

Argumentative Essay Prompt A5: COMMUNITY SERVICE

Be sure to annotate before filling out your Planning Web.

ESSAY PROMPT: In a multi-paragraph, well-organized essay, take a stance on the following issue: Should intermediate school students be required to complete community service hours in order to promote?

Remember to support your claim with relevant textual evidence and be sure to include a counter-argument to make your argument more effective.

Source - The New York Times

The Logic of 'Mandatory Volunteerism'

By STEWART AIN

Published: March 23, 2003

EMILY FRIED, an 18-year-old senior at Roslyn High School, has put in more than 350 hours of community service at various sites, including at her former elementary school and Hebrew school. It all began because her high school requires students to perform 40 hours of community service in order to graduate.

"If it was not mandatory, I never would have looked into doing it," she said. "But once I started, I liked it. And I have continued doing it because I realize how important it is to help other people. It has been very fulfilling for me."

Miss Fried added that she believes community service should be mandated at all high schools because "most kids don't even consider doing community service on their own."

Beginning with the class of 1997, Roslyn High School students were required to complete 30 hours of community service at any time during the 9th through 12th grades. The standard was increased to 40 hours the following year.

Jayson Stoller, principal of Roslyn High School and vice president of the Nassau County Principals Association, said most of his colleagues "have been looking at mandating community service for a long time but have not gotten the cooperation of the community."

Part of the argument against it, he said, is the "kids' right not to do involuntary servitude."

Dr. Stoller added that many districts were using Roslyn "as a model to see how things worked out. Well, things have worked out."

But a spot check of school districts on Long Island found only three -- Roslyn, Commack and William Floyd -- that require students to perform community service before they graduate. William Floyd, which includes Mastic, Moriches and Shirley, requires 10 hours in the senior year. Commack requires 65 hours -- 15 hours in each of the 9th, 10th and 11th grades and 20 hours in the 12th grade.

William R. Bolton, superintendent of the Copiague schools, said his district considered mandatory community service but decided against it because it is a "high-need district."

"Many of our children work to make money because a lot of them are supporting themselves," he said. "We are a 50 percent poverty district and 60 percent minority."

As an alternative, the Wise Program, a school-business partnership, was developed in which seniors may intern with someone in the business community. "As long as they are not paid and make a formal presentation about the work they learned, they get credit for it," Dr. Bolton said.

The Great Neck school district declined to mandate community service, believing that volunteerism is the "purest form of community service," said William A. Shine, the district superintendent.

"It has been talked about by school administrators, but it has never risen to a board discussion," he said. "The high school principals and faculty feel as though the youngsters are participating, especially as they get into their junior and senior years. The list of things they do is heartwarming. It just seemed to the faculty that when you mandate it, you lose the joy of volunteering."

Dr. Shine estimated that 40 percent of the 2,000 students in the high school perform community service.

The Port Washington school district also rejected mandatory public service.

"If you say to kids they have to go to an old age home or have a coat drive, they will do it but it is not self-directed, and teaching kids to self-direct and make good decisions is important," said Geoffrey N. Gordon, the Port Washington superintendent. "I don't believe in mandatory community service, I believe in volunteerism."

He estimated that 75 percent of the district's 1,200 high school students perform 25 to 75 hours of community service in their four years.

"I want to emphasize to students that excellent citizenship and giving to others not only helps others but makes you feel better about yourself," Dr. Gordon said. "Everything today is about what kids get -- toys and computers -- and in school it's important to teach what students can give."

Eleanor H. Kurz, a Port Washington parent, said she believed it was wrong to impose community service on youngsters.

"Everything today is mandatory and arranged and organized," she said. "I don't believe that people should be like a horse, put in harness and driven down the track. People's minds should be able to grow. We're living in a society where things are more and more controlled, and to have a great society you need to have a society that is inspired by great ideals."

The Herricks school district considered mandating volunteer community service in 2001, but abandoned the idea when "students and some others pointed out it can't be both at the same time," said John E. Bierwirth, superintendent of the district, which includes New Hyde Park, Williston Park, Manhasset, Roslyn, Albertson and East Williston.

"There is strong interest on the part of students, parents and staff to encourage community service and the question is what is the best way to do that," Dr. Bierwirth said. "I think there is probably universal agreement that the ideal way would be for students to do it on a voluntary basis because it is something that is important and is a way to give back to the community. If you mandate it, you take out the voluntary part."

He added that "a tremendous number" of his district's 1,300 high school students were performing community service, but that the district was now exploring how to get even more involved. "And there are people who think it should be mandated," he said.

A number of school systems nationwide require mandatory community service as a high school graduation requirement, but William W. Reinhard, a spokesman for Maryland's Department of Education, said his is the only state to require it of all its high school students.

Mr. Reinhard said several cities, most notably Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta and Seattle, have a similar requirement.

Some students around the country fought mandatory service in the courts, claiming it violated the constitutional prohibition of slavery. All of the cases lost.

In the mid-90's, the New York City Board of Education studied the idea and dropped it after finding that some administrators nationwide viewed it as a distraction from academic studies. Last November, the city schools did implement it, but only as punishment.

