

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Sodexo-YSA Hunger Initiative represents a partnership between Sodexo, Inc., a large company that provides food and facilities management services in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and Youth Service America (YSA), a Washington, D.C.-based organization dedicated to improving communities in the United States and other countries by increasing the number and diversity of young people, aged 5 to 25, in substantive service roles. The goal of the Sodexo-YSA Hunger Initiative is to engage a large number of youth in meaningful service activities that facilitate access to nutritious food for various populations. The strategies used to engage youth include:

- **Awareness and mobilization campaigns** to help youth acquire knowledge about the hunger problem and the need to help people gain access to nutritious foods;
- **Grants for youth** to act on their knowledge through specific activities or projects; and
- **Development of educational resources** to support the implementation of high-impact, semester-long service-learning projects that ultimately are used by youth to reduce the rate of childhood hunger and malnutrition in the United States.

Grantee sites were chosen through a competitive process in which applicants had to describe the service-learning projects they planned to conduct with the goal of decreasing hunger and increasing access to nutritious food. For the 2011-2012 academic year, YSA chose a total of 25 sites as grantees. Cohort 1 composed of 12 grantees, conducted service-learning activities beginning in September of 2011 and culminating in November with the National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. The 13 grantees in Cohort 2 were involved in service-learning activities that extended between Martin Luther King Day in January and Global Youth Service Day in April 2012.

Sodexo-YSA sites were located in 19 different states throughout the country and in Washington, D.C. Student participants came from elementary, middle, and high schools; their class levels spanned third through twelfth grades. Each grantee site worked in conjunction with at least one community partner experienced in providing services that expanded access to nutritious food and/or taught about issues of food insufficiency. A number of Sodexo-YSA sites were associated with academic classes, while some grantees coordinated after-school programs.

Training was provided to all subgrantees through attendance at a Youth Service Institute and personalized consultation by members of the YSA staff. The Youth Service Institute, held in October of each year, contains sessions on linking each of the eight quality service-learning standards to the curriculum, strengthening teachers' skills in incorporating key aspects of quality service-learning, and familiarizing grantees with the requirements of the evaluation.

## FINDINGS

### IMPLEMENTATION

- **Teachers in both cohorts reported that projects addressed all seven standards of quality service-learning programs.** Highest teacher ratings in both cohorts were reported for fostering meaningful service activities for students. Cohort 1 teachers also cited links to curriculum and encouraging youth voice as standards that were strongly supported in their service-learning activities. Cohort 2 teachers assigned high ratings to youth voice and diversity. Cohort 1 teachers gave the lowest rating to quality of partnerships and Cohort 2 teachers had the lowest rating for progress monitoring.
- **Grades 3-5 students in Cohort 1 reported that the largest area of participation was in serving or giving food to the hungry, while Cohort 2 elementary students said they participated most often in growing a garden.** In addition to serving or giving food to the hungry, Cohort 1 elementary students also said they had considerable participation in making healthy choices when they went out to eat and in volunteering at a homeless shelter, food pantry, or other community organization. Cohort 2 students in Grades 3-5 also had a fairly high score in making healthy food selections when going out to eat.
- **Grades 6-12 service-learning students in Cohort 1 said that the activity they participated in most frequently was growing a garden, while in Cohort 2 the highest level of participation was in serving or giving food to the hungry.** Service-learning students in Cohort 1 also reported high levels of participation in serving or giving food to hungry people and in helping to decide how to distribute food raised in a garden. Cohort 2 students said that they participated often in volunteering at a homeless shelter, food pantry, or other community organization.
- **Students in both cohorts and at all grade levels assigned fairly low scores to involvement in overall planning and organizing.** Students said that they generally helped with planning or organizing activities or events once or twice during the course of the project. Students did not report any planning/organizing activities being done “regularly” or “very often.”
- **Service-learning projects in Cohort 1 were generally of shorter duration than they were during Cohort 2.** About half of Cohort 1 teachers said that their projects lasted 9 to 13 weeks, and a slightly smaller number said their projects lasted 14 to 20 weeks. In Cohort 2, half of the teachers reported projects lasting 21 or more weeks, and slightly more than a third saying projects lasted 14 to 20 weeks.
- **Community partners gave overall high ratings to indicators of partnership quality.** Community partners gave the highest ratings to items about members of the partnership sharing a common mission and goals and working through any implementation challenges that arose.

