

## STUDENTS IN ACTION

### THEORY OF CHANGE:

The Power of Skills-Based Service Learning: Cultivating Engaged & Empowered Youth with Improved Leadership and Social Emotional Learning Outcomes.

Multiplying Good, along with experts from a leading research institute, developed a Theory of Change and associated Logic Model to demonstrate and evaluate the impact of our skills-based service-learning program, Students In Action, on individual youth participants.

## WHAT IS SKILLS-BASED SERVICE LEARNING?

Service-learning combines an established curriculum with a service experience, where students learn skills through real-world application and community engagement (Clever & Miller, 2019).

### SERVICE-LEARNING IS A HOLISTIC INTERVENTION WHICH CAN BENEFIT STUDENTS IN TWO WAYS:

1. Increasing sought-after “soft skills,” such as leadership, critical thinking, and communication, which are needed for success in college and are attractive to employers in the modern work environment.
2. Instilling empathy, as those who participate in service-learning are more likely to have an increased sense of empathy from being directly involved in their communities.

## THE NEED

Young people face exceptional challenges as they navigate adolescence, seeking direction, connection, and purpose.

### LACK OF SKILLS NEEDED FOR SUCCESS

A 2021 report found that nearly 80% of employers believe soft skills are more important than subject matter expertise (Mays, 2021). Yet, employers are also reporting that students entering the workforce are not adequately prepared and do not have the necessary soft skills required for a successful work environment.

### LACK OF ACCESS TO ESTABLISHED CURRICULUM

Leadership and social-emotional skills can be taught; however, a 2018 study reported that although the benefits of service-learning are well-documented, it is implemented in fewer than 30% of K-12 schools (Losser, Calderella, Black, & Pate, 2018).

There has been a shift towards bolstering soft skills development for college and career readiness within national education policy (Atwell, Bridgeland, & Manspile, 2021; Foster, Wiczer, & Eberhardt, 2019). Yet, many schools are primarily held accountable only for showing progress on state-wide standards in the academic areas of reading, writing, and arithmetic. As a result, soft skills are often not taught because instructors teach to the standardized requirements (Koretz, 2017). As of 2022, 27 states had made efforts to incorporate soft skills into their curriculum standards, assessments, and educator professional development, however, many states struggle to implement soft skills. (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2022).

## THE SOLUTION

Service-learning has emerged as a key method to engage students in ways that traditional educational institutions fail to integrate – teaching soft skills through an engaging, hands-on, applied learning experience. A 2022 report by Aperture Education found this kind of “deeper learning,” where skills learned in one environment would be transferred and applied in new contexts, to be necessary in a 21st century work environment. The knowledge and skill application inherent to service-learning is more effective at cementing content in comparison to skills learned in traditional academic settings.

## EMPOWERING YOUTH VOICES

Key to this work is the emphasis on a ‘youth-led’ process; young people learning the skills necessary to do service and applying them in a chosen service activity, rather than just completing a directed service activity. Research finds that youth who are more involved in the process of researching, choosing, and completing a service project are more likely to feel engaged and committed to the service project outcomes (Schalge, Pajunen, & Brotherton, 2018). When students have the opportunity to provide input on their service efforts, the service takes on a sense of “relevance,” which increases students’ perception of their service’s intrinsic value (Campbell & Oswald, 2018; Schalge, Pajunen & Brotherton, 2018).

### EVERYONE BENEFITS FROM SERVICE-LEARNING

Gathering diverse groups of young people offers an optimal environment in which young people learn from and about each other, and can engage in the study of understanding difference, tolerance, and empathy - all through the lens of service.

### STUDENTS FROM LOWER-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS BENEFIT MOST

Leading research found that low-income students benefitted from service-learning (Presley, 2020) and that service-learning had the potential to lessen the academic achievement gap between lower and higher-income students (Grossman and Duchesneau, 2021). Additionally, in one report that examined the results of nationally representative surveys, teachers serving low-income students believe that “service learning can be a lifeline to students in underserved schools and help close equity gaps between students from different income levels” (Atwell, Bridgeland, & Manspile 2021).

## A COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION – STUDENTS IN ACTION

Students In Action is a skills-based service-learning and leadership curriculum designed to help young people develop a passion for creating community change and to build the skills and confidence needed to do it well.

Multiplying Good partners with schools and youth-serving organizations. We meet youth “where they are” both in terms of place and skill-building. The Students In Action curriculum has three built-in pathways allowing youth to develop their leadership skills over time.

The result is impactful and transformative: young people with increased empathy, a commitment to their community, and internalized key leadership and workforce readiness skills including improved communication and positive racial understanding. A generation of changemakers ready to lead.

## CONTACT:

### STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN SERVICE-LEARNING DISPLAY INCREASED:

#### SOFT SKILLS

(Abla & Faumeni, 2019)

#### CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

(Crittenden & Levine, 2018)

#### EMPATHY

(Clever & Miller, 2019)

#### SELF-EFFICACY

(Beason-Manes, 2018)

#### POSITIVE RACIAL UNDERSTANDING

(McWhirter, Gomez, & Rau, 2018)

#### CAREER TRAJECTORY AND WORKFORCE READINESS

(Ingram, Lohmiller, Cutforth, & Belansky, 2022; Toppo 2022)

#### LEADERSHIP SKILLS

(Martin, Williams, Green & Smith, 2019)

#### PRESENTATION SKILLS

(Nabors, Welker, & Faller, 2018)