William K. Costigan, president of the Roslyn school board, said that when the board first broached the idea, there was some apprehension from parents because it was "always thought of as a punishment."

"It's a shame school districts are using it as a punishment because our plan in no way has anything to do with punishment," he said. "We just felt there was enough time in four years of high school to take 40 hours and do something to help the community. And when you look back on it, it has proved to be correct."

Jay H. Pilnick, assistant principal of Roslyn High School and coordinator of the community service program, said most students found the experience so worthwhile they put in substantially more than 40 hours.

"Last year, the average was 114 hours," he said. "There are at least 150 agencies that kids are working with, including local hospitals, nursing homes, Habitat for Humanity, churches and synagogues, the American Cancer Society, the American Red Cross and soup kitchens."

Mr. Pilnick said he met with students and tried to match their interests with the work of the agencies.

"We also invite agencies to speak at our community service class," he said. Each student is required to take the one-semester course, which explains community service, multiculturalism and values training.

Daniel H. Ostroff-Moskowitz, 15, a sophomore at Roslyn High School, said he had been working at the gift shop at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in Queens since his freshman year. And last summer he volunteered at Camp Kehilla in Melville, a camp for children with special needs.

"It has given me a new perspective on everything," he said, noting that he put in 320 hours of community service at the camp.

Gennifer C. Soren, 16, a junior at Roslyn, said she had amassed more than 500 hours of community service working with children in an afternoon program at the Sid Jacobson Jewish Community Center in East Hills and in its Teen Council program, in which participants visit old age homes and help at soup kitchens each month.

"I'm not so sure I would have thought of doing this" if it was not mandated, she said. "Doing this made me realize that I might want to work with kids" professionally.

The Jacobson Center is the largest placement site for Roslyn students seeking to perform community service, said Stuart R. Botwinick, director of teen services.

"Last year we had over 200 volunteers perform more than 4,000 hours of community service here," he said. "On any given day we have 15 to 20 students here."

He said that students from Herricks also volunteer at the Jewish Community Center but that the numbers are not as high because it is not required there. And Mr. Botwinick said he could understand why. "We made up a list of what kids do after school," he said. "They have homework, extra help, a tutor in every subject, sports, clubs activities and working out at the J.C.C., and they have a job, household chores and want to hang out with friends. There is so much going on in their lives that if it is not required, the numbers doing it are not going to be that high."

The superintendents of Commack and William Floyd school districts said community service was no longer an issue there because it had been mandated for more than a decade.

"It is historically ingrained in the culture and is part of our mission statement," said James H. Hunderfund, the Commack superintendent. "The value of altruism is something we want in our value system. Our

primary mission is academic, but we want the kids to acquire not only skills but attitudes and values to become a contributing member of the community and the greater society."

Asked about those who object to the coercion of students to perform volunteer activities, Dr. Hunderfund replied: "How many students would do homework if we didn't require it? I don't think a lot of kids would read all the books and do their assignments. We think it's up to the professionals to decide what is important to learn, and to do that, you have to have them experience it."

Richard J. Hawkins, the William Floyd superintendent, said the requirement had been "institutionalized for such a long time, that the students know this is an expectation the district has of them. "The only feedback is positive," he said. "It connects the kids to the community, and our kids have told us that being connected is important."

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Should You Have to Volunteer In Order to Graduate?

written by: Julia Bodeeb • 5/15/2014

Will More Schools Require Community Service?

Some school districts require community service work as a requirement for high school graduation and other districts do not.

President Obama is a strong supporter of public service, and has spent most of his career in public service. There has been some discussion that all students may soon be required to get involved in their communities.

For now, each school district must analyze the type of students in the district. In some, students must work at jobs immediately after school. In other districts, students may have free time after school.

With many school districts starting to require community service, it will be interesting to see which way this trend continues.

Advantages

Should Schools Require Community Service in order to Graduate?

Most teenagers have a lot of energy and are eager to take on a project to help the community or the world. They like to do group projects and they like to create ideas for new projects. Community service may help teenagers build leadership skills and learn that they have the ability to start a project that will help people tremendously.

When community service is required for graduation it sparks creativity in students and propels them to create projects that may have a profound impact on the local community. Also, when students work with community leaders in public service they start to make connections that may help them later in their careers or life.

Disadvantages

Some students have to work after school and weekends to help support their family or to buy the clothes and supplies they need for school. Many high school students have very busy school, work, and sport schedules that barely leave time for sleep. Adding community service requirements would severely stress some high school students who work long hours simply to keep their family financially afloat.

Also take into account students who may just want to volunteer for the sake of helping others and not to get something out of it. To a certain extent, requiring someone to volunteer takes away the whole purpose of volunteerism.

Teenagers Can Change the World

Teachers often see postings in the local paper for high school students seeking help for public service projects. It is awe inspiring to see the good deeds teenagers can do to benefit the local community and the world. Upon seeing the sometimes huge amounts of money raised, or large amounts of items donated to worthy charitable groups, it is easy to think that volunteering surely helps teenagers build skills that will be helpful in future careers.

Community service is also a wonderful bonding experience for teenagers. It helps them make new friends and gives them a sense of pride at helping others.