacts were School Counselor, Principal or Assistant Principal, and Program Director.

The literature reviewed provides consensus on the following:

- CSL has many different definitions and not one that is universally accepted.
 - Students and teachers benefit from enhanced educational experiences.
 - Barriers to CSL:
 - Students' abilities to balance program expectancies with personal life
 - Exclusion of CSL programs in recognition for promotion or tenure
 - Scarce opportunities for service identified

- Too few students were aware of the program.
- Segregation within CSL programs according to students' disabilities
- Quality service learning includes clear goals that align with academic goals, student engagement, and student awareness and knowledge of tasks and the skills needed to complete these tasks.
- Recognizing or rewarding teachers to participate sustains the viability of CSL programs.
- Students can be incentivized by aligning the program with their academic goals which furthers their employment opportunities after graduation.
- External partners allow the school to become more involved with the surrounding community and give the students real-world experiences resulting in a greater understanding of the world and allowing them to become more tolerant of diversity.
- Internal partners give opportunities to all students regardless of transportation ability, poverty, disability, or any other barrier created by a singularly directed program. This approach gets the students more involved in and directly benefits the school.
- Programs can grow in popularity among students and faculty with the right programmatic movements.

The research team found the following:

- Most school districts in Arkansas do not have a formal policy to the effect of incorporating service learning in their curriculum.
- Around 50% of the respondents stated there was no specialized training or personal development or no in-service learning with a large increase in non-responses for in-service learning compared to specialized training.

- Two-thirds of the respondents that believed their implementation of CSL into coursework was not successful also believed CSL implementation by the school to be somewhat below average.
- One-third of respondents believed CSL implementation by the school to be far below average.
- The respondents who felt the CSL implementation in the coursework to be successful ranged in perceived CSL implementation by the school from Somewhat below Average to Far above average.
- Over 75% of schools report that they either don't know or expect less than 40% of students take advantage of CSL as a formal course or classroom activity.
- To celebrate students who participated and completed CSL, many schools either did not respond or stated they did not celebrate or recognize completion. Celebrations that involve the community include newspaper ads or posts on social media. Celebrations that involve the entire school include announcements or school-wide celebrations.
- The highest quality programs not only allow all students to participate but also give students some control in decision making.

The research team concluded the following:

- The respondents of the survey were lacking in diversity.
- There is inconsistency in authority across programs.
- There is a lack of training or in-service learning for teachers specific to CSL.
- CSL implementation in coursework is aligned with CSL implementation by the school.
- Utilization rate of CSL by students is low.

To create a more comprehensive structure, the team recommends the following:

1. Policy Implementation:

- The Department of Education needs a clear formal policy defining key personnel for the CSL program and setting guidelines for student preparation in the course.
- The Department of Education should develop specialized training programs for new teachers, administrators, and staff.

2. Utilization:

- Start with finding teachers who have an interest in community service and incentivizing them with career-stage rewards such as adding a pathway to Master Educator through CSL or placing CSL into recognition criteria for awards such as the Milken Educator or Teacher of the Year.
- Districts can expand their current programs to celebrate completion with the community through posts on the district's website, press releases to local media, or intradistrict awards celebrations.
- Schools can align program goals with students' academic expectations by finding partnerships that help students begin networking and gaining experience.

3. Equitable Implementation:

- Course requirements need to be adapted to use a needs assessment that investigates the needs within the class, school, and community.
- Students can help develop relationships with that year's partners.

In conclusion, a proper comprehensive structure ensures improvement through all aspects of an organization. The following is a list of justifications for this overarching recommendation:

- A strongly defined and consistent policy among districts will strengthen the foundation of the program.

- Offering statewide training will ensure a clear and uniform approach to running CSL programs.
- Increasing the utilization of the program both by students and teachers will help the program grow.
- Methods can be included at a school level to improve the equity of feasibility among students allowing each individual to feel welcome and giving them the ability to complete the hours required for graduation credit while enjoying it.