

Youth: Ethics in Service (YES) SASL Youth Philanthropy Board

Eleven students from four New Haven area high schools participated in the Student Activists for Service Learning (SASL) program in 2010-11. They met weekly during the school year and participated in over 350 hours of project work. They recognized how service-learning helps keep students engaged in learning and reduce the incidence of students dropping out of school. Additionally, four members became certified to facilitate community dialogues and led a series of dialogues to discuss how service-learning strategies might support student retention in high school.



Representatives of the SASL Youth-Philanthropy Board (Spring 2011).

SASL members decided that in addition to funding three other service-learning projects (one pictured below); their own service project for the year was to conduct community dialogues for New Haven high schools. The purpose of the dialogues was to bring together administrators, teachers, students and parents to identify (1) what a community would look like if it had a 100% high school graduation rate; (2) what obstacles prevent students from graduating; and (3) what strategies can remove the obstacles and support high school student graduation.

The Community Mediation Center (CMC) partnered with The School for Ethical Education to administer facilitation training. CMC was awarded a grant to defray the costs of training the SASL members and four student members participated in 12 hours of training during their February vacation to become certified facilitators.

After training, SASL invited teams from five high schools to participate in dialogues about why students drop out of school and what types of service-learning projects would help students succeed in school. Of the five high schools sent invitations, all agreed that the idea of students working with their peers might reduce the stigma of some students needing extra help to stay in school. Students who choose to come to a “tutoring” center for example, would come for help on their own, not being selected for extra help by a teacher. This idea was very well received by students, teachers and parents.



One SASL funded service-learning project where fifth-grade students organized a science fair for younger students. Demonstrations included “changing the view” kaleidoscope.

Some of the planned “peers helping peers” projects for the fall include: tutoring in math, especially algebra, workshops about career awareness and career fairs, reading tutoring and readers’ theater, and developing school spirit. School teams also agreed to organize additional focus groups at their schools to get input as to the type of service-learning projects that they could accomplish to encourage students to stay in school. All five schools requested SASL facilitators come help facilitate additional conversations in the fall.

In addition to holding the dialogues, SASL reviewed project applications and provided mini-grants to five other service-learning projects including a science fair hosted by fifth-grade students for younger students in the school, a career and college fair with alumni speakers and a creative writing project where students were asked to write about their own strategies to support success in high school.