## IMPACTS

- **Service-learning students at all grade levels reported large gains in knowledge about hunger and nutrition issues through the course of their projects.** In Cohort 1, for both Grades 3-5 and Grades 6-12 students, the highest level of agreement was with the item, “I learned why some people are unable to get enough nutritious food to eat.” In Cohort 2, elementary students had particularly strong agreement with items relating to learning about exercise and nutrition, while Grades 6-12 students indicated that they learned the most about reasons for some people being unable to obtain enough nutritious food and the effects of childhood hunger.
- **Scores for service-learning students in Grades 3-5 increased from pre to postsurvey in measures of academic engagement, workforce readiness, and civic dispositions.** All measures increased over time for the elementary students in both cohorts, however the increases were not statistically significant except in the case of the Civic Dispositions measure for Cohort 1.
- **Scores for service-learning and comparison students in Grades 6-12 in academic engagement, workforce readiness, civic dispositions, and educational aspirations stayed about the same over time.** In both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, there was little difference in scores from pre to postsurvey for service-learning students. The small number of comparison students in Cohort 1 was insufficient for analysis, but the comparison students in Cohort 2 showed similar patterns of scores with only slight variation over time. Some scores, particularly those associated with educational aspirations, were quite high to begin with for both service-learning and comparison students and had little room for increase.
- **Teachers believed that there were several strong impacts on students as a result of service-learning activities.** Perceived impacts for Cohort 1 teachers were highest for items pertaining to students having an increased awareness of community needs and an increased belief that they could make a difference. Cohort 2 teachers thought that the largest impacts on students were in having an increased awareness of community issues and an increased commitment to working on social or community problems. Cohort 1 teachers thought that the lowest impact area was improved academic performance; for the Cohort 2 teachers, the area of least impact was in school attendance.
- **Moderators were found to influence positive results in several outcome areas for Grades 6-12 students.** Students of teachers with more service-learning experience reported having higher educational aspirations. Other moderators that influenced positive outcomes for students in one or both cohorts included higher scores on the Planning/Organizing scale; teachers with more instructional experience; teachers’ increased use of reflection activities; and teachers giving higher ratings to the areas of links to curriculum, meaningful service, and progress monitoring.

- **Teachers believed that service-learning activities positively impacted the community.** Teachers assigned high ratings to all three items, which included the service-learning impact on the community, on organizations within the community, and on community members' views of young people.
- **All community partners said that they had provided support for students as they engaged in service projects.** More than half of the community partners said that they delivered information on community needs, helped students to identify the service projects to implement, or assisted students in planning the service activity. Community partners were least likely to say that they helped to facilitate reflection activities, with slightly less than one fourth saying they had done so.
- **Community partners viewed the service-learning partnership as beneficial for their respective organizations.** Community partners saw the most positive aspects of the service-learning partnerships as the help they gave to school or after-school personnel in better understanding community needs and resources and the creation of a sustained relationship with the school or after-school program with which they had partnered. They largely agreed that the partnership had improved their agency's capacity to carry out its work and had raised their public profile in the community. They were less likely to agree that the partnership had increased the organization's financial or material resources.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Involve students more directly in the planning and organizing of service-learning projects.**
2. **Monitor projects to ensure that they are true service-learning and not just community service.**
3. **Ensure that regular reflection is a part of the service-learning process.**
4. **Consider potential grantees' teaching and service-learning experience when selecting new grantees.**
5. **Consider helping grantees to see how they can introduce more workforce readiness skills into their service-learning projects.**