

February, 2010

Dear Educational Leader, After School Provider, Policy Maker, Youth Services Funder, Youth Ally:

Despite the many challenges facing education in our state, school administrators continue to work tirelessly to improve academic achievement for all students. Increased test scores and schools exiting Program Improvement status are positive signs. Yet, we are disheartened to see rising numbers of students dropping out of school and not earning high school diplomas.

In California, approximately one-third of all ninth graders do not complete high school. Dropouts will spend more time unemployed, on government assistance, or cycling in and out of prison than high school graduates. They will contribute about \$60,000 less in taxes over a lifetime and cost California about \$46 billion a year in costs associated with crime, incarceration, and government assistance.

There are a number of complex individual, family, school, and community factors that contribute to the dropout crisis. When students are specifically asked about their school experiences, they say the “number one reason” they drop out is because they feel that classroom learning is not engaging or relevant to their lives. They find school to be “boring” and lose motivation to persevere when learning is challenging and eventually succumb to a number of “pull” factors that encourage them to simply give up and drop out. The 2007 and 2008 High School Survey of Student Engagement found that 80% of students felt school materials were not interesting and 40% felt it was not relevant. The Sacramento County Healthy Kids survey resiliency module found that less than 20% of students report high levels of meaning opportunities to participate in school.

The National Dropout Prevention Center cites service-learning as one of the most effective school strategies for dropout prevention. Service-learning connects meaningful community service experiences with academic learning and student voice. This teaching/learning method promotes personal and social growth, career development, soft skill development, and civic responsibility and can be a powerful vehicle for effective school reform at all grade levels. Studies have shown that students who participate in Service learning are more likely to do well in school on standardized tests, more likely to attend school, more likely to understand content, more likely to feel engaged in school and motivated to learn, to be positively engaged with peers and other school adults and also to be more civically engaged in their community(Summary of Research compiled by Adrew Furco, UC Berkley).

As your Regional Service-Learning Lead, we have many resources to help you investigate, plan and implement service-learning in your schools. Below are a few of the resources about service-learning in general and how service-learning can be utilized to address the dropout crisis:

California Department of Education Cal-Serve K-12 Service-Learning Initiative

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/sl/>

Service Learning and Region 3 Service Learning Resources

<http://www.ydnetwork.org/Service%20Learning%20Resources%20and%20Events>. And

<http://www.servicelearning.org/what-service-learning>

National Dropout Prevention Center and Service-Learning

http://www.dropoutprevention.org/effstrat/service_learning/overview.htm

We are ready to help you effectively implement service-learning programs to help your students discover learning as relevant, rigorous, and meaningful, to inspire them to earn their high school diplomas and become productive, responsible citizens of the 21st century.

Deborah Bruns, Yolo COE, bruns@ycoe.org, 530-668-3781

Adrian Ruiz, Youth Development Network (YDN), adrian@ydnetwork.org, 916- 308-7082 Adrian

John Durand, , Galt School District, jdurand@galt.k12.ca.us, 916- 683-1703